

# Indigenous Protocol

## What is Indigenous Protocol?

Indigenous protocol refers to appropriate ways of including Indigenous cultural material and working with Indigenous people and their communities in the Arts.

A lot of diversity exists between the many different Indigenous cultures in Australia making it impossible to create a set of rules for working with Indigenous material and people, but there are some basic principles that act as a guide to working in a respectful way. Indigenous protocol refers to these principles.

Following is a brief summary of protocol for working with Indigenous people, their communities and arts and cultural product. It has been drawn from a series of booklets produced by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's principal arts funding and advisory body that provide an in depth outline Indigenous protocols in relation to arts practice. Please refer to them for further information. They can be obtained by contacting the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board.

## The Australia Council

Tel: (02) 9215 9065, Free call: 1800 226 912, Web: [www.ozco.gov.au](http://www.ozco.gov.au)

- **Respect**

Respect is shown through a commitment to being aware of and working through Indigenous protocol. However we also must respect that Indigenous cultures are diverse and changing. Respect that Indigenous people have the right to be represented in a manner they approve. Respect that Indigenous Australians are the original inhabitants of Australia. This involves seeking permission from the Indigenous custodians of the country where projects are taking place and acknowledging this custodianship through a 'welcome to country' at any event.

- **Indigenous Control**

Indigenous people have the right to self-determination in their arts and cultural affairs. They have the right to own and control their heritage and any artwork that is based on it.

- **Communication, Consultation and Consent**

Indigenous people should be consulted about and provide consent for the use and representation of their Indigenous heritage. When communicating with Indigenous people and communities, be aware that the methods and processes used when working with non-Indigenous people and communities may not be appropriate or effective. Make sure you find out about possible differences in length of process, language and approaches to authority figures within a group.

- **Interpretation, Integrity and Authenticity**

Be responsible for your representations of Indigenous cultures. This involves ensuring you are aware of how your work affects the Indigenous group it refers to - whether it reinforces negative stereotypes or empowers Indigenous cultures. If any Indigenous cultural heritage has been adapted, make sure it has been informed by and consented to by appropriate members of the relevant Indigenous community. If you are using Indigenous material in your work make sure it is being presented in an appropriate context every time.

- **Secrecy and Confidentiality**

Indigenous people have the right to maintain confidentiality about their personal and cultural affairs. Within Indigenous cultures some areas of information are sensitive and should not be explored or worked with. Check with the appropriate members of the relevant Indigenous community if the content of research, workshops or performance is acceptable.

- **Attribution**

Indigenous people must be given proper credit and appropriate acknowledgment, including copyright and royalties, for their role in the development and use of their Indigenous cultural material.

- **Proper Returns**

Indigenous people have the right to be paid for their contribution and for the use of their Indigenous heritage. Check with the appropriate bodies as to whether appropriate copyright, legal and payment procedures are in place.

- **Continuing Cultures**

Indigenous people have a responsibility to ensure that the practice and transmission of Indigenous cultural expression is continued for the benefit of future generations.

### **Where to From Here?**

Indigenous protocol will have a significant impact on the processes and products associated with many youth arts projects. The most important thing to remember when dealing with any specific cultural or social group is to not assume, as what you think is appropriate may not be. An awareness that Indigenous protocol exists and a commitment to working through protocol with the Indigenous individuals, communities and groups associated with a project will contribute to the creation of a youth arts project that respects and empowers Indigenous cultures.

In addition to the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policy and protocol booklets, there are several state-wide organisations in Western Australia with staff that can provide information on Indigenous protocol in relation to arts and cultural activity:

#### **ArtsWA**

Phone: (08) 9224 7310, Free call: 1800 199 090

#### **Country Arts WA**

Phone: (08) 9481 0077, Free call: 1800 811 883

#### **The Artists Foundation of Western Australia**

Phone: (08) 9226 2122

#### **Western Australia Music Industry Association (WAMI)**

Phone: (08) 9328 7711

Make sure you also contact any local Indigenous groups in the community you are working with. These can often be identified through the organisations listed above or a local Shire or Arts body.



*This project is assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts and funding and advisory body, through its Audience and Market Development Division.*

**These Info Sheets were developed by Propelarts in partnership with Country Arts WA - through the sharing of the RYADO Position**  
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