

With RESPECT

Considerations for forming successful partnerships

June 2024

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With Respect

Understanding the why

Overview

Stakeholder engagement ensures that government can be responsive to the needs and concerns of key stakeholders and adapt services and other offerings to a rapidly changing world. Engaging people using authentically empathetic methods amplifies government services that align with the needs and satisfiers of the people using those services, which ultimately drives engagement and the needs and aspirations of the communities that governments serve.

Establishing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is key to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are able exert their right to make decisions about matters affecting their own lives, including the pace and nature of their engagement within the legal, social and economic framework of Australian society.

A recent project by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts established opportunity to develop and share 'guidance' or lessons learned from the project and share this with a broader group of public servants through the Australian Public Service Academy. This document responds to the opportunity for developing concise short guidance on establishing better partnerships.

It is noted that this document should only be used as a guideline and that many First Nations communities and partners will have their own recommendations to contribute to successful engagements. The reader is reminded that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are not homogeneous; language, knowledge, practice and culture varies from Nation to Nation.



Image credit: Raquel Clarke

Modelling respect

Getting it right

The RESPECT model outlines seven key considerations for forming respectful partnerships between government staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Each consideration has been developed in response to over a decade of consultation and research by Relative Creative. Further detail on each consideration is provided in subsequent pages.

Remuneration

Remunerate people fairly for their contribution to a project.

Budgets should be designed to account for this. Pay scales based on the types of contribution should be clearly understood from project outset.

Expectations

Clearly outline the expected outcomes, timeframes and contributions.

Clarity about the opportunities and limitations of a project supports informed decision making and the provision of free, prior and informed consent.

Safety

Ensure all members of a project team have the capability to approach partnerships in a culturally responsive way.

The ability for a department and its employees to work with people from other cultures increases opportunity for meaningful decision making and reduces harm.

Protocols & Principles

Recognise that protocols and principles will vary.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are not homogeneous therefore people should be prepared to engage with pre-established protocols and principles when forming partnerships.

Empowerment

Structure partnerships to ensure shared decision-making authority.

Structuring partnerships so that partners have genuine power and ability to effect decisions and actions is important for self-determination.

Communication

Provide clear and consistent communication throughout a project and beyond.

Open, honest and timely communication is key to power-sharing within partnerships.

Time

Establish reasonable timelines for projects to reduce pressures on partners.

Time is needed to build relationships and trust, while also accounting for various potential delays.

Engaging

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RESPECT

Remuneration

Remunerate people fairly for their contribution to a project.

- Budgets should be designed to account for this.
- Pay scales based on the types of contribution should be clearly understood from project outset.

The labour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been used to build the Australian economy without due payment or recognition.

Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have not been appropriately remunerated for their labour. It was common for workers to be paid in rations rather than wages. Wages, if paid at all, were administered by the government leading to the misappropriation and non-repayment of wages. This failure to pay First Nations people their earnings is now referred to as 'Stolen Wages'.

This injustice has contributed directly to a lack of intergenerational wealth with far reaching consequences relating to economic participation.

Not remunerating people for their time and/or cultural knowledge contributed to a policy or partnership continues to contribute to economic disadvantage.

Recommendation

Approaches to remuneration vary according to the input required. Cultural knowledge should be paid for at comparable rates to other expert knowledge within the project. Depending on the type of input required sitting fees or stipends might be appropriate.

Closing the Gap

8. Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities

Closely connected to

Expectations - everyone should have clear information about what they are being asked to do and share and how this will be remunerated.

Communication - requirements of a partnership are clearly communicated to ensure appropriate remuneration.

References

Cape York Justice Study Report (2001), Dennis Eggington, Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia

Questions to ask

- What is the appropriate fee for the service and/or knowledge required?
- Does the budget for this project extend to appropriate remuneration?

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Expectations

Clearly outline the expected outcomes, timeframes and contributions.

- Clarity about the opportunities and limitations of a project supports informed decision making and the provision of free, prior and informed consent.

“The misappropriations of culture have led to a lot of trust being lost.” Dr. Terri Janke

Increasingly, and in response to the participation that has been denied to First Nations peoples over the course of colonisation, First Nations peoples are being asked to participate in partnerships with government and industry.

Outlining how knowledge (including cultural knowledge) shared will be used and what the benefits of this will be should be integral. Being honest about limitations, such as the level of change likely to be implemented or the available budget for any implementation is important to manage expectations and build trust.

Recommendation

- Clarify the purpose and intentions of the partnership.
- Outline how knowledge (including cultural) will be used and shared both during the project and following the project.
- Be clear about the types of action or change partners can expect as an outcome.
- Provide regular updates, including around any outcomes or actions.
- Communicate honestly.

Closing the Gap

17. People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives

Closely connected to

Communication - expectations need to be clearly communicated.

Empowerment - outlining the expectations of a partnership allows for informed decision making.

Remuneration - informed decisions can be made around the value of knowledge being shared.

References

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/in-conversation-dr-terri-janke/>

Questions to ask

- How will cultural knowledge contribute to the project?
- How is the project reciprocal (what does it give back to participants or participating communities)?
- What level of positive change will the project contribute?
- What limitations do outcomes have e.g. funding, level of change?

Case Study

First Nations Knowledge in Water Modelling: Implementation Case Study, Department of Environment, Science & Innovation

2021 - 2025

The project ‘First Nations Knowledge in Water Modelling: Implementation Case Study’ seeks to apply learnings from an earlier project ‘Incorporating First Nations Land Management into Technical Approaches to Water Modelling’ (2022 – 2023). The project focusses on Munga Lake in the Northern Murray Darling Basin.

The project has two aims:

- 1) To explore and test ways to better engage with First Nations land management practices within the water modelling industry.
- 2) To contribute to the rehabilitation of Munga Lake through this engagement.

While the project seeks to be transformative in the way First Nations Knowledge is valued and respectfully incorporated into land management projects it was important to recognise with all project partners that this type of change is slow.

Open discussions around funding available through the project to support rehabilitation of Munga Lake and the likelihood that this would require ongoing funding and continued support were also important.

By communicating these expectations at the beginning of the project, and continuing to do so throughout the project, trust is able to be maintained and the risk of disappointment is reduced.



Image credit: Water Technology (project partners)
Project Partners: Aunty Kay Blades, Relative Creative, Water Technology, QMDCL Rangers.

RESPECT

Safety

Ensure all members of a project team have the capability to approach partnerships in a culturally responsive way.

- The ability for a department and its employees to work with people from other cultures increases opportunity for meaningful decision making and reduces harm.

Cultural responsiveness is the effective engagement and promotion of the socioeconomic, political and cultural needs of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is having the ability to effectively forge relationships and actively engage in ongoing learning, reevaluation and participation.

Societal systems, including our education system and mainstream media, have not supported a good understanding of, or respect for First Nations peoples and cultures. Often non-Indigenous people need to work through biases, prejudice or lack of cultural sensitivity so that these do not have a negative impact on a partnership, or the people being partnered with.

Recommendation

Ensure that all staff have the appropriate skills and training. Continue to ensure that they are supported to adapt to the changing needs of staff, clients, collaborators, and community.

Increase First Nations employment, through approaches such as group hiring to increase the number of First Nations staff within government.

Consider developing a First Nations recruitment, retention and professional development plan to support an increase of First Nations peoples employed by government.

Closing the Gap

Priority Reform 1 - Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

Closely connected to

Communication - requirements of a partnership are clearly communicated to ensure appropriate remuneration.

References

Walker, Roz & Schultz, Clinton & Sonn, Christopher. (2014). Cultural Competence – Transforming Policy, Services, Programs and Practice.

Questions to ask

- Have I reflected on my own position of privilege before entering into the relationship?
- What power dynamics might lead to people feeling unsafe and how can these be changed or accounted for?
- What is appropriate for me to ask and what should I research by myself?
- Is there training I can undertake to improve my ability to be culturally responsive?
- Would it be better if experts led or supported this work instead?

Case Study

Design-led facilitation and strategy to co-create a First Nations action plan, VicHealth

2023

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) identified the need to engage an experienced consultant/s to support the co-creation of an action plan to deliver the objectives of VicHealth's Future Healthy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in Victoria.

As part of this project a two-day immersion on Country was designed and facilitated; an interactive three day gathering bringing together First Nations people from across the state of Victoria. The design of the event was led by a First Nations cultural consortium.

The Immersion was designed to centre Action Committee voices and experiences. A highly interactive space, with a range of First Nations facilitators and workshops from panels to break out sessions, cultural activities occurred. A smoking ceremony, Welcome to Country, Blak Bingo, Elder support, a wellbeing hub, traditional Aboriginal games and open yarns were also key to the success of the event.

The event successfully created a space where First Nations knowledge and culture was respected and celebrated.



Image credit (bottom): Wayne Quilliam
Project Partners: Relative Creative, VicHealth

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Protocols & Principles

Recognise that protocols and principles will vary

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are not homogeneous people should be prepared to engage with pre-established protocols and principles when forming partnerships.

There has been considerable work by First Nations peoples to develop frameworks that support culturally responsive working together. Being familiar with existing protocols and principles is important.

Likewise, it may be necessary to establish new protocols relevant to the partnership group and the intended outcomes of the partnership. This should be done in consultation with partners and through the provision of free, prior and informed consent.

Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are not monocultural and that different communities have different aspirations is important to this step.

Recommendation

- Ensure the project team understand Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) principles and that these, and how they will be followed, are communicated to partners.
- Provide opportunities for partners to outline any protocols and principles they would like to see followed.
- Understand that different Nations and communities will have different protocols and principles.
- Establish principles and protocols relevant to the partnership and who is being partnered with.

Closing the Gap

16. Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing

Closely connected to

Safety - recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are not homogenous is important to valuing the need for different protocols and principles.

References

Woodward, E., Hill, R., Harkness, P. and R. Archer (Eds) 2020 Our Knowledge Our Way in caring for Country: Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management. Best Practice Guidelines from Australian experiences. NAILSMA and CSIRO.

Questions to ask

- What protocols, principles and guidelines already exist?
- How can existing protocols, principles and guidelines offer a scaffold for any Country or Nation specific principles and protocols?
- Are their experts within the specific area (such as ICIP) who could support the development of project specific protocols, principles and guidelines?

Case Study

Co-designing with Gurambilbarra Wulgurukabba Traditional Owners, ReefHQ

2021 - 2022

Townsville's Reef HQ Aquarium, owned by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, is undertaking a major capital asset refurbishment project.

Relative Creative were engaged to work with Gurambilbarra Wulgurukabba Traditional Owners to co-design their contribution to this redevelopment. One outcome from this was the proposal for Gurambilbarra Wulgurukabba Traditional Owners to contribute to artwork within the aquarium.

Core to this outcome was the development of a set of whale stories in an area in the aquarium. While a whale story is important to the Gurambilbarra Wulgurukabba peoples it is also important to a number of Traditional Owner groups down the east coast of Queensland and beyond. Therefore, a terms of reference was established for a creative project to respectfully invite a number of Reef Traditional Owner groups to contribute to the Whale Story area. The visitor experience will be such that visitors learn about the plurality of songlines and storylines about the whale. For each group contributing, their unique terms for protocols and principles when engaging in the partnership will be respected.

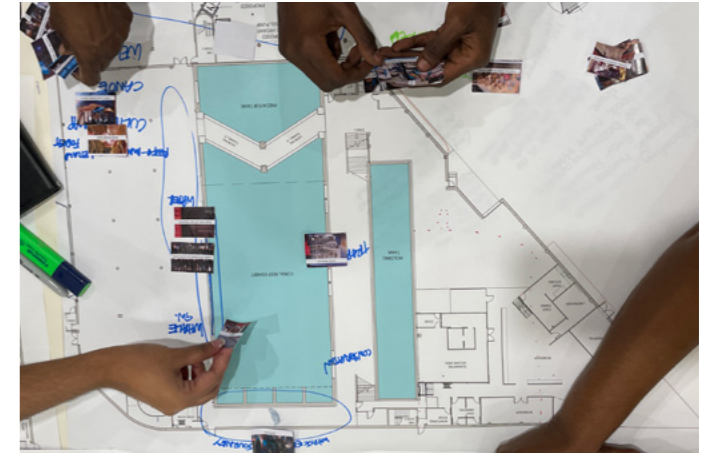


Image credit: Relative Creative
Project Partners: Relative Creative, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

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Empowerment

Structure partnerships to ensure shared decision-making authority.

- Structuring partnerships so that partners have genuine power and ability to effect decisions and actions is important for self-determination.

“Indigenous people should be given opportunities to be involved as designers or collaborators where they are recognised as creators and not merely informants.” Danièle Hromek and Terri Janke

The Australian Human Rights Commission defines self-determination as “concerned with the fundamental right of people to shape their own lives’. In a practical sense, self-determination means that we have the freedom to live well, to determine what it means to live well according to our own values and beliefs.”

Partnerships should be structured in ways that empower participants to shape outcomes.

Recommendation

Ensure that the structure of the partnership enables agency, this could be achieved through co-designing the partnership with project partners.

Ensure the project recognises First Nations peoples rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage. This could be through the development of terms of reference agreements or the application of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) principles.

Closing the Gap

17. People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives

Closely connected to

Communication - purpose, opportunities, limitations and available data and related insights are all communicated to partners.

References

Hromek, D & Janke, T 2017, Cultural Principles and Protocols for Designers: for Projects or Curricula involving Indigenous Peoples, Communities and Materials, (2021 ed.), Sydney

Case Study

First Nations Drones Policy and Partnerships Project, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA)

2024

As part of the DITRDCA project a number of case studies focussing on drone use by First Nations peoples were supported with funding.

Beyond a focus on drones participants had the opportunity to self-determine the project focus and how the money was spent to achieve this. This contributed to the development of a range of projects that increased participants capacity to deliver fee-for-service work.

These case studies provide a good example of how participants can be empowered to shape project outcomes.



Image credit: Relative Creative
Project Partners: Relative Creative, DITRDCA

RESPECT

Communication

Provide clear and consistent communication throughout a project and beyond.

- Open, honest and timely communication is key to power-sharing within partnerships.

“This is one thing that happens all the time right now. You go in as a group of Aboriginal advisors, you share your stories, you share your knowledge... you get a space for it in an action plan or a strategic plan, but next to nothing comes from it.”

Aunty Kay Blades – Mandandanji Traditional Owner

Consultation fatigue and a lack of accountability and follow-through is a critical flaw in many projects and if perpetuated, is likely to form barriers to First Nations peoples continuing to engage in projects. Clear communication throughout a partnership ensures everyone knows what is occurring, why project outcomes might not be being implemented and why the work was still important.

Recommendation

Visual and plain-language resources should be produced throughout the project to communicate the approach and enable learning and application for future projects.

All engagement activities need to be respectful, accountable and transparent to communicate with participants the purpose of the engagement, how the inputs will be used, and what action will result from the project.

Accountability of decision-makers should be increased to support post-project communication and implementation of recommendations.

Closing the Gap

8. Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities

Closely connected to

Expectations - must be clearly communicated.
Safety - understanding how to communicate cross-culturally is important to communicating effectively.

References

Water Technology, Relative Creative & Aunty Kay Blades (2023) Phase 4: Technical Recommendations Report; Incorporating First Nations Knowledge

Water Technology, Relative Creative & Aunty Kay Blades (2023) Reimagined Water Modelling Pipeline

Questions to ask

- Is there a plan in place to communicate at every stage of the project?
- Do I need help to communicate in plain English, or visually, to support participant understanding?
- Should I plan for communication to continue as the project ends or in the event it is unable to proceed?

RESPECT

Time

Establish reasonable timelines for projects to reduce pressures on partners.

- Time is needed to build relationships and trust, while also accounting for potential delays.

Building the trust required for meaningful partnerships takes time. Short project timelines do not properly account for this, putting pressure on partners.

Time is important in projects for a multitude of reasons. Time needs to be provided for community to participate, this extends to ensuring flexibility around timing of meetings. Partners may be nominated representatives for an entire community, family group or Nation and will need time to consult on ideas, outcomes, proposals etc. with their community.

Time for the project team to engage in-person and on site (on Country) can also be significant in building the trust necessary for stories and Culture to be shared. Time is also a significant factor in recalibrating powerdynamics and feelings that project partners are just 'parachuting in' to a community to serve their own purposes rather than community hopes and aspirations.

Rethinking western concepts of time is often viewed as an important step in decolonial praxis.

Recommendation

Work towards longer project timelines, or ensure a buffer for extending timelines is in place.

Where longer timelines are not viable consider how the partnership can be adjusted and whether expectations need to be changed to suit.

Discuss with project partners what is realistic for the time available.

Closing the Gap

17. People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives

Closely connected to

Safety - appropriate timelines reduces pressure and ensures time can be taken for cultural activities such as sorry business, a continued role within the community and conversations with the wider community and so on.

Expectations - a shorter timeline may require adjustments to what can be achieved through a partnership and how this is communicated to project partners.

References

- Abdilla, A et al. Out of the Black Box: Indigenous protocols for AI.
- Schultz, Tristan (2018) Mapping Indigenous Futures: Decolonising Techno-Colonising Designs, Strategic Design Research Journal, 11(2): 79-91 May-August
- Leong, T. W et al (2018) Designing for diversity in Aboriginal Australia: Insights from a national technology project. ACM Woodstock conference

Questions to ask

- Are time constraints going to limit what the project can achieve in a way that contradicts agreed expectations?
- Are you providing the time for representatives to discuss ideas, outcomes, proposals with community?

Case Study

Reimagining Cooktown Museum, National Trust of Australia Queensland (NTAQ)

2018 - 2021

In 2018 the National Trust of Australia, Queensland (NTAQ) engaged Relative Creative to design and lead community engagement with local Bama-ngay (Guugu Yimidhirr) as part of their broader project to redevelop James Cook Museum (now Cooktown Museum) for the 21st Century.

Relative Creative began conversations in June and July 2018 with the Cooktown community and continued community engagements over 2019 and January 2020.

This timeframe was necessary to foster respectful relationships and seek genuine input into the reimagining of the museum. Outcomes of the engagements, as well as typologies and thematics of place, and extensive visual studies contributed to the development of a Visitor Experience Plan, Concept Framework document and eventually the development of an updated identity. Due to the strength of relationship built over the years Relative Creative was able to seek honest feedback and respectfully communicate the stories and culture of the Guugu Yimidhirr peoples, weaving them through the other stories of the town.

This project was awarded winner of the 2022 Gallery and Museum Achievement Award.



Image credit: Relative Creative
Project Partners: Relative Creative, NTAQ

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