



Policy

Engagement and Consultation with the Aboriginal Elders and community members

Objective

This policy is to define how the City of Armadale engages with local Aboriginal Elders and other community members for the purpose of seeking their advice and expertise on a range of issues and topics.

Scope

This policy applies to City staff and external organisations requiring the advice and expertise of the local Aboriginal community, in particular the Aboriginal Elders, for a range of matters. These will be diverse in nature; for example officers may seek guidance on the naming of localities or how to feature Noongar language and history on signage.

Policy Definitions and Terms

The terms 'Aboriginal', 'Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous'

In Australia, there are two identified cultural groups who are Australia's first peoples to the land; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This document uses the term 'Aboriginal' instead of 'indigenous' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of the City of Armadale (Aboriginal cultures vary place to place).

Traditional owners/Custodians

The original Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who inhabited an area are identified as Traditional Owners and Custodians. Traditional Custodians today are descendants of original inhabitants. They have continuing cultural, spiritual and physical connection with particular land where their ancestors lived. The traditional owners and Custodians of the City of Armadale are the Noongar people.

Aboriginal Elders:

Elders are in traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, custodians of traditional knowledge and customs. Elders are also responsible for providing guidance to the community on cultural matters and cultural protocols. Governing the community, knowing the culture and holding the history are also duties for the Elders. The term 'Elder' is not necessarily older people but must have the respect, trust of the local community and be recognised as cultural knowledge keepers.

Aboriginal Elders Reference Group

This is a group of 10 Elders who meet fortnightly to discuss a range of community issues and to provide advice to the City on matters when appropriate. The City supports this group with a space at the Champion Centre and the undertaking of administrative tasks.

Aboriginal Development Team

The Aboriginal Development team comprise the Aboriginal Development Coordinator leading four officers to provide a range of services and programs. This includes supporting the Aboriginal Elders with a weekly meeting at the Centre, hence there is a robust connection between the Aboriginal Development team and the Elders (in addition to the other Aboriginal community members).

The Champion Centre:

A community centre owned by the City and staffed by the Aboriginal Development team. Based on a service hub, one-stop-shop model, the Champion Centre was established in 2008 in Seville Grove and continues to be regarded by the community as an accessible, welcoming and neutral space for Aboriginal people and the wider community.

Policy

Introduction

Local Aboriginal History

The area now known as the City of Armadale was originally occupied by the Noongar people many thousands of years before European settlement. The territory of the Noongar people was the triangle of Western Australia's southwest extending from the Geraldton district south to Cape Leeuwin, continuing southeast almost to Esperance and then in a line northwest to re-join the coast at Geraldton.

The Noongar people were very connected to the land. Their survival depended on a thorough understanding of the environment and the plants and creatures in it. This knowledge came from the mythical Dreaming, a period when:

- All things began
- The laws of Aboriginal society were established
- The people learned the foods they could eat and the things that must not be touched
- The people discovered an interdependence with their surroundings - an invisible chain that linked people and the environment.

This form of religion and philosophy made the Noongar inseparable from the land. Any change in the environment meant a change in the lifestyle of the people.

The Noongar way of life

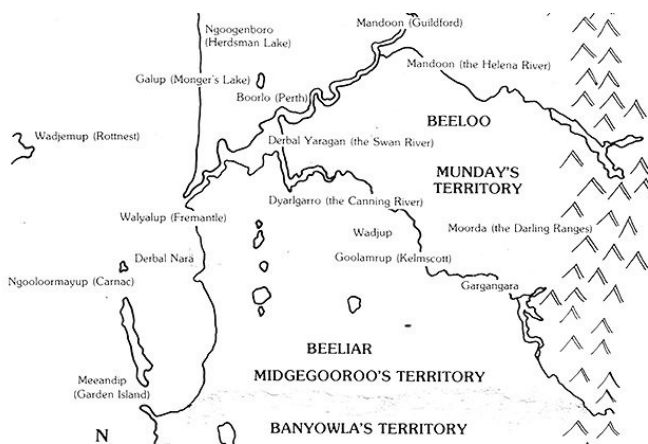
In the southwest corner, the climate was generous to the Noongar people. They lived on the coastline in the drier months, eating the food supplied by the lakes, which were filled during

the rains. Just before the onset of winter, the people would move to drier inland areas following the kangaroos and emus, setting up shelters wherever food was plentiful. There is little information about the area now known as the City of Armadale, but we know that Noongar tribal elders were responsible for specific areas.

Elders' territory

The map below identifies place names and territories described by Yagan (an Aboriginal Elder) to Robert Lyon in 1832.

As shown by the map, the area to the north and east of the Canning River was part of Beeloo, Munday's territory. The area to the south and west of the Canning River was Beeliar, Midgegooroo's territory.



Place names and territories recorded by Robert Lyon in 1832 (map by Neville Green, 1979)

Principles of engagement

- Integrity – Engagement based on demonstrated mutual respect and trust
- Transparency – Engagement based on clear and agreed information and feedback processes
- Inclusiveness – Engagement that involves and includes the community early and throughout the process
- Communication – Engagement based on listening, learning, and talking
- Respect – Engagement based on cultural security and a commitment to respecting the cultural rights, values, and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Accountability – Engagement based on an individual or organisation to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner

A Commitment to Engage

This includes clarity and openness about how, when, and why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will be consulted and how much influence there will be in the decision-

making process. These may include (ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, 2015):

- Providing information and seeking community participation and input on an existing policy, strategy, service, or program
- Seeking input and advice on the development and design of new services, programs or measures
- Consulting about the need in a community for a proposed policy or program
- Establishing an ongoing communication mechanism, such as an advisory group, to contribute to a policy, program, or service
- Monitoring the implementation of an existing service, program, or policy
- Inviting participation in a proposed initiative

A commitment to engage also means being honest and realistic about the purpose of engagement. This requires organisations to be (ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, 2015):

- Clear about the objectives and outcomes sought from the engagement
- Prepared to explain the purpose and reach of the policy, service, or program including both its inclusions and exclusions
- Open about your agency’s capacity to meet community expectations as a result of the engagement
- Prepared to follow through with agreements made with communities at the time of engagement, for example with an outcomes report

These practices are an important part of culturally appropriate public policy, research, and service/program development and implementation.

When planning to seek advice, participation, and views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, decisions must be made on the level of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Table 1

Levels of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, 2015)

Level of Engagement	Definition	Technique Examples
Information Sharing	A one-way relationship where information is shared with the community	Websites, brochures, education advertisements, research specific reports
Consultation	A two-way relationship for communities to provide feedback on issues	Focus groups, workshops, individual interviews
Active participation	Collaboration where community shapes policy, service, or program	Reference and Advisory Groups

Understanding the community and region.

Adequate research and collection of background information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be carried out prior to the engagement process. This informs agency/organisation understanding of the local environment and facilitates identification of options for addressing strengths and weaknesses. Information to gather includes:

- Demographics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Local community groups
- Traditional custodian groups
- Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations
- History of the community and past engagement
- Current or emerging issues of sensitivity that may affect the engagement process
- Current or emerging issues of sensitivity that may affect the engagement process
- Government, Commonwealth, and non-government agencies already delivering programs or services to the community

Approach

The City of Armadale will take the approach of respecting the Aboriginal Elders as experts in their field and make the appropriate arrangements to seek their advice. This comprises the following:

- For simple queries requiring an answer of a short duration, the Elders Group may respond to this whilst they are meeting each fortnight at the Champion Centre. The query may be forwarded to the Aboriginal Development team for inclusion on the Agenda to be discussed at the Group meeting.
- For more complex consultation of a longer duration (including those matters requiring consultation with the Aboriginal community as a statutory obligation), this matter may be forwarded to the Aboriginal Development team for inclusion on the Agenda with the intention that the matter is discussed generally and that the Elders best placed to respond in more detail are nominated by the Group for a separate meeting with the staff seeking the advice on the specific matter.
- For external organisations requiring advice from the Elders Reference Group specifically, the organisation may contact the Aboriginal Development team and arrange to forward their matter via email.

The City will:

Provide support:

- Provide ongoing support to the Aboriginal Elders Reference Group include the following:
 - Allocating space at the Champion Centre for regular meetings
 - The Aboriginal Development team will monitor a central email address for the Group
 - The Aboriginal Development team will collate the fortnightly Agenda for the Group
 - The Aboriginal Development team will take the Minutes for each meeting

Compensate Aboriginal Elders for formal consultation processes

- Similarly to the City paying Aboriginal groups for other cultural expertise including traditional dance performances or art work, the City recognises that the Elders are providing their knowledge and insight during consultation and will remunerate the Elders accordingly
- In terms of remuneration for complex consultations of a long duration, the City will reimburse the Elders \$75 per hour. This amount is based on the survey costs set out by the Noongar Standard Heritage Agreement cited on the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage website, which as of August 2022, is \$589 per day.
- Please note that if an external organisation seeks to consult with the Elders, the external organisation is responsible for the remuneration of the Elders and will be payable directly to the Elders by the external organisation. The City’s role is to provide the pre-approved contact details of the Elders.
- With matters pertaining to planning and heritage sites, liaise with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage for the appropriate ‘knowledge holders’. This can be done by requesting a list of knowledge holders or, providing the Department with a list of Elders to ensure they are the correct individuals for the particular location of focus.

Respect the intellectual property and cultural copyright of local Aboriginal Elders

A key issue when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is cultural copy right and the protection of intellectual property. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Custodians of their culture and have the right to own and control their own heritage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual copyright covers all forms of traditional cultural expression, such as traditional stories, music, dance, song and artistic works and designs. If an employee wishes to access and make use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cultural materials or knowledge, it is critical to gain permission from relevant individuals or organisations.

Applicable legislation

Act	
Regulation	

Local law	
Policy	

Delegation of Power

- NA

Link to influencing strategies or plans

- Community Development Strategy 2021 – 2026
- Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021- 2024

Link to procedure

- NA

Other implications

Financial/Budget Implications

- Fees for consultation with the Aboriginal Elders to be part of the budget allocation of the City department seeking advice
- Fees for consultation with the Aboriginal Elders are to be the responsibility of any external organisation seeking advice

Administrative information

Adopted on	13 February 2023 Resolution: C1/2/23
Reviewed or amended	
Responsible department	Community Development