

Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country Guidelines

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) Charles Sturt University acknowledges that for First Nations people, Country encompasses every aspect of existence such as spiritual, identity, kinship and community. Within First Nations networks there are many interconnected relationships, rights and responsibilities. The process of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country recognises the unique position of First Nations peoples in Australian culture and history. First Nations peoples are the Traditional Custodians of the Land, Rivers and Sea where Charles Sturt University is located. It is important this unique position is recognised and incorporated as part of official protocol and events to enable the wider community to share in First Nations culture and heritage, building meaningful relationships between First Nations people and other Australians.

(2) An Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country are both ways to honour and recognise the First Nations peoples of Australia and their traditional land. However, they serve different purposes and are delivered by different people. Acknowledgement of Country is a sign of respect that anyone can deliver, while a Welcome to Country is a formal cultural protocol carried out by Traditional Owners.

(3) This guideline will help all staff understand the significance of this important protocol and how it should be applied in gatherings and written communications.

Scope

(4) Charles Sturt University (the University) expects all staff to recognise the Traditional Custodians of the land they are gathered upon. This should include incorporating a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country at every official meeting and event, as well as at the commencement of learning programs. An Acknowledgement of Country will be gradually included in written materials across University resources and products and displayed at all University campuses.

Section 2 - Policy

(5) Nil.

Section 3 - Procedures

(6) Nil.

Section 4 - Guidelines

Part A - Acknowledgement of Country

(7) An Acknowledgement of Country is a means by which all people can show respect for First Nations culture and heritage and the ongoing relationship the Traditional Custodians have with their Land.

(8) An Acknowledgement of Country would be used at minor functions such as public lectures, in-house training, workshops, seminars and meetings. On such occasions, a chair or speaker may begin by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place on the Country of the Traditional Custodians of the Nation where the minor function is occurring.

(9) As more people work flexibly and participate in virtual meetings from diverse locations, it's important to continue honouring this cultural practice.

(10) You can use an Acknowledgement of Country at the start of meetings, speeches, or formal events, whether they are in-person or online. It can also be included in published materials and e-resources which can be found below. However, it has been agreed that alternatives may also be used and that it is appropriate and encouraged to speak our own words, from the heart.

In Person

(11) If you know who the traditional custodians are for the land on which you are hosting the meeting or formal event:

I acknowledge (insert traditional custodians name) as the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of all First Nations people here today.

(12) If you do not know who the traditional custodians are for the land on which you are hosting the meeting or formal event:

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of all First Nations people here today.

Online

(13) If you know who the traditional custodians are for the land on which you are hosting the meeting or formal event:

I acknowledge that I am coming to you from the lands of the (insert traditional custodians) in this virtual space. I also acknowledge the traditional custodian of the various lands on which you all are joining from today. I would like to encourage everyone to please share the Nation you are joining from today in the chat.

I pay my respect to Elders past and present and extend that respect to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of all First Nations people here today.

(14) If you do not know who the traditional custodians are for the land on which you are hosting the meeting or formal event:

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands that I am coming to you from today in this virtual space. I also acknowledge the traditional custodian of the various lands on which you all are joining from

today.

I pay my respect to Elders past and present and extend that respect to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of all First Nations people here today.

In documents or online resources

We, Charles Sturt University, acknowledge the Wiradjuri people as the traditional custodians on whose land our university was founded, and share their aspiration of Yindyamarra Winhanga-nha, the aim for us all to learn the wisdom of respectfully living well, in a land worth living in. We pay our respect to all Elders past and present as the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We would also like to acknowledge the First Nations people that have contributed to the development of this resource.

(15) At major functions such as conferences, naming and/or opening ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, exhibitions and other functions where official guests and dignitaries are in attendance, it is important that an Elder be asked to conduct the 'Welcome'. In addition, other 'welcoming activities' such as music and dance may be used under the direction of the Elder.

Part B - Welcome to Country

(16) A Welcome to Country is where the Traditional First Nations custodians welcome people to their Land. Steps should be taken to ensure that the appropriate representative is invited to perform the Welcome, because it is a significant recognition and a formal process. A Welcome to Country should always occur in the opening ceremony of the event in question, preferably as the first item.

(17) The Welcome to Country is conducted by a representative(s) of the local First Nations custodians who welcome the delegates and all in attendance. Protocols in relation to the performing of a Welcome to Country ceremony are well established in most First Nations communities of the University. If there is uncertainty as to whether an Acknowledgement or a Welcome is appropriate, advice may be sought from the either Pro Vice-Chancellor (First Nations Strategy), and/or senior First Nations staff.

(18) A Welcome to Country may consist of a single speech by the representative of the local First Nations community, or it may also include a performance of some description. Performances may include a cultural performance. In most communities, there are performing artists who are regularly available for such occasions.

Negotiating a Welcome to Country

(19) Initiation of negotiation to perform a Welcome to Country ceremony is to occur through the appropriate First Nations staff.

(20) It is important that the First Nations representative(s) be contacted via a communication method that is suitable and is guided by local First Nations peoples and community. All arrangements thereafter for the Welcome to Country should be mutually negotiated. It is very important that the First Nations representative(s) has been involved in, and is comfortable with, the arrangements. This may include the format of the ceremony, who should be invited, who should perform the 'Welcome to Country' and how that person will be recognised for their time and commitment.

(21) The University representative should make provision for those performing the Welcome to be paid. The amount for a Welcome to Country speech can be negotiated and range up to \$500.

(22) Performers are also required to be paid. These fees need to be negotiated prior to the event. Other considerations may include the arrangement of transport for the Elder(s) and ensuring that refreshments are provided.

(23) Payment for a Welcome to Country should be considered and included in the budget of the team responsible for organising the ceremony or event.

Part C - Cultural protocols to be observed

(24) There are certain First Nations protocols that must be observed:

- a. The practice of not mentioning the name of a deceased First Nations person, or displaying photographic images of a deceased person unless agreed to by the relevant family.
- b. Sensitivity to knowledge that is specific to gender (commonly referred to as 'Women's Business' or 'Men's Business').
- c. Appropriate acknowledgement of guest artists that are either from or supported by the local community.
- d. All intellectual property rights of the cultural knowledge belong to the First Nations Elder(s) and cannot be recorded or reshared without referencing and/or permission from the Elder(s).

(25) In most cases, members of the First Nations community will advise staff of intrusive behaviour and/or if they are not permitted to discuss the protocol or ceremony with staff because of age, gender, status or because staff do not belong to their Nation. If staff are in doubt, assistance should be sought from appropriate First Nations staff.

Section 5 - Glossary

(26) Nil.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	6th March 2025
Review Date	6th March 2030
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	6th March 2025
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Unit Head	Tony Dreise Pro Vice-Chancellor (First Nations Strategy)
Author	Melissa Olsen Director, First Nations Strategy and Coordination
Enquiries Contact	Office of the Vice-Chancellor +61 2 63384209