Honouring Nyungar culture and country assists in developing strong partnerships with Aboriginal communities across Western Australia. It also demonstrates the commitment of Curtin University to Aboriginal people and the Reconciliation Action Plan.

Recognition of Aboriginal traditional ownership of country through a formal process called welcome to country will support this commitment.

**Guidelines for a Welcome to country**

Arranging a welcome to country ceremony that acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which you meet and shows respect for Aboriginal people as Australia’s First People. Ceremonies and protocols are a fundamental part of Aboriginal culture.

Valuing and respecting appropriate Aboriginal ceremony increases the understanding and mutual respect for cultural practices by both Aboriginal Australians and the wider community. Appropriate cultural engagement seeks to observe protocols and the sharing of cultural practices.

Improving relationships between the local Aboriginal community and the broader community through ceremony, protocols and the process of collaborative negotiation is essential.

**The Welcome to country ceremony**

A traditional welcome to country is a speech, ceremony, song or combination of things that is done usually by an elder of the Indigenous community of the area. The welcome to country always occurs at the opening of an event and is usually the first item on the program. It is mostly done at major events and meetings and welcomes people to visit and meet on the traditional area. The traditional owners of the area are people who have originally come from that area, and also are acknowledged by the community. They are people recognised by the community as a whole.

Event organisers may need to spend time talking with local Aboriginal people to identify the traditional owners and explaining to them the type of public event which is being organised.

In some areas of Western Australia there may be two or more language groups that have traditional ownership of the land where the event is being held. In these circumstances, all groups should be approached and consulted regarding the welcome to country ceremony.

**Who to ask**

The welcome to country is a right of the local traditional owners and not a privilege: it is not about political correctness or tokenism. The Centre for Aboriginal Studies and Nyungar staff may be able to advise organisers about the traditional owners.

It is advised that the Centre for Aboriginal Studies be contacted prior to any planned event if you are unsure of the required format for the ceremony/event. Observing Aboriginal protocol includes allowing time for traditional decision making and discussion among traditional custodians.

Not all Aboriginal people can perform a welcome to country as it must be given by an appropriate person such as a recognised Elder within the local community.

It is necessary for the speaker who follows immediately after the welcome to country ceremony to provide a response. The following text can be used in response to the traditional Welcome to country:

- I respectfully acknowledge Elders past and present and the traditional owners of this land on which we are meeting, the (appropriate group) people. It is a privilege to be standing on (appropriate group) country.

**Guidelines for Acknowledgement of Country**

An acknowledgement of country is a way that non-Aboriginal people can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and the ongoing relationship of traditional owners with the land. An acknowledgement of country may be done at smaller, less formal gatherings.

A Chair or Speaker begins the meeting by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the country of the traditional owners.

A typical acknowledgement of country statement can be:

- I acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people.
- I acknowledge that this meeting is being held on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people in this land.

Acknowledgement of country is a way that the wider community can demonstrate respect for Aboriginal protocol and can be performed by an individual, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, participating in an occasion of any kind.