



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols

## **Purpose:**

Access Arts acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of Australia and the contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to the social, economic, artistic and cultural identity of Australia.

Access Arts in its own capacity partners with organisations and engages with First Nations people experiencing disability or disadvantage to assist those individuals in developing and maintaining their cultural wellbeing through cultural and artistic expression.

The purpose of these Cultural Protocols is to ensure all Access Arts programs and staff engage appropriately and responsively with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experiencing disability or disadvantage with whom the organisation is working, and further the cultural wellbeing of these communities.

## **Aims:**

The aim of these Cultural Protocols is to:

- Ensure appropriate and meaningful engagement with First Nations communities by developing a cultural framework that reflects and acknowledges First Nations peoples values.
- Ensure staff and partners have knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
- Identify and be aware of issues that may be relevant to First Nations communities.
- Promote social inclusion of First Nations cultural groups.
- Promote the leadership and autonomy of the First Nations communities we work with.

Access Arts understands and recognises that supporting First Nations cultural wellbeing within communities is not confined to physical health, as noted by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation:

*Indigenous health is not just the physical wellbeing of an individual, but the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their community.*



In recognising this, Access Arts understands that engaging and working with an individual within their cultural context and maintaining a cultural identity can contribute to their cultural wellbeing. Access Arts believes that creative or artistic expression, along with programs that encourage community and cultural identity, are beneficial to overall wellbeing. The range of programs that Access Arts is involved in is a demonstration of this belief and ongoing commitment to the engagement of First Nations people.

1. Access Arts respects the survival, wellbeing and dignity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and recognises their rights including:
  - The right to maintain their culture
  - The right to recognition of their distinct identities
  - The right to self-government and self-determination
  - The right to be asked for their free, prior and informed consent in decisions that may affect them.
2. Access Arts respects the cultural, spiritual and linguistic identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their rights to practice and revitalise culture and the transmission of histories and languages, as well as the protection of traditions, sites, and ceremonial objects.
3. The acknowledgement of First Nations culture is a significant part of Access Arts' philosophy and approach.
4. Access Arts recognises that each cultural and geographical group is unique and what works in one area won't necessarily work in another.
5. Access Arts acknowledges that local knowledge is paramount to every aspect of working with First Nations communities in different geographic locations.
6. Access Arts develops and delivers cross-cultural programs to:
  - Enhance social skills, life skills and work skills through creativity.
  - Encourage creative activities and develop creative engagement opportunities.
  - Develop career paths through community based practice.
  - Provide training for young and emerging artists to work effectively in the arts.
  - Further the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
7. Elements of our programming practices include:
  - People are recognised as key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients
  - Participation is both a means and a goal
  - Strategies that are empowering, not disempowering
  - The development process is locally owned
  - Measurable goals and targets are important in programming
  - Each project is evaluated for social and emotional wellbeing



## Partnerships:

1. Access Arts delivers First Nations and cross-cultural projects based on community partnerships, drawing on the strengths of partner organisations. This enables the organisation to:
  - Establish contacts with and networks among First Nations practitioners.
  - Develop and disseminate appropriate communications.
  - Effectively and appropriately connect communities, artists and participants through intercultural awareness and communication.
2. Access Arts is committed to the long-term approach for collaborative programs with communities and to developing ongoing and sustainable relationships with partners.
3. Access Arts recognises the benefit of actively pursuing opportunities to add sustainable value to existing services and infrastructure, rather than just focusing on creating new programs for First Nations communities.
4. Access Arts has identified the following issues, responses and examples for engaging with First Nations people:

Issue	Basic information	Access Arts' response
<b>Health</b>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally have lower life expectancy, higher rates of maternal and child mortality and less access to health services than the national average.</p>	<p>Access Arts will, where appropriate, seek to ensure that a health element is built into our First Nations partnership projects.</p>
<b>Education</b>	<p>Education is an important development tool for young people who must live in two worlds.</p> <p>First Nations people have fewer years of schooling and less access to education and vocational training than the majority of the population.</p> <p>In addition, their own educational systems may not be recognised at the same level as the mainstream system.</p>	<p>Access Arts welcomes partnership projects that further the education of First Nations people and encourage learning.</p>

	<p>While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are important as traditional knowledge holders, they have at the same time been particularly disadvantaged in formal education systems.</p>	
<p><b>Capacity development, vocational training, work employment and occupation</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are usually discriminated against in work conditions and employment, and are subject to higher unemployment rates than the rest of society.</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas usually occupy low remunerated employment or work in the informal economy, and often do not have access to vocational training programmes.</p>	<p>Access Arts supports special programs and positive measures that build work-ready skills and attributes, and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>
<p><b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women</b></p>	<p>In many cases, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people women are doubly discriminated against due to their ethnicity and gender. This results in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people women being worse off than First Nations men and non-First Nations women in terms of poverty levels, access to education, health and economic resources, political participation, among other issues. The rate of maternal mortality is alarmingly high among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people women.</p>	<p>Access Arts supports programs that build confidence and social and emotional wellbeing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people women.</p>

<p><b>Children and young people</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people children and young people require culturally-sensitive treatment.</p> <p>Efforts by First Nations peoples to pass on their language and culture to their children need to be supported.</p> <p>Given the prevalence of poverty in First Nations communities, the lack of health and education services, and sometimes the presence of violence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have often moved to cities for employment and educational opportunities.</p> <p>Some First Nations people are confronted with social problems such as substance abuse, human trafficking, suicides, or petty crimes among children and young people.</p>	<p>Access Arts welcomes projects that pass language and culture down through generations.</p> <p>Access Arts welcomes projects that help address social problems such as drug, alcohol, family violence or sexual abuse.</p>
<p><b>Urban migration of First Nations people</b></p>	<p>Various factors cause migration of First Nations peoples to urban areas. Frequent push-factors include poverty, environmental degradation, conflict, inadequate legal protection, and absence of services. Among the pull-factors are better employment, health, housing, education, political participation, social recognition and visibility.</p>	<p>Access Arts welcomes partnership projects that seek to address the impact of urbanisation on First Nations people, including their rights to health care.</p>