

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 custodians of the region or area.

Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) seeks meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities that is founded on respect for their cultures, knowledge and beliefs.

AAG acknowledges the traditional owners of the land and believes that it is important that members and staff recognise the importance of observing and recognising the traditional custodians of this land at events being held by AAG.

This document provides information on the appropriate ways to recognise and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 than 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 Aboriginal Traditional Owners for people visiting 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, Aboriginal people a welcoming ceremony will be appropriate.

Can any Aboriginal person perform a Welcome to Country?

No, a Welcome to Country should only be performed by a representative of the Traditional Owner group. Asking an Aboriginal person to perform a Welcome to Country when they do not belong to the Traditional Owner group may cause them embarrassment and may offend the Traditional Owners.

Is there a fee for a Welcome to Country?

Most Traditional Owner groups 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. However, this also should be negotiated with the relevant group when planning the event.

Acknowledgement of Country

What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country recognises that Australia has a strong and proud Aboriginal history and complex ownership and land stewardship systems stretching back many thousands of years. It pays respect to the Traditional Owners.

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 acknowledge and pay my respect to the Elders past and present, to those who have passed before us and to the members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who are also attending here today. I want to acknowledge the [Traditional owners name], the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on here today'.

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

'I would like to acknowledge and pay my respect to the Elders past and present, to those who have passed before us and to the members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who are also attending here today. I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on here today'.

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.