

ACRC Guidelines:

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

Purpose

The aim of this document is to establish a set of guidelines for Adelaide City Rotaract Club (ACRC) members on the provision of a Welcome to Country and delivering an Acknowledgement of Country at ACRC hosted meetings and events. This information may also be useful to our broader Rotary community.

What is a Welcome to Country?

Protocols for Welcoming visitors to Country have been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. Despite the absence of fences or visible borders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups had clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other groups. Crossing into another group's Country required a request for permission to enter. When permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during the journey. While visitors were provided with a safe passage, they also had to respect the protocols and rules of the land owner group while on their Country.

Today much has changed, and these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances. However, the essential elements of Welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place.

A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English. A Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to Welcome visitors to their Country.

What is an Acknowledgment of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity provided whenever people gather to Acknowledge the traditional Country you are on and show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It can be given by both non-Indigenous people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Similar to a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

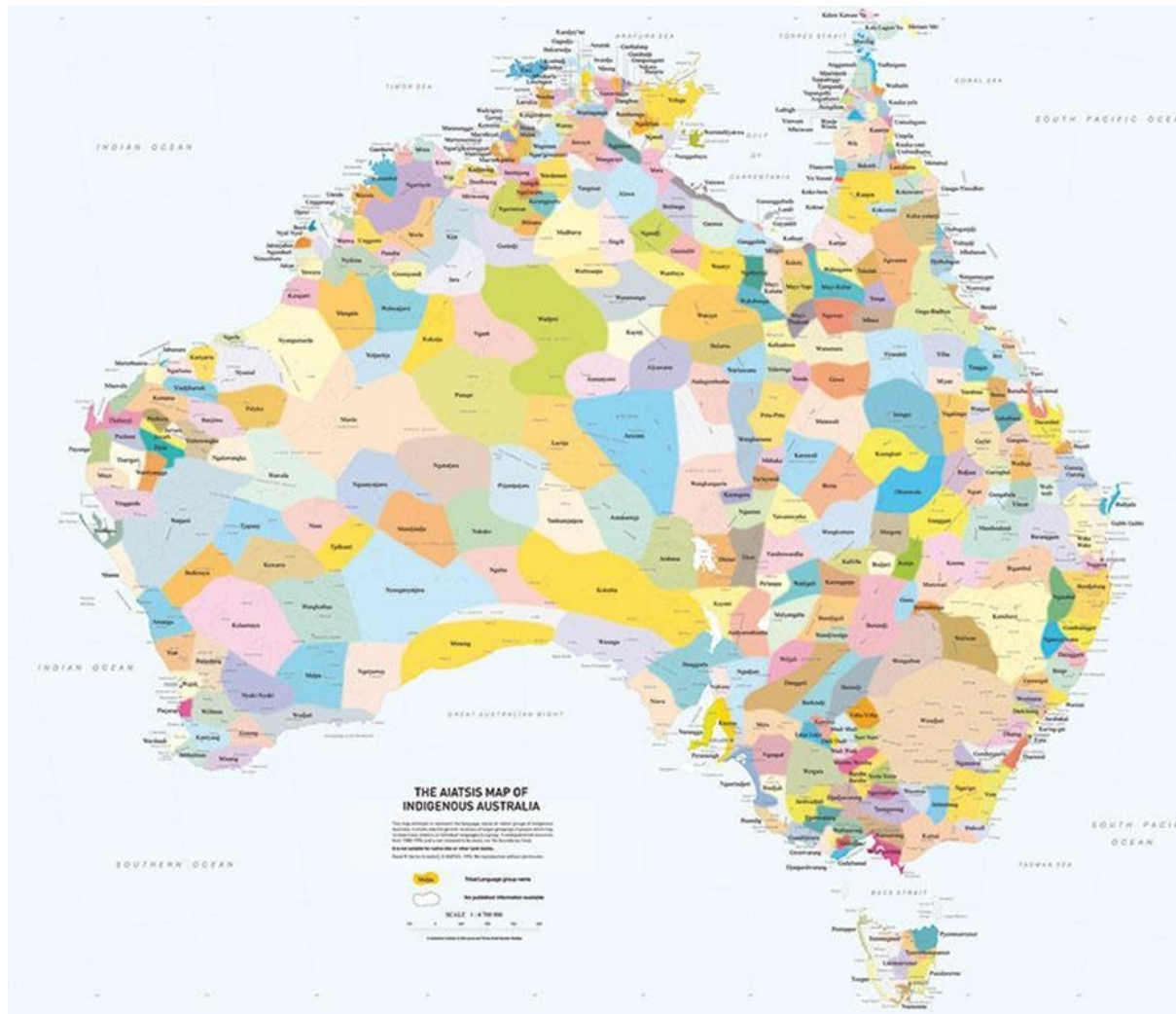
There is no set wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following forms:

General: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Specific: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the (people) of the (nation) and pay my respects to Elders past and present.



To complete a specific Acknowledgement of Country, it is important to know the Country you are meeting on and how to pronounce it correctly. This may require some research.



Know the Country you're on | Source: [AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia](#)

Why is a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country important?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced a long history of exclusion; from Australian history books, the Australian flag, the Australian anthem and for many years, Australian democracy. This history of dispossession and colonisation lies at the heart of the disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians today. Including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in events, meetings and national symbols is one part of ending the exclusion that has been so damaging.

Incorporating welcoming and acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of land. It promotes an ongoing connection to place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and shows respect for Traditional Owners.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the meaning of Country is more than just ownership or connection to land, as Professor Mick Dodson explains:

“When we talk about traditional ‘Country’...we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians...we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While they may all no longer necessarily be the title-holders to land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are still connected to the Country of their ancestors and most consider themselves the custodians or caretakers of their land.” - Information from Reconciliation Australia

ACRC Protocols

Welcome to Country

ACRC will facilitate the provision of a Welcome to Country at formal, larger scale, ACRC events such as Changeover.

A person with Cultural authority to provide a Welcome to Country will be invited to provide a Welcome to Country for the proposed event. The ACRC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stakeholder list includes people/organisations who can be contacted about providing a Welcome to Country.

Someone providing a Welcome to Country should always be paid, unless they specifically request no payment, in which case a donation of the original sum should go to an Aboriginal charity of their choice in their name. Budget should be allocated annually to allow this to occur.

The first person to speak/present following a Welcome to Country should provide an Acknowledgement of Country.

Acknowledgement of Country

ACRC members provide an Acknowledgement of Country at every general, board and special meeting, and any other occasion where people gather formally such as an event, training session or presentation.

An Acknowledgement of Country should occur at the beginning of a meeting or event before other formalities.

An Acknowledgement of Country should include paying respect to Elders and Acknowledging the name of the land the meeting is occurring on. It is important the speaker is confident in pronouncing the name of the Country as a sign of respect and it is ok to ask someone for confirmation.

An Acknowledgment of Country is not a tokenistic gesture, they are words with purpose and meaning and should be treated as such. The person conducting an Acknowledgement of Country

should be given ample time prior to the meeting to reflect on how they would like to Acknowledge Country and feel confident to do so.

Providing an Acknowledgement of Country may include using a video, sharing a resource, or making a connection with the meeting/event topic.

An Acknowledgement of Country will also be published on ACRC's annual report, website and other important documents.

References:

Reconciliation Australia: [Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country - Reconciliation Australia](#)