



CITY OF VINCENT

ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

2023 – 2028

'To stand side by side as one community.'

Acknowledgement Of Country

The City of Vincent would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We would also like to acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.

We recognise the contribution the Whadjuk people have made and continue to make to our culture and in our community. We will continue to seek the input of the Traditional Owners.

The land on which we live, meet and thrive as a community always was and always will be Noongar land.

Moorditj Mural Masters artwork
Cover: **Berrung** artwork by Charmaine Cole



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THE PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Engagement Guidelines outline the City of Vincent's commitment to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to engage in a meaningful and consistent way. The guidelines are underpinned by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledge and heritage.

The guidelines aim to provide Council members, staff and consultants with knowledge about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how to engage with them in a culturally appropriate way.

The guidelines also provide a set of principles, protocols and resources to support engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the community.

OUR LOCAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

Our population is made up of a diverse mix of cultures, nationalities, households and family structures, all of which contribute to our vibrant community. We aspire to celebrate as a community what makes us unique and connect with those around us to enhance our quality of life, which includes acknowledging Noongar culture and history in our events, activities, open spaces and in our day-to-day conversations and interactions.

At the last Census, there were 311 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents that make up 0.84 per cent of Vincent's population.

A key part of our engagement process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is taking the time to research and learn about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

OUR PRINCIPLES

Our engagement is underpinned by key principles that have been developed in partnership with our Boordiya Reference Group which consists of Aboriginal Elders and leaders, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and local businesses and stakeholders.

- We will value, respect and acknowledge Whadjuk Noongar culture.
- We will always allow time for authentic engagements.
- We will seek advice from the Boordiya Reference Group on wider City matters.
- We will listen, be respectful and transparent.
- We will always act with integrity and seek to build on our relationships to earn trust.
- We will always include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in matters that directly affect them and involve them throughout the lifetime of each project.
- We will follow cultural protocols.

OUR ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Council endorsed our Community and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy that guides staff on how we should engage with our broader community.

This strategy is applicable when engaging with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community however, it must be accompanied by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement principles along with the cultural considerations detailed in these guidelines.



WHY DO WE ENGAGE WITH THE ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY?

The City of Vincent believes that strong and meaningful relationships lie at the core of reaching greater reconciliation within our communities. We acknowledge the ongoing and tireless efforts of local organisations and individuals working with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We strive to better understand how the City can support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals, aiming to work alongside them in a productive, empathetic, meaningful and efficient way.

The City is committed to taking real steps toward building and maintaining genuine partnerships and trust. Remembering and acknowledging wrongs that have occurred in the past, the City believes that it can work consciously and courageously beyond these wrongs, towards a place of reconciliation.

The City delivers a diverse range of services and projects to and for our community. Our engagement strategies are developed based on the level of impact, interest and influence. Policies, strategies, and projects that directly impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples required targeted engagement processes.



Engaging with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples

It's important to understand that communicating and engaging are two different things. Although they are aligned, communication can be just talking, but engaging is when the other party listens and responds.

How well you communicate will determine whether the other party will engage. In many cases, people may engage a little at a time whilst trust is being established. This is where you can use informal meetings and alternative locations to meet and yarn.

Further to acknowledge that:

- Engaging incorporates both verbal and non-verbal communication.
- The first step to engaging is ensuring "cultural safety".

Cultural safety is behavioural based. It's about the obligations of those working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to work within policies and practices that ensure services adequately meet cultural needs by recognising, appreciating and responding to the impact of cultural diversity on the effective use and provision of services.

How do you demonstrate cultural safety?

- clear, value-free, open and respectful communication
- establishing trust
- recognising and avoiding stereotypical behaviours
- having a two-way dialogue, where knowledge is shared
- understanding the influence of culture shock



CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE & CONSIDERATIONS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples identify themselves through their land areas, relationship to others, language, and stories which may be expressed through ceremony, the arts, family, spirituality (religion) and sports.

Cultural heritage is passed on from one generation to the next. Language is vitally important as it forms part of identity, each language group has their own language. It's important to acknowledge that whilst the majority of the Aboriginal community within Vincent are Whadjuk Noongar people and the broader Noongar nation, they also include people outside of Noongar nation (other language groups) and Torres Strait Islander peoples. When you engage with the Aboriginal community to seek guidance or feedback, you are seeking their cultural knowledge. It is important that you are clear about what you are seeking and that you engage in a culturally appropriate way.

Understanding cultural & community sensitivities, acknowledgement & respect

There may be cultural and community sensitivities that need to be considered when we determine the best approach to our engagement process. To understand the best way to minimise confrontation or conflict, communication methods should be discussed with the Community Development team prior to engaging.

Diversity within the community

There was a time when all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived a traditional lifestyle that included kinship, control, economic systems and lifestyle practices. In the local environment as more and more Aboriginal people become involved in mainstream processes there is now a greater diversity within the Aboriginal community and a one size fits all approach no longer works.

It is important to understand the diversity that exists in order to adapt to different individuals and groups within our community. There are now many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have adopted some parts of the contemporary western lifestyle. As with many cultures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has evolved, what remains the same is the dreaming, spirituality, connection to country, ceremonies, family and kinship and customary law.

Strategies to assist you may include:

- Gathering knowledge – know who you are/should be talking to.
- Stay informed – know what's going on in the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Be open, honest and understanding.
- Don't make promises if you can't keep them.
- Acknowledge that there may be power imbalances.
- Marking important dates, attending special events are vitally important ways of demonstrating genuine interest in understanding and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Seek guidance from the City's Community Development team.

Family & kinship systems

Kinship is at the heart of Aboriginal society. A person's position in the kinship system establishes their relationship to others and to the universe, prescribing their responsibilities towards other people, the land and natural resources. Traditional kinship structures remain in many Aboriginal communities today.

There are many Aboriginal nations across Australia. Within these nations there are clan groups and within the clan groups there are family groups. Clan groups share a common language and kinship system based on either patrilineal or matrilineal lines of descent.

When Aboriginal people refer to their family, they invariably mean their extended family which might include parents, several children, numerous aunts, uncles and cousins and grandparents. These family members can be both genetic and classificatory.

The continuance of Aboriginal society is dependent on keeping Aboriginal families strong and healthy both physically and culturally.





Kinship protocols

Relationships within the Kinship system have rules or prescribed behaviours. These behaviours govern relationships. The kinship system governs the relationships between:

- male and females
- young people and elders
- extended families

For example, you behave a certain way around your Elders and Aunties and Uncles, but in most cases, authority sits with the oldest. It determines behaviours that apply between males and females. How it is applied varies from one location to another, in some cases ‘formally’ and in others ‘informally’. In remote locations, customary lore still exists and in these locations, it remains intact in its’ entirety.

Note – If you are a non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person then you need to consider how this may affect your ability to engage effectively and culturally appropriately, especially across genders (male to female) or young to old.

Intellectual property

As Traditional knowledge holders, Aboriginal people should determine what happens with their cultural knowledge, how it is used and who can access it.

When seeking to source and use Aboriginal knowledge, the City will:

- Consult with the Boordiya Reference Group that comprises Aboriginal Elders and Leaders on cultural, heritage, social and environmental strategies, and decisions with the City.
- Seek advice from the Aboriginal community about the correct implementation of cultural protocols.
- Obtain consent from the Boordiya Reference Group and or/Aboriginal Elders and leaders to use cultural knowledge.

In providing cultural knowledge, it is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. For this reason, it is appropriate that payment is received for their services. The remuneration should consider the time involved in providing the cultural knowledge.

Developing & maintaining relationships

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has been let down by past governments and agencies, and many times they have felt forgotten or left out. Building trust in the relationships takes time but is an essential step moving forward. Throughout any engagement process it is necessary to maintain regular communication and involvement with those we are engaging with.

Environment

Many people respond differently to unfamiliar environments. Picking the right environment can have a significant benefit to communication and engaging. Many Aboriginal people prefer to be in familiar environments and or weather permitting outside. If the weather doesn’t allow for an outdoor environment, then perhaps a local community centre or organisation that people are familiar with could be used to meet rather than an office environment.

Alternatively, you could consider a coffee or a meal, especially when first meeting – start informally and get to know each other better. When people are relaxed, they are more likely to engage and communicate more openly. For example: Meetings on Country

Being ‘on Country’ is a useful engagement method to acknowledge and learn about the connection to Noongar Boodjar (country). Being ‘on Country’ also provides an opportunity for us to build relationships and strengthen partnerships with the local Aboriginal community. Where possible, meetings should be held in the location that is the subject of the meeting.

In-person meetings

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is communicated orally, known as yarning. Yarning provides an opportunity to build relationships and have open discussions. Meetings should always therefore be held in person and only held online if unavoidable.

Understanding non-verbals

Non-verbals are a natural part of Aboriginal communication. Silence does not mean a person is not listening or does not understand, they could be:

- thinking or processing
- remaining non-committal
- wanting to confer with other family members
- or they may not understand, so you may need to confirm or rephrase

Time

The City interacts with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on a range of topics and setting realistic timeframes can be a challenging process. When planning to engage, adequate timing needs to be considered. Generally, one month prior to broader engagement is a realistic time for cultural needs to be considered, however, this could change due to other cultural sensitivities.

When meetings have been set in advance, always check a day or so before that the meeting will still go ahead as planned. In some instances, funeral dates and family matters may take precedence and therefore flexibility is required.

Written communication

Written communication is not the preferred method of communication. It is important that if there has been no response to written communication that it is not considered to be acceptance or disinterest. It is always recommended that face-to-face meetings are more appropriate to discuss cultural information. The written communication therefore should be clarifying discussion and agreed actions moving forward.

Yarning circles

Yarning Circles are an important process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as they provide an opportunity to learn from one another, build a shared understanding of information and sharing knowledge in a safe space. Yarning Circles also provide an opportunity to bring the community together to establish common ground. In meeting new people and groups, Yarning Circles can be an ideal starting point to develop trust.



TERMINOLOGY

The appropriate use of terminology and language in reports, letters and other types of publications is important as it demonstrates recognition and respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal or Aborigine

You should avoid using the term 'Aborigine' as it can be offensive and could relate to past trauma and the misrepresentation of Aboriginal people. Use 'Aboriginal' where possible.

ATSI

ATSI is an acronym for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and should not be used in oral or written form. This acronym can be considered offensive.

Indigenous

Using the word 'Indigenous' can be misunderstood or interpreted differently in Aboriginal communities. It's commonly used to reference Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a collective and does not recognise the distinction between the cultures.

RESOURCES

Council policies & plans

Recognition of Noongar Boodjar Culture and History through Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment to Country

Reconciliation Action Plan 2017 – 2018 | Reflect

Reconciliation Action Plan 2019 – 2021 | Innovate

Reconciliation Action Plan 2022 – 2024 | Innovate

Legislation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984

Community Services Act 2007

Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008





CITY OF VINCENT

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