

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for libraries, archives and information services

## 1. Governance and management

Libraries, archives and information services which serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or hold materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait content or perspectives should ensure the involvement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in governance, management and operation. Are encouraged to:

- 1.1 Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the traditional owners and custodians of Australia.
- 1.2 Ensure appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership of governing and advisory bodies including boards, councils and committees.
- 1.3 Ensure meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in effective development, adoption and implementation of relevant policies.
- 1.4 Develop mechanisms to ensure effective monitoring and review of policy implementation.
- 1.5 Facilitate organisational change to accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

## 2. Content and perspectives

Many of the records, books, images and other materials held by the library and information sector, include depictions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culture and experience presented from a variety of perspectives. Major institutions have a responsibility to ensure that their collections are comprehensive, inclusive and reflective of all perspectives. Smaller institutions may have a more specialised collecting focus. In order to respond appropriately to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues, organisations should consider the following strategies:

- 2.1 Consult in an appropriate and ongoing manner with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regard to the development and management of the collections.
- 2.2 Seek to balance collections by acquiring material by and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 2.3 In the case of government archives, consult through the relevant government agency. Agencies should be advised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content of materials and appropriate access policies.
- 2.4 Promote the existence and availability of collections and provide clients with an explanation for any conditions governing access.
- 2.5 Facilitate the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge centres.

## 3. Intellectual Property

The interests of the authors and publishers of records, books and other documentary material are protected by copyright law but the interests of those whose culture is described are not. The primary rights of the owners of a culture must be recognised. Organisations will:

- 3.1 Raise awareness of the issues surrounding cultural documentation and the need for cultural awareness training.

3.2 Develop professional recognition of cultural and intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and consult with appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples on their application.

3.3 Develop ways, including the recognition of moral rights, to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and intellectual property.

## 4. Accessibility and use

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have written about libraries and other resource centres have invariably mentioned how important it is to feel comfortable in them. Friendly staff will mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not feel intimidated by an alien Anglo-American system or inadvertently made to feel inferior if they do not know how to find information. Organisations will:

- 4.1 Develop and implement clear statements of the types of resources and services Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples want by initiating consultation to determine appropriate resources and services.
- 4.2 Employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in as many roles as possible, but especially visibly at library and archive service points.
- 4.3 Employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as liaison officers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or communities served by the organisation, on an ongoing basis.
- 4.4 Ensure accessibility by encouraging and fostering positive relationships between staff members and clients.
- 4.5 Promote libraries, knowledge centres, archives and information services in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- 4.6 Encourage the use of the organisation's facilities as meeting places and resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 4.7 Involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the planning, design and layout of libraries, archives and information services to create welcoming and suitable environments.

## 5. Description and classification

Indexing terminology, subject headings and classification systems are designed to provide easy access to materials in libraries, archives and information services. However, the use of outdated, inaccurate or value laden terms actually obstructs access. To improve access organisations will:

- 5.1 Use national Indigenous thesauri for describing documentation relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues.
- 5.2 Promote appropriate changes to standard descriptive tools and metadata. schemas with the aim of retrospectively re-cataloguing items recorded with unsuitable subject headings.
- 5.3 Improve access by the introduction of classificatory systems which describe items by their geographic, language and cultural identifiers.
- 5.4 Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at local, state/territory and national levels in relation to the description, cataloguing and classification of materials in libraries, archives and information services.
- 5.5 Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe and annotate material that relates to themselves and their communities.

## 6. Secret or sacred materials or sensitive

Some of the materials in libraries, archives and information services are confidential or sensitive which may require certain restrictions on access for regulatory, commercial, security or community reasons. Secret or sacred or sensitive Indigenous information should not be confused with material that may be considered offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Guidance on the handling of potentially offensive material is provided in **Protocol 7**. Suitable management practices will depend on both the materials and the communities served by the organisations. In implementing the processes through which such materials are managed, organisations will:

- 6.1 Consult in the identification of such materials and the development of suitable management practices with the most appropriate representatives of the particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities involved.
- 6.2 Facilitate the process of consultation and implementation by developing effective mechanisms including liaison with reference groups at local, state and national levels.
- 6.3 Participate in the establishment of reference groups consisting of senior library and archival services staff and Aboriginal representatives.
- 6.4 Seek actively to identify the existence of secret or sacred and sensitive materials by retrospectively surveying holdings and by monitoring current materials.
- 6.5 Each appoints specific, designated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander liaison officer/s to serve as the specific point/s of contact between their institution and the relevant reference group/s.
- 6.6 Provide suitable storage and viewing facilities with limited access as may be required.
- 6.7 Ensure that any conditions on access are understood by staff and users and are fully implemented.
- 6.8 Ensure that secret, sacred and sensitive material is managed appropriately in the Digital Environment.

## 7. Offensive

Libraries, archives and information services need to recognise that their collections may contain materials that are offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such materials may be racist, sexist, derogatory, abusive or offensively wrong. Many examples are of a historical nature but some are contemporary. Libraries, archives and information services have a responsibility to preserve and make accessible the documentary record but must also respond appropriately to the existence of offensive materials. Within the context of the communities they serve, organisations will:

- 7.1 Develop an awareness of the extent to which their collections may contain materials which will be offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 7.2 Take advice from and develop effective consultation strategies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to sensitive materials.
- 7.3 Develop strategies to deal appropriately with offensive materials in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## 8. Staffing

The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within organisations can change organisational culture for the benefit of all. Organisations will:

- 8.1** Aim to reflect the composition of the client/community population in each organisation's staffing profile.
- 8.2** Take affirmative action to recruit and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This responsibility will require employers, educational institutions and professional bodies to be proactive in developing employment and promotional pathways.
- 8.3** Recognise the value and/or relevance of prior learning and/or qualifications in other fields when appointing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 8.4** Involve members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the selection of staff when it is appropriate.
- 8.5** Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members are suitably trained and supported.
- 8.6** Facilitate the entry of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members into management positions through support strategies such as mentoring and training.
- 8.7** Recognise and respond to the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members.
- 8.8** Develop and implement cross cultural awareness programs which ensure that all staff are approachable and sensitive to cultural diversity.

### 9. Developing Professional Practice

Libraries, archives and information services must ensure their staff are appropriately prepared to deal with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and staff. Libraries, archives and information services, educational institutions and professional bodies will:

- 9.1** Ensure that library and archive education and training courses at all levels adequately cover issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials, clients and staff.
- 9.2** Provide cultural awareness training for every staff member and particularly all who deal with the public.
- 9.3** Provide appropriate models for professional practice in cataloguing, acquisition, reformatting, collection management and other areas on matters of concern to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 9.4** Ensure that education and training programs involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in both design and delivery.
- 9.5** Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in archive and library education and training through such means as positive encouragement, mentoring and study leave.

### 10. Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues

Libraries, archives and information services can contribute to greater understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples. In pursuing this aim, organisations will:

- 10.1** Be proactive in the role of educator, promoting awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and issues among non-Indigenous people.
- 10.2** Actively acquire materials produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.
- 10.3** Highlight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives through such means as oral history, indexing, record copying projects and online.



- 10.4** Promote awareness and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander related holdings, by such means as targeted guides, finding aids, tours, websites and exhibitions.

### 11. Copying and repatriation of records to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

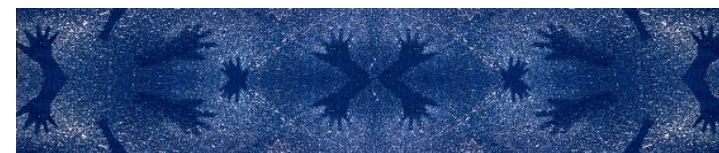
Archives and libraries often hold original records which were created by, about or with the input of particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A community may place tremendous importance on particular records and request copies for use and retention within the community. Some records may have been taken from the control of the community or created by theft or deception. In addressing this issue, organisations will:

- 11.1** Respond sympathetically and co-operatively to any request from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for copies of records of specific relevance to the community for its use and retention.
- 11.2** Agree to the repatriation of original records or the provision of copies to Aboriginal and Islander communities as may be determined through consultation.
- 11.3** Seek permission to hold copies of repatriated records but refrain from copying such records should permission be denied.
- 11.4** Assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in planning, providing and maintaining knowledge centres for repatriated records.

### 12. The Digital Environment

Increasingly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections are or include digital collections created through digitisation programs, for preservation and to increase access to collections, or are 'born digital'. In addition, digitisation is an enabling technology that permits virtual repatriation without institutional relinquishment of heritage materials. Digitisation of Indigenous materials poses some complex issues for organisations. Challenges include the need for institutions to accommodate different access conditions for materials that contain sensitive Indigenous knowledge, and the need for institutions and communities to deal with conflicts around different concepts of intellectual property associated with Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. In addressing these issues, organisations will:

- 12.1** Ensure sustainable choices of formats, descriptive methods and access and preservation strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge, creativity and experience.
- 12.2** Pursue digitisation and digital access as a means of facilitating repatriation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and preserving material for future generations.
- 12.3** Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about relevant digital content made available via their websites.
- 12.4** Avoid providing access to items deemed secret, sacred or sensitive via their websites and online catalogues.
- 12.5** Ensure that material is digitised and stored electronically, in a manner consistent with and respectful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols.
- 12.6** Work cooperatively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to promote the creation, collection and management of digital materials.
- 12.7** Educate users of their collections about the potential benefits and risks of sharing digital content in an online environment.



## ATSILIRN protocols for libraries, archives and information services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first peoples of Australia and the traditional owners, and these Protocols reflect the issues important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in regard to their materials held in collections. The Protocols are a guide to good practice for libraries, archives and information services.



[www.aiatsis.gov.au/atsilirn/protocols.php](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/atsilirn/protocols.php)

