

Membership Toolkit

Connecting with Community

Connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and building genuine relationships is a key part of every organisation's reconciliation journey. There is no fast-tracked way to build relationships. Connecting with community involves the **three T's**:



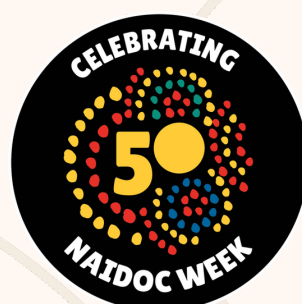
Approach relationships in a genuine and respectful way. Be clear about your intentions when you work with Aboriginal people and communities. Be open to listening, learning, and recognising the value of the cultural knowledge that may be shared with you.

Engaging Locally

Use informal opportunities, such as a yarn over morning tea, to build trust and connection over time. When you engage with your local community you should:

- Know which Aboriginal Country your organisation is on and always acknowledge that Country and its Traditional Custodians.
- Find out which community dates and events are celebrated in your local area and join in when it is appropriate to do so.
- Be aware that some spaces are not open to non-Indigenous people and that this must be respected.
- Attend community events that are open to everyone. For example, National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, and activities run by ACCOs.
- Stay up to date with what is happening in community by following local Aboriginal organisations and community groups on social media.

When you connect with community take time to explain who you are, what your organisation does, and why you wish to engage. Be patient. Do not expect every Aboriginal person to want to speak publicly about cultures, families, histories, or issues. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, like all groups, hold a wide range of opinions, experiences, and values.



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Cultural Responsibilities and Customs: Sorry Business

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have strong responsibilities to family and community. Understanding Aboriginal views of community, kinship, and family is central for cultural safety in workplaces.

Cultural obligations are deeply important and may sometimes conflict with workplace requirements, and this requires awareness. Workplaces need to recognise and actively support these responsibilities. This includes acknowledging the pressure on Indigenous employees to navigate two cultural worlds: white Australia and its Western organisational demands, as well as their own Indigenous identity and cultural obligations.

For First Nations people, overcoming grief is a unique and complex process. When someone passes away, the whole community comes together to share in that sorrow through Sorry Business. Sorry Business is a period of cultural practices, obligations, and mourning that follows a person's death. Due to the ongoing impacts colonisation and systemic inequity, First Nations communities experience disproportionately higher rates of deaths. [i] In some First Nations communities, a period of Sorry Business prohibits other events, meetings, or consultations from happening. This time must be respected by all people working with land councils, First Nations people, and organisations.



Steps to Support an Employee During Sorry Business:

- **Listen carefully** to your employee and offer your support.
- **Check how much time your employee might need** away from work and when they might need this time.
- **Talk to your employee about taking compassionate leave.**
- **Consider other options for additional leave** or time off wherever possible.
- **Explain the significance of Sorry Business** to other employees and promote cultural awareness in your workplace.
- **Get some advice** if you are unsure how to support your employee. Speak to a trusted community member or Indigenous liaison officer.

[i] Rona Glynn-McDonald, "Death and Sorry Business", Common Ground, October 25, 2022.
<https://www.commonground.org.au/article/death-and-sorry-business>

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Trauma Informed Engagement

When connecting with community and initiating relationship building, it is important to be culturally aware of the histories of trauma that shape life experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Be aware of the need for space during Sorry Business. Also be mindful that topics such as the Stolen Generations, genocide, deaths in custody, and community losses can be upsetting. Allow community members to lead these conversations and speak about them only if and when they choose.

Purposeful Engagement

Purposeful engagement involves walking alongside and, at times, behind Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This means:

- Demonstrate respect for sovereignty, cultures, and ways of life.
- Provide opportunities for meaningful collaboration and relationship-building.
- Invite First Nations people to the table and understand the important of their voice.
- Listen to the needs of the communities you engage with. Listening is more important than speaking.
- Remunerate people for sharing knowledge.
- Include voices from across generations, wherever possible.



Partnerships

Workplaces can support local Aboriginal organisations and communities in many ways. This support may be financial, but it can also involve staff volunteering, sharing skills, providing resources, or using procurement to support Aboriginal businesses. Your organisation may choose to build a partnership with a local Aboriginal community or an Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation in your sector. Strong partnerships are developed from long-term relationships and genuine intentions.

Before you begin a partnership, consider questions such as:

- How do our organisational values align?
- Do our reconciliation goals support the priorities of community?
- What is the main purpose of this partnership?
- Does the partnership benefit both parties?

