

064 – ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY OPERATIONAL POLICY



POLICY TITLE:	064 – ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY		
VERSION:	001	DATE EFFECTIVE:	03/08/2020
AUTHORISED BY:	Chief Executive Officer	DATE REVIEWED:	04/08/2022

PURPOSE

To ensure that services provided by ARC Disability Services Inc. (ARC) are delivered in a way that is reflective of appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, Customs and Lore.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers and participants who access or deliver ARC services.

STATEMENT

ARC acknowledges that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander peoples are quite distinct ethnically and culturally. Historically and to this day, Aboriginal people have lived on mainland Australia, in Tasmania and on offshore islands for over 80,000 years. In all areas of Australia, Aboriginal people, the original custodians of Australia, were dispossessed of their land piece by piece. Their sovereignty remains unseeded.

Torres Strait Islanders came from Melanesia and settled in the islands of the Torres Strait some 10,000 years ago. Since World War II, many Torres Strait Islanders have moved to the mainland. The Torres Strait was annexed by Queensland in 1879, and other than, in the establishment of settlements such as Thursday Island, the people were not dispersed from their homelands by foreign colonisers (**As people were dispersed by rising sea levels and will continue to be in the near future*). However, like Aboriginal people, they were subjected to restrictive and paternalistic legislation that denied them their citizenship & human rights. Today, the social indicators for Torres Strait Islanders-in education, health and employment-are similar to those for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols are relevant to inform the internal operations of the organisation, external service delivery and individual practice. Protocols are an essential component to appropriate and effective communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. ARC acknowledges that for many years culturally appropriate protocols were invisible in communications with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Along with these protocols that provide a general guide for members of staff, ARC affirms the right of every participant to access services in an environment that is free from all forms of discrimination and harassment. ARC also affirms the right of members of staff to work and learn in a safe environment that is free from all forms of discrimination and harassment. All staff members are responsible for ensuring their own actions and behaviours are non-discriminatory and non-harassing.

ARC practices will always be informed by and developed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Protocol. However, it is important to emphasise that this policy is not intended to be a blanket Prescription, given that different communities will have differing consultative arrangements to others. As a result, this policy is intended to be a general guide for members of staff, in particular non- Indigenous staff, who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities.

IMPLEMENTATION

ARC acknowledges both the positive and negative impacts of 'native title'. With this in mind, ARC preferences an acknowledgement of Traditional Owners when holding meetings on their country, rather than a welcome to country, which risks excluding traditional owners, in particular where there may be multiple native title claims. In doing so, best practice would be to use words similar to the extract below to acknowledge traditional owners and country when commencing meetings.

“We respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet today. We would like to pay our respect to the traditional owners, past and present and emerging.”

Cairns Region Traditional Owners:

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- Gimuy Walubara Yidinji People (Gimuy); and
- Yirrganydji People (Yirrganydji).

All members of staff are expected to respect Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people through:

- Checking to see if the person would like somebody with them e.g. if a participant is coming for an appointment, let them know they are welcome to bring a family member, friend or other person who is significant to them.
- Being genuine and non-intrusive. Listening without interruption.
- Displaying genuine respect for culture, beliefs and lifestyle of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Using inclusive, non-labelling and non-discriminatory language in dealings with participants, colleagues or visitors
- Offering/arranging an interpreter in situations where English is not so strong (as English can often be the second or third language of a person).
- Recognising that coarse language may be very offensive in some communities.
- Avoiding jargon and complex terms, noting that this should be the case for any groups or Individuals to whom staff are providing a service.
- Recognising that outdated terms are extremely offensive. Avoiding the use of acronyms when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for example, ATSI. Terms must be written or spoken in full and not abbreviated. Ensuring that words such as Aboriginal/Indigenous/ First Nations People are always capitalised
- Ensuring that names such as “Murri” or “Koori” are not used unless credibility is established and permission has been granted to use the names.
- Avoiding such comments, as ‘I understand what you are going through’.
- Being aware, that direct eye contact in some communities may be viewed as disrespectful.
- Being aware of any specific cultural boundaries between males and females and practicing appropriate behaviour at all times
- Ensuring any written correspondence and communications are also reflective of appropriate protocols and are non-discriminatory.
- Understanding that with kinship systems it may be inappropriate for a person to speak to a particular person in the community as this can be misconstrued as the person being uncooperative if you may not be aware of why a person may be reluctant to speak.
- Being aware of the bereavement practices (Sorry Business, funerals) of Indigenous people vary in different regions and often include sensitivity to seeing or hearing the image, voice or name of the deceased.
- Understanding that there are many different First Nations within these lands and that culture and lore differs between different communities and should be respected as individual communities.

ARC Employees will not:

- Use language in a way that creates devaluing and segregation of a person is unacceptable.

SIGNIFICANT ANNUAL EVENTS

- Harmony Day;
- National Close the Gap Day;
- National Sorry Day;
- Mabo Day;
- NAIDOC Week;
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children’s Day.

COMMUNITY VISITS

Members of staff who conduct community visits must adhere to the following general protocols:

- As a general rule, liaise with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Council and/or appropriate organisations/community members to gain entry to a community, and seek guidance and direction about how to carry on business in the community.
- As a general rule, collaborate with identified key local community workers.
- Always ask when unclear about lines of authority and communication within a community. Being genuine and non-intrusive.

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- Genuine respect for culture, beliefs and lifestyle is essential.
- Acknowledging traditional ownership of land.
- Seeking permission for any photographs.
- Allow plenty of time when visiting a community.
- Home visits with Indigenous people will only be carried out by invitation.

EMPLOYMENT

ARC is committed to the employment and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons.

ARC will endeavour to:

- Maximise staff development along with the transfer of job skills and information in order to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff knowledge, independence, remuneration, job security and self-sufficiency;
- Encourage and foster the employment and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of work activity within the Organisation; and
- Facilitate and encourage the direct involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in determining career strategies, goals, culturally safe working conditions/environments and objectives.

Whilst pursuing these objectives and in employment matters generally, the Organisation will:

- Respect and consider the cultural, social and religious systems practiced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- Recognise that the general working environment requires the redress and sensitivity of past social injustice, exploitation and Indigenous employment inequities.

REFERENCES

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003

Native Title Act 1986

Anti-Discrimination Act 1977

AUTHORISATION

This Policy is approved and issued by:

BENJAMIN KEAST

Chief Executive Officer

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