



Aboriginal Community Partnership Principles 2020-2022

What we want to achieve through these principles

These Principles are designed to guide how the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) engages with Aboriginal¹ communities and empowers Aboriginal voices in our work on Aboriginal rights issues.

“Community can trust that when they go there, they are going to be heard and that their issues are going to be respected.”²

The Commission is committed to developing these principles as part of our *Aboriginal Community Engagement Strategy 2020 – 22 (ACES)*. They have been developed in response to feedback from Victorian Aboriginal community members and organisations and aim to embed leading practice into our functions and services.

“Aboriginal people need to be treated in a way that is doubly understanding and committed.”

The Commission recognises and respects the unique position of Aboriginal Victorians as First Nations peoples and the central importance of self-determination. As a non-Indigenous organisation working to advance Aboriginal rights, we understand that the way we work is critical to advancing the values we espouse.

¹ Throughout this document, the word ‘Aboriginal’ is intended to represent all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

² All quotes in this document are included with consent and were collected by the Commission during community consultation workshops held in February 2020.



Our integrity to work on these issues relies on our ability to:

- clearly articulate our commitment to self-determination and advancing Aboriginal people’s rights
- provide culturally safe services and work in partnership and meaningful consultation with Aboriginal communities and organisations
- build and maintain relationships of trust with Aboriginal organisations and communities founded on our transparency and accountability
- listen to and respond to the distinct voices of Aboriginal people in Victoria.

“[Y]ou need something in place for Aboriginal people, so they know that they need to go that extra step and how to do it for Aboriginal people.”

Review

These Principles are a living document. The Commission will review these Principles on an annual basis, in line with our annual reporting obligations, to ensure they remain effective, responsive to the needs of Aboriginal communities and consistent with best practice.

Our Principles

To achieve the strategic purpose outlined above, we commit to engaging with Aboriginal rights issues, as well as Aboriginal communities and stakeholders, in line with the following principles:

Self-determination

Cultural rights

Promoting Aboriginal voices and perspectives

Accountability to the Aboriginal community and transparency



Principle 1 - self-determination

The right to self-determination is protected under international human rights law by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*³ and is a foundational principle for Aboriginal communities.

Self-determination recognises that Aboriginal Victorians are the experts on their own lives and are best placed to understand and respond to issues affecting their communities.

We commit to embed self-determination within the remit of our statutory functions to ensure that, wherever possible, our work is guided and led by the lived experience and expertise of Aboriginal stakeholders. Accordingly, we will consult with Aboriginal organisations and community members in a way that recognises and respects their unique expertise, as well as the time and resource constraints under which they are working.

We will also elevate the contributions of our Aboriginal staff, Board members and partner organisations in determining our priorities and Aboriginal rights agenda.

In our major Aboriginal rights-focused projects,⁴ we will endeavour wherever possible to partner with and be guided by Aboriginal stakeholders. In doing so, we will prioritise sharing knowledge and resources and building reciprocal capacity to achieve our common goals.

In our day-to-day work and delivery of services to the Aboriginal community, we will leverage the expertise and perspectives of our Aboriginal staff to guide our work and test our approach. We will also be informed by data collected in accordance with the Aboriginal Data Strategy developed in association with these principles.

We will assess how self-determination needs to be embedded into each initiative on a case by case basis to ensure the greatest practical impact.

Our Commitment

We will promote and adhere to the principle of self-determination by embedding Aboriginal knowledge and lived experience into our work. This will include ensuring Aboriginal people have a genuine opportunity to shape and steward our work.

³ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, opened for signature on 13 September 2007.

⁴ Major projects are those that are long-term, involve a substantial allocation of resources and will have a significant impact on Aboriginal communities (such as a long-term research project or review).



Example

We undertake a research project concerning inequalities in health outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. Because the project is long term and resource intensive, we assess it to be a 'major' project.

In consideration of this, we partner with an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation to jointly co-design and undertake the project and hold consultation sessions with Aboriginal community members to further inform our understanding.

We ensure there is adequate time for meaningful relationship building, Aboriginal choice making and direction setting.

On completion of the project – and at key milestones as required – we report back to the Aboriginal community to share knowledge and build two-way learning.

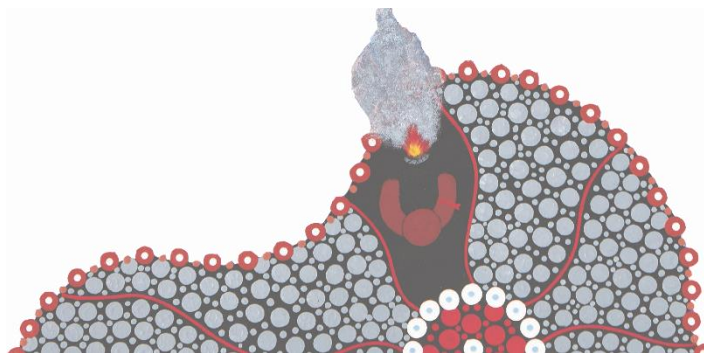
Principle 2 - cultural rights

Section 19 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)* (**Charter**) recognises that Aboriginal Victorians hold distinct cultural rights and provides that public authorities, such as Victorian public service agencies, must consider these cultural rights when making decisions concerning Aboriginal Victorians.

As a public authority, the Commission applies cultural rights to our own functions and services. As part of these Principles, we will formally embed cultural rights into our work in three ways. Firstly, we will consider and respect the cultural rights and requirements of our Aboriginal staff to ensure they are being supported to work in a culturally safe environment. Secondly, we will engage with Aboriginal stakeholders in recognition and respect of their cultural rights (as outlined in our *Cultural safety practice guide* and *Guide to culturally safe practices in dispute resolution*.) Finally, we will consider how our initiatives and actions promote cultural rights.

Our Commitment

We will promote and adhere to cultural rights under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)* in undertaking our functions and providing services.



Example

An Aboriginal person ('Tracy') experiences discrimination and contacts our enquiries line. Recognising and respecting Tracy's cultural rights, our staff member:

- asks Tracy if she identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- offers to connect her with an Aboriginal staff member (where available)
- takes the time to develop rapport and trust
- communicates in a clear, value-free, open and respectful way
- listens, respects and understands the impact of the discrimination on Tracy and what would resolve the complaint for her
- provides information to support Tracy to make her own decision about whether or not to proceed with a complaint, including explaining how the Commission tailors our response to Aboriginal people.

Tracy decides to proceed with a formal complaint. The Commission tailors our process in the following ways:

- we ask if Tracy would like to speak with an Aboriginal staff member before talking to the dispute resolution team
- we provide alternative and flexible points of entry to make a complaint, so Tracy doesn't have to tell her story multiple times to different people
- we fast-track the complaint through the dispute resolution process
- we provide tailored assistance to support Tracy to formalise her complaint and participate in the conciliation process
- we provide warm referrals to Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) organisations to wrap supports around Tracy
- we follow up with Tracy after her complaint is resolved to obtain feedback about her experiences so we can ensure and improve cultural safety for other Aboriginal parties in the future.



Principle 3 - promoting Aboriginal voices and perspectives

As a non-Aboriginal organisation working to advance Aboriginal rights, we understand the importance of not only listening to Aboriginal expertise but also promoting and elevating Aboriginal voices.

To do this, we will promote Aboriginal voices and perspectives in our work and provide a platform for Aboriginal Victorians in our advocacy and events. When engaging in public commentary or political discourse on Aboriginal rights issues, we will take into account the views and wishes of Aboriginal organisations and communities and seek to promote Aboriginal spokespeople.

Our Commitment

We will elevate and magnify the perspectives and voices of Aboriginal people in our Aboriginal rights-related work.

Example

The Commission is hosting a public event on Aboriginal rights, we ensure that no less than seventy-five percent of the panel is comprised of Aboriginal speakers and prioritise securing an Aboriginal chair.

Example

The Commission is advocating for legal reform to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes. To ensure we prioritise and promote Aboriginal voices in our campaign, we:

- coordinate with Aboriginal stakeholders to ensure our messaging recognises and supports their goals and expertise
- defer to Aboriginal leaders as the key spokespeople on issues affecting their communities
- work with Aboriginal communities to incorporate Aboriginal stories and case studies into our advocacy, with informed consent
- develop joint media releases, briefings and/or campaigns with Aboriginal leaders and/or stakeholders
- elevate and amplify the voices of other Aboriginal stakeholders through promoting their messaging in our engagement with the media, decision-makers and other avenues.



Principle 4 - accountability to the Aboriginal community and transparency

To effect meaningful change, our work must align with and progress the needs of the Aboriginal community. To achieve this, we need to act in a clear and transparent way so that Aboriginal Victorians can assess our work and hold us accountable to our commitments and actions. We must proactively seek feedback and regularly reflect on our work to ensure we are continually evolving and responsive to the needs of the community.

Our Commitment

We will act with transparency in our work involving Aboriginal rights to ensure that we are accountable to the Aboriginal community while proactively seeking and responding to feedback.

Example

We provide regular formal and informal reports on the nature and outcomes of our Aboriginal rights-related work, and seek full and frank feedback from the Aboriginal community, through:

- sharing data with Aboriginal organisations in accordance with our Aboriginal Data Strategy
- prioritising timely, detailed and open responses to questions from Aboriginal stakeholders
- our membership of the Aboriginal Justice Forum and associated working groups
- our relationships with Aboriginal organisations and stakeholders
- monitoring and evaluation processes built into our dispute resolution, education and engagement services and individual projects
- our annual report.

Artwork: *Last Connection* by Alfred Carter (Gunaikurnai).

This resource uses elements from *Last Connection* as licensed from The Torch.

Story: This is about three countries keeping a connection with each other using smoke over the water. At the centre of the painting are our Ancestors keeping the culture going.