

What does First Nations led truth-telling look like?

Reconciliation Australia:
**Community Truth-telling
Pathways**

A core principle of truth-telling is that it should always be First Nations led. This means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are the ones setting the direction and making the key decisions.

First Nations led truth-telling:

- centres First Nations voices, knowledge and perspectives.
- prioritises the needs and aspirations of the First Nations peoples of that place.
- gives First Nations peoples the final say over decisions at every step in the process.

This does not mean expecting First Nations peoples to have all the answers or to do all the work of the truth-telling activity.

The importance of First Nations led truth-telling

The experiences and perspectives of First Nations peoples are largely excluded from the official records of Australia's history. First Nations peoples hold deep cultural authority and lived experience, they **know what is missing and what needs to be told**.

Much of Australia's silenced history is personal for First Nations peoples. If and how historical information should be shared, is most **appropriately decided by those directly impacted** and their descendants.

When First Nations perspectives are welcomed unconditionally, it can **break the cycle of omitting and forgetting and promote wellbeing** through long-denied recognition and validation.

Decisions have long been made on behalf of First Nations peoples under the assumption that non-Indigenous people know best. First Nations led truth-telling resists this narrative, putting power back in the hands of First Nations peoples to tell their own story on their own terms. This is **self-determination in action**.

Knowing whose lead to follow

Be ready to invest time and energy in finding out whose leadership in the community you should be following. Every community is different. Individuals with a high public profile or in positions of authority in First Nations organisations may not necessarily have cultural authority.

Cast a wide net and talk with a range of people to understand community dynamics and lines of authority. The first person you talk to is unlikely to be the only person you should talk to.

Places to start include:

- **Traditional Owners, Elders and Stolen Generations groups**
- **Local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Land Councils or Native Title bodies**
- **Local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Corporations**
- **Local First Nations health and legal services**
- **Local government**
- **Local reconciliation groups**

Navigating differing views

Like any group in society, First Nations community members are going to hold differing opinions at times, especially when sensitive subjects are involved. If differing opinions arise during the truth-telling process, it is not your job to fix things. Trust the community to lead the way. Stay engaged and keep communication open to show your support, even if progress takes time.

Appropriate actions:

- **Listen intently, listen to understand.**
- **Ask open ended questions.**
- **Stay actively engaged, offering your assistance without pushing an agenda or outcome.**
- **Avoid putting any additional burden on the community by forcing predetermined timelines.**
- **Do not pick sides or favour one viewpoint over another – it is not your role to arbitrate.**
- **Recognise that disagreement within community may be part of the truth-telling process. Conflicting views can reflect the ongoing impacts of colonisation, including disrupted knowledge systems and histories.**

Non-Indigenous truth-tellers

Increasingly, non-Indigenous Australians are taking responsibility for investigating the historical actions of their own families and organisations, and their impact on First Nations peoples. The principle of First Nations led applies equally to this truth-telling. Though important and well-intentioned, sharing that history may cause further harm and distress. This is why it is critical that the voices and perspectives of First Nations peoples are sought and respected throughout the process.

Explore examples of First Nations led community truth-telling.



reconciliation.org.au/truth-telling

This resource was produced by Reconciliation Australia to support community truth-telling. Published October 2025.

