

Protocols for Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country

The difference between an Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country is often not well understood. This document explains these differences, and provides contact details for the appropriate cultural authority, should further information be required.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country can be a way of showing awareness of, and respect for, the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which a meeting or event is to take place. Its purpose is to recognise the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, and is commonly delivered by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

It is a practice that is commonly conducted at meetings or events within the University. Acknowledgments are not required for all meetings and nor are they essential to virtual (Teams/Zoom) meetings. Certainly not for multiple internal meetings. It is not mandated. It is fine if one speaker would like to do an Acknowledgement, especially if the meeting is a major one and people from outside the institution are being welcomed to the institution. In such cases being mindful of the Indigenous history is especially important. But one acknowledgment is sufficient. One protocol often overlooked is that once an acknowledgment or welcome is performed, it is not necessary for every single speaker to continue to acknowledge.

It should be noted that Acknowledgment of Country is not a universally accepted practice among the Indigenous community. The practice has been criticised for its perfunctory nature and for distracting from more meaningful forms of recognition. That is one reason why it is not recommended that Acknowledgements of Country be mandated or performed as part of a standardised meeting practice.

We must be respectful of Indigenous concerns about token gestures, empty rhetoric and performative aspects of acknowledgments given Australia has failed to address unfinished business, implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart, or contemplate treaties or reparations. Do not add any other issues to an acknowledgment such as BLM or EDI. That is disrespectful.

Some examples of an Acknowledgement of Country relevant to the UNSW Kensington main campus are:

"I would like to show my respects and acknowledge the Bedegal people who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which this meeting takes place, and to Elders past and present".

"I would like to acknowledge the Bedegal people that are the Traditional Custodians of this land. I would also like to pay my respects to the Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are present here today."

[See an example of an Acknowledgment to Country that covers all UNSW campus' at end of document.]

The more recent practice of acknowledging "emerging leaders" or "Elders past, present, and emerging" is generally **not accepted practice** in the Indigenous community and should not be used.

It is also acceptable for you to say your own words. You do not need to stick to a strict script. Often meaningful acknowledgements are more powerful and well received than perfunctory scripted acknowledgements. You could make the acknowledgment relevant to the event, the theme of the event, to the concept of welcoming people and recognising Indigenous culture, your childhood experiences, or adult experiences with Aboriginal culture. As long as the acknowledgment is meaningful and short, it is acceptable.

Acknowledgement of Country (for all three campuses):

UNSW is located on the unceded territory of the Bedegal (Kensington campus), Gadigal (City and Paddington campuses) and Ngunnawal peoples (Canberra) who are the Traditional Owners of the lands where each campus of UNSW is situated.

Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country is different to an Acknowledgement of Country. A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by a local Aboriginal person of significance (usually an Elder) to acknowledge and give consent to events taking place on their traditional lands. It is also a sign of respect and protocol which dates back to traditional times prior to colonisation. This distinctive difference has important cultural significance for Aboriginal peoples and should be observed carefully.

Negotiating a Welcome to Country may take longer than anticipated. It is therefore important that the appropriate Aboriginal representative organisation has been contacted by telephone well in advance of the event. This should be followed up with a formal letter of invitation. All arrangements thereafter for a Welcome to Country should be mutually negotiated between the Local Aboriginal Land Council (or relevant Aboriginal Incorporated organisation), the Elder who has been selected to carry out the welcome, and the University.

It is also important that Aboriginal representatives involved in the negotiations are comfortable with the suggested arrangements. This may include a negotiation of the format of the ceremony, who has been



invited and what type of 'Welcome to Country' is to be held. It is vitally important that the Elder performing the Welcome to Country ceremony is introduced and acknowledged in a culturally appropriate manner, and that they are recognised for their time and commitment. Performing a Welcome to Country or engaging Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander dancers is not a free service and prices can vary depending on the type of welcome required.

Can I film a Welcome to Country, and play it at each event and pay a fee for service for each repeated WTC?

No.

How do I organise a WTC?

If you would like to organise a Welcome to Country ceremony you should contact the Land Council relevant to the event location:

- UNSW Kensington Main Campus you should contact the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council (02) 9311 4282;
- UNSW City and Art and Design Campus you should contact the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (02) 8394 9666; and
- UNSW Canberra at ADFA you should contact the Ngunnawal Local Aboriginal Land Council (02) 6297 4152

If you are planning on having a Welcome to County at any of UNSW's Clinical Schools, then you should make contact with the following Land Councils

Albury Wodonga - Albury Local Aboriginal Land Council (02) 6025 7075

Coffs Harbour - Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Land Council (02) 6652 8740

Port Macquarie - Birpai Local Aboriginal Land Council (02) 6584 9066

Wagga Wagga - Wagga Local Aboriginal Land Council (02) 6921 4095

