

Guidelines for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country are protocols used in Australia at the opening of meetings, launches, events and official functions. The practice shows respect for the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the region or area.

The Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) seeks meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, as the First Peoples of Australia. We seek to establish and maintain relationships that are founded on respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledges and beliefs.

AAG acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and believes that it is important that members and staff recognise the importance of observing and recognising the First Peoples of this land at events being held by AAG.

This document provides information on the appropriate ways to recognise and acknowledge First Peoples in a consistent and meaningful way at AAG meetings, events and other activities, including:

- a. Welcome to Country
- b. Acknowledgement of Country
- c. Smoking Ceremonies

AAG encourages individuals to follow this protocol but if people prefer not to then it is better they don't, as no acknowledgement is better than an insincere acknowledgement.

Welcome to Country

What is a Welcome to Country?

A Welcome to Country ceremony is performed by representatives of the Traditional Owners and Custodians when people visit their Country. These ceremonies vary from speeches of welcome to traditional dance and smoking ceremonies.

When is a Welcome to Country appropriate?

It is suggested that a welcoming ceremony be arranged for major public forums and functions, such as the AAG National Conference. Naturally, if the function has broad impact on, or significance for, First Peoples a welcoming ceremony will be appropriate.

Can any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person perform a Welcome to Country?

No, a Welcome to Country should only be performed by a representative of the Traditional Owners and Custodian group or an official who is authorised through the relevant Land Council and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation. Asking an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person to perform a Welcome to Country when they do not belong to the Traditional Owners and Custodians group may cause them embarrassment and may offend the Traditional Owners and Custodians.

Is there a fee for a Welcome to Country?

Most Traditional Owners and Custodians who perform a Welcome to Country will require at least a nominal fee to cover costs. A Welcome to Country that includes traditional dance and smoking ceremonies will generally involve a more substantial payment. This cost should be factored into budgets in consultation with the relevant authorised body when planning the event.

Acknowledgement of Country

What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country recognises that the First Peoples of Australia have a strong and proud history as well as complex ownership and land stewardship systems stretching back many thousands of years. An Acknowledgment of Country pays respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which an event or function is being held.

When is an Acknowledgement of Country appropriate?

An Acknowledgement of Country should be given at formal events, forums and functions such as board or committee meetings, conferences, forums/ workshops and official openings.

Who should give the Acknowledgement of Country?

The first speaker at an event or function (following the welcome or in the absence of a welcome) should give the Acknowledgment of Country. Subsequent speakers may also give an acknowledgement.

What form should the Acknowledgement of Country take?

If you are clear about whom the Traditional Owners of an area are, you should say:

'I would like to begin by thanking everyone for joining us here today and acknowledging the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land that we are meeting on here today, the [name of the Traditional Owners and Custodians] people. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders both past and present.'

If you are uncertain about whom the Traditional Owners of an area are, you should say:

'I acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land [or Country] on which we are meeting. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders, past and present'

'We acknowledge that we meet and work on Aboriginal (substitute "Torres Strait Islander" where appropriate) lands. We recognise that the ongoing connection of First Peoples to the land is just as relevant today and pay respect to the cultural authority of First Peoples and to the Elders past and present.'

Smoking Ceremonies

What is a Smoking Ceremony and who can perform it?

Smoking Ceremonies have traditionally been used to cleanse a space. Within AAG activities they should only be performed by a person who has been granted the authority to do so by the Traditional Owners and Custodians.