



Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies **Corporate Plan 2024–2028**



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Front cover: Djirri Djirri Dance Group performing at the 2024 AIATSIS Summit gala dinner. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners of Country and recognises their continuing connection to land, sea, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



Smoking ceremony at the 2024 AIATSIS Summit. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Introduction

Chairperson's statement

I am pleased to present the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Corporate Plan 2024–28.

As the Acting AIATSIS Council Chairperson, I am proud to lead AIATSIS as a world class organisation, focused on creating a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued.

This year AIATSIS celebrates a significant milestone, our 60-year anniversary. AIATSIS was established in 1964, through an Act of Parliament, as a place for research and preservation of Indigenous culture and heritage. Over the course of the past 60 years, Australia's First People have continued to reclaim our rights, practice and celebrate our culture, the oldest living culture in the world.

Over the past six decades, AIATSIS, now proudly Indigenous-led, has remained a highly respected organisation for advice in relation to Ethics; has established a Centre for Indigenous languages, boasts an ever-growing presence in the Education sector; and in 2024, for the first time has expanded our presence outside of Canberra, opening AIATSIS Central Australia in Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

Through the delivery of our 2024–2028 Corporate Plan, we focus actions towards our refreshed vision, purpose and strategic focus areas to align with the AIATSIS Strategic Plan 2024–2029 to realise our ambition. Our vision, purpose and strategic focus areas reflect the functions we are legislated to deliver under the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989.

In presenting our 2024–2028 Corporate Plan, I look forward to continuing to work closely with our Minister and Portfolio, Government agencies, the Academy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.

Statement of preparation

As Acting Chair of the AIATSIS Council, I present the AIATSIS Corporate Plan, for the reporting period 2024–2028 as required under paragraph 35 (1) (b) of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act). This Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014.

Clint Bracknell Acting Chairperson, AIATSIS Council 16 August 2024



Period of coverage

This Corporate Plan is prepared for the reporting period 2024–2025 and covers the four reporting periods 2024–2028.



Left: Front row L to R: The Hon. Kyam Maher MLC, Tim Agius, Dennis Rigney, Michael Kumatpi O'Brien, Uncle Lewis O'Brien. Second row L to R: Emma Gollan and Mitzi Nam at the Kaurna On Country Return event at Pirltawardli (Possum Park) in Adelaide. Photo: TB Photography & Videography. Top right: The Jimmy Pike exhibition on display in Shanghai, China for the NAIDOC week activities. Bottom right: Dr Caroline Hughes and The Hon. Justice Louise Taylor in discussion at the 2023 Russell Taylor Oration. Photo: AIATSIS.

Our purpose

We are the only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural institution solely dedicated to telling the story of Australia's First Nations peoples.

We collect, steward and appropriately share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge through our collection, our leadership in research and our network of collaborations and partnerships by:

- creating opportunities for everyone to encounter, engage with and be transformed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories;
- enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural vitality; and
- shaping our national narrative.

Strategic focus areas

- 1. To steward a national collection that is regularly used and enjoyed by all Australians.
- 2. To foster quality and innovation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.
- 3. To promote understanding of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge cultures and stories.
- 4. To deepen local connections and strengthen our global reputation.
- 5. To invest in our capability and capacity to deliver on our ambition.

Legislated functions¹

- 1. To develop, preserve and provide access to a national collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.
- 2. To use that national collection to strengthen and promote knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.
- 3. To provide leadership in the fields of:
 - a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.
 - Ethics and protocols for research, and other activities relating to collections, related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
 - c. Use (including use for research) of that national collection and other collections containing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage.
- 4. To lead and promote collaborations and partnerships among the academic, research, nongovernment, business and government sectors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in support of the other functions of the Institute.
- 5. To provide advice to the Commonwealth on the situation and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage.

¹ As per section 5 of the AIATSIS Act 1989 (Cth) and the AIATSIS Amendment Act 2016.

Key activities

To deliver on our functions and achieve our purpose, over the next four years, AIATSIS will focus effort on the following key activities:

- 1. Build and preserve a national collection.
- 2. Promote and strengthen knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.
- 3. Leaders in the provision of advice on Indigenous ethics, collections and research.
- 4. Lead and promote collaborations and partnerships in support of the AIATSIS functions.
- 5. Leaders in the provision of advice to the Commonwealth on the situation and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

. Build and preserve a national collection.

Goals
Ensure that our collection is representative, relevant and diverse. Optimise appropriate accessibility. Maximise opportunities provided by digital innovation.

2. Promote and strengthen knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

Goals	Actions	
Provide a national forum for dialogue on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Deliver transformative experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and heritage. Deliver high quality exhibitions, products and publications.	 Produce culturally responsive and authoritative collections based online curriculum resources. Develop and implement a schools' program to support learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – their histories and cultures. Develop teacher training and associated resources to support teacher's culturally responsive pedagogy. Strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages through funding, research and projects such as the AIATSIS Dictionaries Program and the Language Strengthening Toolkit. Deliver a robust publishing program with strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation. Design and deliver high quality exhibitions, displays, and installations. Promote the importance and significant impact of the return and repatriation of cultural heritage material. Produce culturally safe and accessible online content. Continue to deliver engaging public programs utilising the AIATSIS collection. 	

3. Leaders in the provision of advice on Indigenous ethics, collection and research.

Goals	Actions
Speak authoritatively through evidence-based research and culturally based representative networks. Articulate national priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.	 Make evidence-based research accessible through the Indigenous Research Exchange. Support Indigenous-led research through the Indigenous Research Exchange. Ensure Indigenous Data Sovereignty and governance principles are upheld and promoted through AIATSIS research, particularly in digital research infrastructure. Conduct research in partnership with Indigenous communities and individuals. Convene forums and foster dialogue among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Assist University, Government and Industry sectors to adopt and implement the AIATSIS Code of Ethics.
Position AIATSIS as the arbiter of standards in relation to research ethics, Indigenous research, and management of Indigenous collections. Foster innovation in ethical, impactful research and collection practice.	 Provide ethics approval and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. Provide best practice guidance on culturally safe Indigenous collection development, management, preservation and access principles and practices. Share and promote the results of AIATSIS research and innovations in practice.

4. Lead and promote collaborations and partnerships in support of AIATSIS functions.

Goals	Actions	
Actively build diverse and enduring relationships domestically and internationally. Be responsive and professional, with culturally competent working practices. Build an active network	 Maintain existing and develop new connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to collaborate and contribute to the work of the Institute, including through new activities. Build and strengthen relationships with communities and organisations involved in Indigenous-led research. Engage and collaborate with peer Indigenous research and collections organisations. Increase revenue from corporate, private and philanthropic sources. Increase membership base and improve existing member engagement through targeted activity. 	
of corporate partners.	 Develop and maintain partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to return and repatriate cultural heritage material. 	
expand our network of members, friends,	 Provide temporary custodianship of cultural heritage material returned from overseas. Return of cultural heritage material to Traditional Custodians. 	
volunteers, visitors and affiliates.	• Partner and work with Central Australian communities to build trusting relationships through advocacy for the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) facility.	
Learn from and contribute to the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.		

5. Leaders in the provision of advice to the Commonwealth on the situation and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

Goals	Actions
Maintain AIATSIS position as a trusted advisor. Build our policy capacity and capability to deliver world class expertise. Report regularly on the situation and status of Indigenous cultures and heritage.	 Proactively participate in national and international policy debate, expert mechanism and forums relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage. Conduct policy research and research translation to build an evidence base for Indigenous and government decision making. Make submissions to inquiries and reviews in our areas of expertise. Publish the framework and first two domain reports on the situation and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage. Pursue AIATSIS representation on international committees and forums as they relate to First Nations culture and heritage.

Our environment

In 2024, we celebrate our 60th anniversary and reflect on our evolution as an organisation. Over the coming years, our operating environment will continue to change, and we must be positioned to respond to this change.

We have evolved into a world class organisation, focusing on telling the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We continue to transform and create opportunities for all people to encounter and engage with cultures that are tens of thousands of years old.

We have a proud identity as Australia's only existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led national cultural institution that celebrates, educates and inspires people from all walks of life to connect with the rights, knowledge, cultures and stories of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our vision – to create a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued acknowledges the vital role we play in developing deeper and shared understandings of our Nation's history and future on Australia's truth-telling journey, working towards collective healing.

We support:

- and facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resurgence through our vast array of cultural programs, such as the Return of Cultural Heritage Program, our Family History Unit and extends to research, education and discovery of our Collection of over one million items.
- an ever-increasing number of community-based researchers to conduct research relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories, which requires an evolving approach to service delivery.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and organisations through our publishing arm, our collection infrastructure and our convening power.

Our partnerships and relationships with communities give the credibility to continue our work, including to deliver better outcomes for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and amplify their stories.

We continue to play a significant role in supporting cultural revival and resurgence, we are recognised as the leading national cultural institution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and we are pivotal to Indigenous research nationally.

> Dancers at the opening of the AIATSIS Mparntwe/Alice Springs facility in Central Australia. Photo: Oliver Eclipse Photography.



Ngurra: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Precinct (Ngurra), reimagines our vision and provides the impetus to revisit and uplift AIATSIS' purpose. Ngurra provides a platform for us to prepare for a future where we will continue to invite all Australians, international partners and other stakeholders to acknowledge and celebrate Australia's First Peoples and their significant contribution to the life of this nation.

Ngurra will comprise two key and distinct elements:

- A National Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Centre with enhanced facilities for AIATSIS that empower and support First Nations peoples to tell their own stories and celebrate the 65 000-year history of this nation.
- A National Resting Place (NRP) to house and care for repatriated limited provenance ancestral remains and any associated material on their journey back to Country.

Ngurra will address critical infrastructure needs of our current facility to ensure the AIATSIS Collection – the largest of its kind, is appropriately cared for and maintained.

Extensions to Maraga will see a National Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Centre realised and will provide exhibition and public engagement spaces to display the AIATSIS Collection – an invaluable dynamic resource for our stakeholders and the broader community.

Realisation of the National Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Centre will allow a full scope of our existing outward facing and public programs, including an expanded school's program – consistent with what is delivered by other National Cultural Institutions. This will also include exhibitions that provide opportunities for deeper engagement with, and use of, the AIATSIS Collection in a more meaningful way to shape the narrative on Australia's First Nations people, their history and rich cultures. We will deliberately steward our Collection and increase availability and access to support greater recognition, respect and celebration of the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories.

Located alongside the National Museum of Australia, the Cultural Precinct places the story of Australia's First Peoples in the National Cultural Institutional Landscape.

AIATSIS are custodians of a long and significant history that tells the story of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', a role AIATSIS has played for 60 years. This history serves as a platform to build into future years and for future generations.

We occupy an important place in the cultural fabric of this nation, working at the intersection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Government, Universities, the Cultural Sector and the broader Australian and International public. AIATSIS operates in a changing environmental context in which the Council interprets the AIATSIS Act 1989 (Cth) to provide strategy and priority setting. AIATSIS does not have any subsidiaries.



The AIATSIS building on the Acton Peninsula Canberra, named Maraga – a Ngunnawal word for a strong and robust shield. Photo: AIATSIS.

Challenges and opportunities over the life of this Plan include:

- Increased recognition, demand and expectation for AIATSIS expertise and collections;
- Increasing knowledge and relevance of AIATSIS;
- Increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities seeking the return of their cultural heritage material from overseas and the number of overseas collecting institutions, private collectors and foreign governments willing to support the return of cultural heritage material to Australia;
- Ongoing risk to the AIATSIS Collection; The highly endangered state of all Indigenous Australian languages;
- Impacts of audio-visual obsolescence as detailed under the UNESCO deadline 2025 statement;
- A unique cultural institution managing multiple areas of professional expertise and practice in a dynamic environment;
- A fiscally challenging environment;
- Workforce challenges, impacted by the continued pressure and salary competition in the labour market across the public sector. We must maintain our focus on attraction and retention strategies and maintaining a reputation as an employer of choice, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff – currently with an Indigenous workforce of over 38% of staff;
- Changes to our internal operating environment, including that our staffing profile will grow and change to reflect our expansion and the needs of stakeholders;

- Focus on exploring avenues for sustainable and diversified funding sources and opportunities to partner with industry and the corporate sector.
- AIATSIS continuing to be responsive to community needs and expectations, including the changing nature of Native Title arrangements and how we support and engage with nation building efforts. Our role in empowering and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to tell their own stories and speak their own languages, and in providing access to the Collection for all Australians, will only grow as we expand our facilities.



60 years of Indigenous Australian Literature: The History of Achievements of Aboriginal Studies Press (ASP) exhibition shown within the exhibition space at the 2024 AIATSIS Summit. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Cooperation

AIATSIS acknowledges our partnerships with key stakeholders. We draw on their expertise and insight and leverage these relationships to support us in achieving our purpose and vision. This includes but is not limited to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', communities, authors, businesses and organisations;
- AIATSIS members;
- Education providers and academics;
- Cultural Institutions, Language Centres and the broader Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museum (GLAM) sector;
- The corporate and philanthropic sectors; and
- Governments.



Back row L to R: Nicholas Thomas, Dame Sally Davies, Leonard Hill, Ray Ingrey, Noeleen Timbery, Ash Walker, Stephen Smith, and Ben Maguire. Front row L to R: Quaiden Williams Riley, Tristan Simms, and David Johnson at the return of the Gweagal Spears from Trinity College, Cambridge University to the La Perouse Aboriginal Community. Photo: Jenny Magee.

Capability

Over the duration of this Plan, AIATSIS will continue to strengthen and enhance our capability to achieve our purpose with a focus on:

Relationships

- Respectful engagement that continues to build our reputation and standing within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Working closely with the Government including government agencies and jurisdictions to support our joint aspirations in Indigenous Affairs.
- Continue to partner with key organisations both domestically and internationally.

Governance

- Enhanced financial performance and resource management.
- Adhere to legislative obligations and compliance requirements.

Workforce capability

- Strengthen our leadership cohort.
- Develop a workforce plan that addresses workforce capabilities, requirements and gaps.
- Maintain and increase Indigenous representation in our workforce.
- Improve cultural competency.

 In 2024–25, AIATSIS will reduce outsourcing of core work in line with the APS Strategic Commissioning Framework. Our targets for 2024–25 focus on reduced outsourcing of nine positions related to Data and Research, Communications and Marketing, Engineering and Technical, ICT and Digital Solutions and Intelligence with an expected reduction of \$0.23 million in 2024–25 in outsourcing expenditure.

ICT capability

- Ongoing modernisation and integration of our ICT environment to support improved knowledge management and discoverability of our collection.
- Enhance our technical expertise and capability through our ICT Strategy 2023–2026 and our Digital Business Strategy.

Capability development

Map and refine core capabilities to identify capability gaps and areas for development including Public Programs and visitor experience.



Reconciliation Day staff event at Maraga. Photo: AIATSIS

Risk management and oversight

Risk management and oversight

AIATSIS Risk Management is embedded within our governance, decision-making and business processes. Risk is managed in accordance with The AIATSIS Accountable Authority Instructions, the Commonwealth Risk Management Policy 2023 and both the AIATSIS Risk Management Policy and Framework.

AIATSIS' Risk Management Policy and Framework were reviewed in 2024. The AIATSIS Risk policy is embedded within the Risk Management Framework and has been developed in accordance with the Commonwealth Risk Management Policy 2023.

The CEO holds Senior Executive Officers accountable for risk management within AIATSIS. AIATSIS Executive are overseen by the AIATSIS Council. The Audit and Risk Committee provide assurance to the Council as the Accountable Authority under the PGPA Act.

The AIATSIS Deputy Chief Executive Officer (also the Chief Risk Officer) supports the CEO and provides strategic advice to the Senior Executive leadership team and to Council. Together, they promote positive risk behaviours to AIATSIS staff in order to incrementally improve AIATSIS' approach to risk.

The Audit and Risk Committee provides independent advice to the Council Chair on the appropriateness of AIATSIS' systems of risk oversight and management as required to by the PGPA Act.

All AIATSIS staff actively contribute to risk management by identifying, assessing, controlling, communicating, monitoring and reporting risks in accordance with our Risk Management Policy and Framework as part of the business planning and relevant processes.

Our enterprise risks

AIATSIS not being recognised by Indigenous communities as the leading Indigenous national cultural, research, education and collections institution.

Failure to grow, preserve, manage and store the physical and digital collections and data assets cared for by AIATSIS.

AIATSIS not providing adequate leadership in the fields of research, ethics, and education.

AIATSIS being unable to deliver its core services as its systems, and processes are not sustainable, updated, relevant or fit for purpose.

AIATSIS not developing and strengthening its targeted international and national connections to support increased engagement in First Nations cultures and heritage.

Performance criteria

(As taken from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio Budget Statements 2024–25)

1. Build and preserve a national collection.

- Ensure that our collection is representative, relevant and diverse.
- Optimise appropriate accessibility.
- Maximise opportunities provided by digital innovation.

Performance measure	2024–25 target	2025–26 target	2026–27 target	2027–28 target
Increase AIATSIS Collection across all collection types.	2% from 2023–24.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
Increase in the total amount of content digitised.	5% increase in digitised content from 2023–24.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
	1% increase in digitised content that includes descriptive data from 2023–24.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
Maintenance and preservation of the physical and digital collection as per the AIATSIS Collection Care Policy and relevant standards.	Physical and digital collection maintained and preserved in accordance with the Australian Institute of Conservation of Cultural Material Standard.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25

2. Promote and strengthen knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

- Provide a national forum for dialogue on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
- Deliver transformative experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and heritage.
- Deliver high quality exhibitions, products and publications.

Performance measure	2024–25 target	2025–26 target	2026–27 target	2027–28 target
Number of engagements with the collection.	2000 engagements.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
Number of respondents indicating an increased understanding of issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Heritage after an experience with AIATSIS.	70% of respondents indicate an increased understanding.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
Number of Publications and/or education resources released.	15 publications.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
Number of Core Cultural Learning education program licenses issued.	50 licenses.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25

3. Leaders in the provision of advice on Indigenous ethics, collections, and research.

- Speak authoritatively through evidence-based research and culturally based representative networks.
- Articulate national priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.
- Position AIATSIS as the arbiter of standards in relation to research ethics, Indigenous research and management of Indigenous collections.
- Foster innovation in ethical, impactful research and collection practice.

Performance measure	2024–25 target	2025–26 target	2026–27 target	2027–28 target
Number of downloads of the AIATSIS Code of Ethics.	5,000 downloads.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
Number of Citations of AIATSIS works.	20 citations.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25

4. Lead and promote collaborations and partnerships in support of AIATSIS functions.

- Actively build diverse and enduring relationships domestically and internationally.
- Be responsive and professional, with culturally competent working practices.
- Build an active network of corporate partners.
- Engage with our network of members, friends, volunteers, visitors and affiliates.
- Learn from and contribute to the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Performance measure	2024–25 target	2025–26 target	2026–27 target	2027–28 target
Number of formal agreements with stakeholders.	Ten formal agreements.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25

5. Leaders in the provision of advice to the Commonwealth on the situation and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Heritage.

- Position AIATSIS as a trusted advisor.
- Build our policy capacity and capability to deliver world class expertise.
- Report regularly on the situation and status of Indigenous cultures and heritage.

Performance measure	2024–25 target	2025–26 target	2026–27 target	2027–28 target
Regular reporting on status of Indigenous Culture and Heritage Report.	Reporting through the AIATSIS Annual Report.	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25	As per 2024–25
Provision of high-quality advice to the Commonwealth.	Yes			



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Public exhibition space at the AIATSIS Mparntwe/Alice Springs facility in Central Australia. Photo: Oliver Eclipse Photography.