

Engaging communities: empowering futures

Framework for engagement with Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander communities



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Queensland
Government

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands, waterways and sea country from across Queensland and pays respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the state.

Introduction

Sustained, respectful and inclusive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities at all levels is integral to our efforts to improve early childhood and school education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and students.

The Department of Education engages with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders including:

- children
- students
- parents
- Elders
- community members
- Traditional Owners
- community groups and organisations
- employees
- educators
- academics and researchers
- peak organisations
- businesses.

Purpose

The purpose of this framework is to enhance engagement between the department and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in Queensland.

Specifically, the framework aims to:

- foster respectful, high quality and culturally appropriate engagement between the department and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities

- invite and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to inform, collaborate with, and co-design initiatives with the department
- support departmental staff to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students, families, stakeholders and communities
- position these engagement activities as a critical means of improving education outcomes and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Alignment

The engagement approaches put forward in this framework support the Queensland Government's commitment to reframe its relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland so we can move towards a shared future.

The framework supports the department's commitment to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights under the *Human Rights Act 2019*. It also complements key whole-of-government and departmental strategies such as:

- the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#)
- the [Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan](#)
- service delivery reform in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as part of the Queensland Government's Tracks to Treaty and Local Thriving Communities
- the [Queensland Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability action plan](#)
- the [Department of Education Commitment Statement](#)
- the [Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education action plan](#).



Our guiding principles

The [Department of Education's Commitment Statement](#) sets out our commitment to place Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander people at the forefront of our decision making. It outlines our intent to actively listen and engage with stakeholders and demonstrate the value we place on self-determination.

To deliver on our commitment, this framework aims to strengthen all departmental employees' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. It is based on five core principles:

- building on strengths
- cultivating relationships and connections
- demonstrating cultural respect and recognition
- employing appropriate communication and language
- lifting capability and creating opportunities.

Lifting the capability of departmental employees is particularly important as it is integral to our success across all of the other principles.

The department acknowledges the diversity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. This framework should be interpreted as each experience of engagement requires, building on strengths while recognising the importance of healing, lived experience and transgenerational trauma.

The framework also acknowledges that engagement occurs across a continuum, and must be fit for purpose and guided by the level of input Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders wish to have. Depending on the nature of the activity, program or policy being pursued, this may include information sharing, networking, consultation, collaboration, and/or co-design. The department's commitment statement prioritises co-design arrangements where possible.



Principle 1: Building on strengths

The department will ensure its engagement activities recognise and build on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

We will do this by:

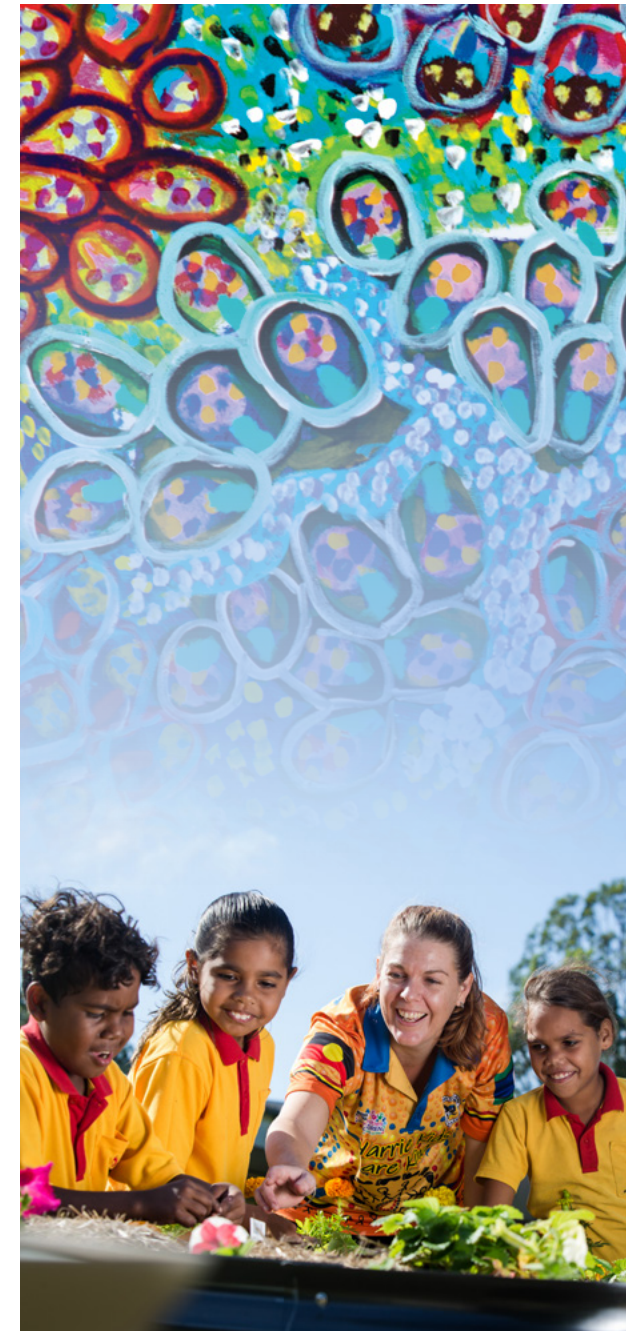
- valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' views and voices to deepen and enrich the community and the work of the department
- supporting high expectations and aspirations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and students, and celebrating and showcasing positive narratives
- enacting co-design arrangements that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in decision-making
- seeking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community expertise and local knowledge to gain insights into community strengths, cultural considerations, protocols and areas for improvement
- building on established community governance structures, networks, services and relationships
- harnessing and drawing on the knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees
- linking with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement strategies and initiatives, where available
- engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to ensure proposals suit local needs and harness local knowledge, talent and expertise
- sustaining momentum on activities that achieve results, expanding these further, and sharing what works across the system.

Principle 2: Cultivating relationships and connections

The department will cultivate networks and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to strengthen connections and engagement.

We will do this by:

- creating supportive environments where people feel empowered to act and self-determination can be exercised
- recognising each relationship is unique and takes time to establish and nurture
- engaging from the earliest stages of project, program and policy development
- checking that timeframes and engagement styles are suitable for all stakeholders and addressing barriers to stakeholder participation
- establishing ongoing arrangements, such as advisory groups, to facilitate and foster contributions over time
- being involved in, supporting or attending community events, meetings and functions as a way of meeting the community and establishing relationships
- building relationships with community groups, organisations and individuals to gain an understanding of community structures, dynamics, protocols and cultural beliefs
- seeking appropriate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on committees, particularly those dealing with issues that significantly impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and students
- understanding the risk of, and mitigating against, over-consultation with individuals or communities
- building a clear understanding of local communities and their characteristics, including what programs are being delivered, and by whom, to achieve greater alignment across services.



Principle 3: Demonstrating cultural respect and recognition

The department will ensure that its engagement activities demonstrate an appreciation, respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, customs and protocols.

We will do this by:

- building understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages
- recognising the impacts of past government policies and practices on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and its effects on engagement
- recognising that Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are culturally unique with diverse backgrounds, experiences and histories, and that each has its own ways of being, knowing and doing
- acknowledging that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in all parts of Queensland, ranging across urban, rural and remote communities
- having an understanding of community protocols and observing these when engaging with community
- respecting Country, and the strong connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to their traditional land, sky and waterways
- acknowledging the role of Elders in the community and engaging with them in a respectful manner
- being aware of culturally sensitive matters when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and tailoring engagement in a way that is sensitive and respectful
- recognising that everyone has a role in ensuring cultural safety
- facilitating local level decision making, where appropriate.

Principle 4: Employing appropriate communication and language

Departmental employees will be open and genuine in their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and ensure all communication is respectful and culturally sensitive.

We will do this by:

- being honest and authentic in our approach, taking the time to actively listen to individual and community needs, hopes and concerns
- acknowledging the diverse communication needs and protocols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- adopting appropriate communication styles when working with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly in remote communities
- considering local community protocols, historical context, age, language/s, gender and literacy when developing communication approaches
- proactively planning with local communities before formal engagement commences to agree on an engagement approach
- minimising unnecessary jargon, acronyms, government and professional education language
- clearly communicating the objectives and outcomes sought from the engagement process
- using appropriate and accepted language and terminology, recognising that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in remote communities, speak English as an additional language or dialect
- providing feedback to communities at the end of the engagement process to show how their knowledge, expertise and input have informed government decision-making.



Principle 5: Lifting capability and creating opportunities

The department will create a supportive environment for its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and build the cultural capability of all staff to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and communities.

We will do this by:

- increasing employment opportunities at all levels for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in schools, regions and central office
- raising awareness about how engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities contributes to the success of policies, programs and services
- increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to lead and participate in education research
- developing resources to educate and train employees about how to engage effectively and appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities
- creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to tender for work to be commissioned by the Department of Education
- providing relevant and appropriate information and resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that will support opportunities for engagement.



Definitions

Co-design: An agreement on a range of activities and processes used in the design of services and products that involve the people who use, or are directly or indirectly affected by, that product or service.

Community: Community is about interrelatedness and belonging and is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of being. To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities can be formed around a geographical location, country, their mob, extended family ties or shared experiences.

Cultural capability: The integration of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices and attitudes to produce better outcomes for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples (DATSIP, 2018).

Cultural safety: A way of working with someone of different cultural backgrounds that does not diminish, demean or disempower them (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2009).

Engagement: A meaningful interaction between groups of people, establishing trust and working towards shared goals.

Self-determination: Being able to freely determine your political status and pursue economic, social and cultural development; an ongoing process of choice to ensure Indigenous communities are able to meet their social, cultural and economic needs. (Article 1 and 3, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 2019)

