

National Reconciliation Week

Let's walk the talk!



Reconciliation
AUSTRALIA

National Reconciliation Week |
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27 May – 3 June

Activity guide for Reconciliation Action Plan partners

Introduction

We all know the importance of recognition and how good it makes us feel. National Reconciliation Week is the perfect opportunity to recognise all Australians, and the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within this country.

This activity guide will provide Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) partners with useful information relating to reconciliation and why recognition is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. It also includes ideas and suggestions for activities to celebrate National Reconciliation Week in your workplace.

About National Reconciliation Week

National Reconciliation Week is celebrated each year from 27 May to 3 June. The dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey—the anniversaries of the successful 1967 referendum and the Mabo decision.

The week-long event gives us the opportunity to explore how we can all engage in the conversation of national reconciliation.

To find out more about the theme for National Reconciliation Week each year visit our website:
www.reconciliation.org.au/nrw

Let's talk recognition

We all know the importance of recognition and how good it makes us feel. National Reconciliation Week is the perfect opportunity to *recognise* the traditional owners of the land, and the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture within this country.

If you're having a public event during National Reconciliation Week, make sure you include a Welcome to Country in your order of proceedings. Incorporating welcomes to or acknowledgements of country into official events is an important act of reconciliation and provides opportunities to recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' culture and heritage. It also communicates to the broader community the cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Reconciliation Australia can help put you in touch with traditional owners in your area.

What is a Welcome to Country?

A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to welcome visitors to their traditional land. It must be conducted by a traditional owner and should occur as a priority item at the beginning of an official ceremony or event being held by your organisation.

A Welcome to Country can take many forms, depending on the particular culture of the traditional owner/s performing the Welcome. It can include singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English.

What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

At the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion, the speaker can begin their proceedings by offering an Acknowledgement of Country. An Acknowledgement of Country is a way of showing awareness of and respect for the traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held, and of recognising the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their Country (land).

Unlike a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country can be performed by any non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who isn't a traditional owner of the land the meeting is being held on.

There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following form;

General: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

Specific: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the (people) of the (nation) and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

It helps to think about how you might personalise and localise an acknowledgement to make it as meaningful as possible, so this statement is just a guide.

Why do we do it?

The process of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country recognises the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian culture and history.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the original Custodians of the Land. It is important that this unique position is recognised and incorporated as part of official protocols and events to enable the wider community to share in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

Activity ideas

Reconciliation Australia is encouraging all RAP partners to get involved in National Reconciliation Week by hosting a morning tea or attending local community events.

Here are some simple ways you can get involved.

1) Hold a morning tea

Holding a morning tea and inviting a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander elder/person to speak is a great way for your organisation, university or school to engage your staff in the reconciliation conversation!

You may like to ask your speaker to talk on the topic of recognition and the history of the First Australians in your local area (contact your local Aboriginal council or reconciliation group).

Why not collect a gold coin donation from staff to donate to a local not-for-profit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program or organisation.

Not sure what to say to staff at your morning tea? Here are some ideas to get your speech-writing underway.

Host: Good morning/afternoon everyone. Before we start I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to their elders past and present.

This morning/afternoon we're celebrating National Reconciliation Week. This is an important week for recognition between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

This year, the theme is all about recognition. How do you feel when you're recognised for something you've done? Pretty good, don't you?

Being recognised is good for your self-esteem. It can energise you and encourages you to recognise the best in others.

Today we've invited xxx to talk to you about the history of First Australians in this area. And so in the spirit of reconciliation, I'd like to ask xxx to speak...

Guest speaker: Acknowledges country and delivers presentation.

Host: Thank you for taking part in today's morning tea. Please feel free to make a gold coin donation for <insert Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation of your choice> and help make a difference.

But the conversation doesn't have to end today. When you go home tonight or at work tomorrow, get talking about reconciliation, recognition and how we can make Australia an even better place to call home!

2) Create a recognition wall

Look for opportunities to recognise the efforts of all your staff.

Starting with the words "Recognition means...", create a display depicting colleagues' written or visual interpretations of recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culture and customs. It could be a drawing, a poem or a story about someone they admire.

Or how about sticking up a large piece of paper and adding sticky notes with messages of praise. "I'd like to recognise xxx for organising National Reconciliation Week activities."

3) Take a cultural walking tour

Australia has been populated for tens of thousands of years, which means there is plenty of it to discover. We have a rich multicultural society, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that we can be proud of.

Take the time to find out about them during National Reconciliation Week as they are an important part of our history and our identity. Check out the internet for some local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural walking tours or presentations to learn more about local knowledge.

4) Volunteer for your local community

Volunteering at a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander group/organisation is a great way to build relationships between your organisation and your local community. Indigenous Community Volunteers can also assist with larger scale volunteering projects: www.icv.com.au

5) Show your support for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution

You Me Unity is the national conversation about constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As it stands, the Australian Constitution does not recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians, and parts of the Constitution do not treat all Australians equally. Recognition has a lot to do with reconciliation—the two go hand in hand. For example, an Acknowledgement of Country is a way of showing respect for traditional owners and of recognising their continuing connection to country. This recognition is at the very heart of reconciliation.

With the 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations providing a meaningful chance for reconciliation, the formal recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our Constitution could be the next step in working towards lasting and positive change for Australia. For more information about constitutional change visit <http://www.recognise.org.au/>

National Reconciliation Week



Next steps

Register your event online

Don't forget to jump online to register your event at www.reconciliation.org.au/nrw

Check out our new website for more ideas

Need some more inspiration? You'll find a resource kit (including factsheets, activities and note) plus some specific action items on the new National Reconciliation Week website www.reconciliation.org.au/nrw or keep up-to-date on twitter.com/RecAustralia