

# ENGAGING WITH FIRST NATIONS YOUNG PEOPLE

## THIS MINI GUIDE WILL:

- Provide advice on how to take steps to conduct safe and ethical engagement with First Nations young people.
- Highlight the importance of cultural and other considerations for engaging with First Nations young people.

## INTRODUCTION

Through the National Youth Consultations in 2023, First Nations communities told the Office for Youth that to get involved in decision-making First Nations young people need to be supported to have a strong cultural identity. First Nations young people also told us that Government needs to make sure that spaces where we engage First Nations young people are culturally safe.

As such, there are additional considerations for engaging First Nations young people beyond the general youth engagement principles outlined in this Toolkit. This is especially true when we consider how First Nations young people's views are shaped by the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages, spiritualities and unique ways of knowing and learning across Australia.

Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Australian Government has committed to working in formal partnership and to share decision-making with First Nations people. This includes strengthening structures that empower First Nations people to share decision-making with Government.

Through this mini-guide, the Office for Youth encourages you to appreciate First Nations young people's perspectives and cultures, consider the historical and contemporary barriers they face and consider new approaches to engaging First Nations youth.

## GUIDANCE

When engaging with First Nations young people, always explore with them what they need to feel safe, respected, and heard. Every young person is different, and their needs might vary depending on their background, culture, or individual experiences.

GUIDANCE	RESOURCES
<p>1. <b>Respect Cultural Duality:</b> Recognise that First Nations young people navigate both their cultural obligations and Western systems. Seek cultural understanding and engage facilitators with experience, where possible.</p>	<p>First Nations cultures are extremely diverse and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to engagement. It is important to consider how historical context and First Nations language, cultural protocols, individual beliefs, norms and ways of learning influence your engagement</p> <p>You can learn more about the richness and diversity of First Nations cultures by visiting the <a href="#">Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies website</a>.</p>
<p>2. <b>Meaningfully Acknowledge Country:</b> Begin engagements by honouring the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land. Each department or agency will have a standard Acknowledgment that has been developed in partnership with First Nations stakeholders and internal networks.</p>	<p>It may be useful to consider ‘moving past’ the script and making your acknowledgements unique to the place and context of the engagement and the people you are engaging.</p> <p>If you want to learn more about Acknowledgments of Country, check out this <a href="#">article by Common Ground</a>.</p>
<p>3. <b>Empower Their Voice:</b> Involve First Nations young people in designing the engagement format and meet in familiar spaces where they feel comfortable.</p>	
<p>4. <b>Include Multiple Voices:</b> Involve more than one First Nations young person to represent diverse perspectives and reduce the pressure on individuals.</p>	<p>Place-based and national engagements with First Nations young people require you to consider the varied ways in which people live, work, study and learn.</p> <p>The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water’s <a href="#">State of the Environment (2021) report</a> reminds us that urban areas are Country too.</p>

GUIDANCE	RESOURCES
<p>5. <b>Use Strength-Based Language:</b> Focus on positive and respectful language, recognising the diversity of First Nations communities.</p>	<p>Reconciliation Australia's <a href="#">Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education platform</a> provides a helpful overview of a strengths-based approach to engaging First Nations young people.</p>
<p>6. <b>Engage Flexibly:</b> Use culturally safe methods like yarning circles and allow for storytelling in a way that feels natural to them.</p>	<p><a href="#">UNSW Canberra</a> provides a generic overview of yarning circles to support the public's understanding of their purpose and processes. It is a generalised overview - different First Nations will have rules and protocols as they relate to yarning circles.</p>
<p>7. <b>Foster Safe Truth-Telling:</b> Encourage honest sharing but focus on strengths and solutions to respect their voices.</p>	<p>Safe truth-telling strengthens relationships between First Nations people and non-Indigenous people. Engagement should aim to achieve change, whether at a structural, institutional or personal level and be an ongoing process of dialogue and engagement (not a 'one-off' event or activity).</p> <p>You can learn more about truth-telling and how it strengthens First Nations communities on the <a href="#">Reconciliation Australia</a> website.</p>
<p>8. <b>Build Trust Over Time:</b> Take time to establish rapport through genuine respect and consistency.</p>	
<p>9. <b>Ensure Cultural Safety:</b> Create spaces where First Nations youth feel respected, heard and supported.</p>	<p>You can read more about cultural safety for First Nations children and young people on the <a href="#">Australian Human Rights Commission</a> website.</p>
<p>10. <b>Be Accountable:</b> Show how their input is valued by providing feedback and acting on their ideas.</p>	

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- The NSW Government has information directory that is useful for understanding Aboriginal protocols and culture. Find it [here](#).
- The Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia has developed an Engaging with Aboriginal Children and Young People Toolkit which includes case studies and information on Aboriginal cultural contexts, such as communication: Find it [here](#).