

VOICE INVESTMENT LEADERSHIP RESPECT OWNERSHIP



Image: Brook Andrew, Jumping Castle War Memorial, 2010. 17th Biennale of Sydney. Image courtesy of the artist and Torarno Galleries, Melbourne. Photo: Gordon Craig

Arts NSW

ABORIGINAL ARTS AND CULTURAL PROTOCOLS 2011

AIMS

These Protocols provide guidance for people working with the NSW Aboriginal arts and cultural sector who are developing arts programs and projects involving Aboriginal people, organisations and cultural material. They will also assist Arts NSW in assessing funding applications and submissions for arts programs and projects.

The Protocols present five guiding principles that encompass a contemporary and progressive approach to working with the Aboriginal arts and cultural sector. They have been developed from consultation with Aboriginal leaders in arts and culture from across the country¹.

The Protocols complement the NSW Government's Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Strategy released in 2010, which drew on extensive consultation with Aboriginal arts and cultural workers and practitioners in NSW.

WORKING WITH THE NSW ABORIGINAL ARTS AND CULTURAL SECTOR

The [*NSW Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Strategy 2010*](#) recognises the importance of arts and cultural expression in Aboriginal society, and that arts and cultural expression continues to be a crucial element of the social, cultural and economic fabric of Aboriginal people and communities throughout Australia.

Within NSW there are up to seventy different language groups and a diversity of Aboriginal culture and practice. It is important to recognise that Aboriginal Australians have historically come from a different heritage and culture from that of the wider Australian public. Aboriginal people practice many traditions of the past in a modern context. It is fundamental to Aboriginal artists who engage with cultural materials and practices to show consideration for the traditions of the past. Non-Aboriginal artists and arts practitioners should also engage with Aboriginal culture and heritage in a respectful way.

In this document, the term "Aboriginal" includes people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.

¹ Developed by the participants of *IndigeLab 2010*, a Performance Space initiative financially assisted by Arts NSW. The ten Indigenous leaders include: Wesley Enoch, Lee-Anne Buckskin, Vernon Ah Kee, Daniel Browning, Andrea James, Jason Eades, Marilyn Miller, Rob Lane, Reko Rennie, Liza-Mare Syron.

ABORIGINAL ARTS AND CULTURAL PROTOCOLS 2011

1. VOICE

It is important that Aboriginal people have a significant involvement in any work that deals with Aboriginal cultural material, heritage, or practices. The inclusion of an Aboriginal voice ensures participation from the Aboriginal arts sector, and that Aboriginal people are represented in the development of a project.

In practice, however, it is often the case that a multiplicity of Aboriginal artists and organisations operate in small and large towns and cities across NSW. It is not always possible to know who to consult or include. Nor do artists represent all Aboriginal arts and culture. If in doubt, it is best to start with the local land councils, whose members consist of the local Aboriginal people. Local land councils also have elected representatives, whose role it is to serve their communities' interests.

The inclusion of an appropriate Aboriginal voice, or a diversity of Aboriginal voices, encourages real engagement with the Aboriginal arts and cultural sector.

2. INVESTMENT

The *NSW Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Strategy 2010* identifies priority areas for investing in the Aboriginal arts and cultural sector. The Aboriginal arts and cultural sector provides jobs and triggers wider cultural and socio-economic growth.

Investing in career pathways for the Aboriginal arts and cultural sector provides sustainable improvements to the lives of Aboriginal people. Traineeships, mentorships, and leadership programs are just some examples. Identifying work opportunities for Aboriginal people in the arts and cultural sector is also a priority area for investment.

Inequality still persists for Aboriginal people across all sectors of Australian society. An ongoing issue for many Aboriginal artists, performers and other arts and cultural workers is fair rates of pay and conditions. Aboriginal participation in an arts or cultural project needs to include appropriate and equal rates of attribution for the contribution of Aboriginal people.

3. LEADERSHIP

Aboriginal Governance and Leadership is one of the priorities identified nationally in *Closing the Gap*² between non-Indigenous and Indigenous lives. Aboriginal leadership and effective governance in the arts and cultural sector contributes to this priority.

² *Closing the Gap* is the commitment from the Council of Australian Governments to close the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and other areas of Indigenous disadvantage within a generation.

Developing leadership capacity for Aboriginal people across all levels of the arts and cultural sectors increases the number of inspiring and effective leaders, who will make a positive difference to the lives of Aboriginal Australians, their communities and the wider arts and cultural sector in Australia.

Leadership programs encompass both individual leader development and leadership development within organisations and sectors. Leadership in the Aboriginal arts and cultural sector can include mentoring programs for young people, programs for emerging artists, mid-career opportunities and professional development for established artists and arts and cultural industry workers.

4. RESPECT

It is the responsibility of organisations and individuals who engage with Aboriginal materials, culture, heritage and people to acknowledge that a diversity of customs and laws exist pertaining to the use of specific community and intellectual property. It is also essential that materials used, or people identified, be done so in a culturally sensitive way.

Some examples of respect include:

- ≈ Respect for country by providing welcomes (by traditional owners) and acknowledgements, and respect for Elders past and present when performing an event as part of a project.
- ≈ The appropriate use of terminology used to represent Aboriginal people and their communities. (e.g avoid the use of the word *Aborigines*, research the language groups in the area, seek advice from appropriately qualified Aboriginal people in the area)
- ≈ Acknowledging the diversity of Aboriginal communities engaged in projects.
- ≈ The representation of deceased Aboriginal people depicted in manner determined by Aboriginal people and their families.

5. OWNERSHIP

Indigenous people have the right to self determination in their cultural affairs and expression of cultural material³. Considering how Aboriginal ownership can be incorporated into a project is an important aspect of self-determination. Enabling Aboriginal people to take control of their careers and projects in which they are involved is essential to the development of positive Aboriginal life outcomes.

One way of ensuring a sense of Aboriginal ownership is through appropriate consultation with relevant Aboriginal artists and arts workers, groups, agencies, and organisations. Ownership can also be fostered by forming an Aboriginal steering or reference group to contribute to the project, whose role would include advising on issues arising from working with Aboriginal cultural material, heritage, or practices.

³ Taken from Australia Council for the Arts, *Protocols for producing Indigenous Australian arts* (2007).

Detailed Aboriginal Protocols have also been developed for specific parts of the arts and cultural sector:

Film and Television:

- *Pathways and Protocols. A Film Makers Guide to Working with Indigenous People, Culture and Concepts.* Screen Australia (2009)
- *SBS Living Black Filming Protocols* (2007)

Libraries and Archives:

- *National Library of Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and information Services.* (1995)

Museums and Galleries:

- *Cultural Protocols – Indigenous Welcome to Country*

Performing Arts:

- *Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Performing Arts* (2007)

Visual Arts:

- *Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Visual Arts* (2007)
- *Valuing Art, Respecting Culture: Protocols for Working with the Australian Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft Sector* (2001)
- *Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Media Arts* (2007).

Music:

- *Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Music* (2007)

Writing:

- *Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Writing* (2007)