

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY: Why It Matters and How to Do It Well

What is an Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way of recognising the Traditional Custodians of the land you are on and paying respect to their ongoing connection to land, culture and community.

It is different from a Welcome to Country, which can only be delivered by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person from that Country.

Why do we do it

Acknowledgements are not just a formality. When done properly, they are political, historical and relational.

They matter because:

This always was and always will be Aboriginal land

Sovereignty was never ceded. An acknowledgement recognises that the land you are on was taken and remains unceded.

They interrupt business as usual

They create a moment to pause and recognise the ongoing impacts of colonisation, rather than acting as if it is something in the past.

They ground our work in justice

If you are doing social justice or anti-poverty work, you are operating on stolen land. An acknowledgement situates your work in that reality.

They show respect and accountability

They are a small but important way of showing respect to First Nations people and signalling that this space intends to be conscious of power, history and responsibility.

What makes an acknowledgement meaningful

A meaningful acknowledgement is not about saying the “right” script. It is about being intentional, informed and connected to your purpose.

Be specific

Know whose land you are on. Name the Nation if you can.

Be present

Do not rush through it. Take a moment. Let people actually hear it.

Connect it to why you are here

Link the acknowledgement to the purpose of the meeting, training or action.

Avoid autopilot

If it sounds like something you have memorised and are trying to get through quickly, it will feel that way to everyone else.

Take responsibility

If you are a non-Indigenous person, do not position yourself as an expert. Speak with humility and respect.

How to structure an acknowledgement

There is no single correct script, but a strong acknowledgement usually includes:

Naming the Traditional Custodians

Recognising their ongoing connection to land, waters and community
Paying respect to Elders past and present (and emerging if appropriate)
Optionally linking to the purpose of the gathering

Example

I acknowledge that we are meeting today on the lands of the Kurna people. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters and community. I want to acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that the work we are doing here today takes place on stolen land. I hope we can carry that awareness into how we organise and act.

Making it more than words

An acknowledgement is only meaningful if it is backed up by action.

This can include:

Building relationships with local Aboriginal organisations and communities

Making space for First Nations voices and leadership
Paying people for their time, knowledge and labour
Challenging racism and deficit narratives when you see them
Continuing to learn about the history and present realities of the place you are on

Key idea to take away

An Acknowledgement of Country is not about getting the wording perfect. It is about telling the truth about the land you are on and taking responsibility for what that means in your work and actions.