



What is a Welcome to Country?

A Welcome to Country is a ceremony given by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elders, or Traditional Custodians who have been given permission, to welcome visitors onto their Traditional land.

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. Traditionally, 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, these protocols have been adapted to fit with contemporary life. However, the essential elements of welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place.

When do I include a Welcome to Country?

A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event such as a conference, seminar or festival where people are coming from outside the local area. A Welcome can take many forms, including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies, or a speech in Traditional language and/or English.

What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for anyone to show respect for Australia's Traditional Custodians, and the continuing connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to the land, sea, sky and waterways. An Acknowledgement of Country can be performed by an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous person, and is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

The University of Queensland recommends a short and longer version for acknowledging Country:

When to use a short version for acknowledging Country

You may use the shorter version if you are not the first person to acknowledge Country or in a more informal setting or thanking a Traditional Owner for welcoming people to Country.

Short

I (too,) acknowledge the (people as) Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet today and pay my respect to their Ancestors and their descendants.*

When to use longer version

If you are the main speaker at the event/gathering or the first person to present, it is appropriate to use the longer version for acknowledging Country.

Long

I acknowledge the (people as) Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet today. On behalf of ** I pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.*

(* people as) If known add the Traditional Owners' language group/ nation/clan. You may need to contact a local organisation to understand who the Traditional Custodians are.

** If you are hosting an event, meeting or seminar, you might say something like "On behalf of the event organisers or your section."

Remember to pause briefly after acknowledging Country as a sign of respect. If you are more familiar with acknowledging Country you may add a statement about the event, meeting or forum's connection with Country. For example; at a higher education event you might