

Adoption - First Nations Strategic Framework 2026-2030

File No: X127861

Summary

The First Nations Strategic Framework 2026-2030 (the Framework) is a new approach to strengthen the City of Sydney's work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In 2023, we evaluated our strategic actions relating to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures, including our reconciliation action plan, Eora journey and Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: continuing the vision. We committed to develop a First Nations strategic framework, in addition to the Stretch RAP, to increase visibility and alignment of all the work we do to ensure meaningful local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community outcomes.

The Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2025-2028 was adopted by Council in May 2025. The Framework includes objectives that the Stretch RAP will deliver, alongside other key commitments aligned to support the community's needs and aspirations. The Framework also provides guidance through principles, ways of working and enabling tools to support meaningful outcomes and sustained opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Framework includes an outline of why this commitment is a priority for the City of Sydney. This goes through local context, including historical through to current approaches to government engagement with First Nations people. This serves to build an understanding of local background and current issues, relating to past and present treatment, experiences of First Nations communities and addressing inequities.

The development of the Framework was informed by multiple sources where we have heard directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Community engagement and consultation reports in recent years offered insights on key themes for community priorities. A review of our own and others' relevant strategies highlighted themes, areas of focus and strategic alignment. Key data and reports on current demographics, recent research and social trends also informed the Framework's development.

The Framework focuses our work toward a vision: First Nations self-determination, prosperity and wellbeing. There are guiding principles that inform and support the implementation. The areas of focus are organised into 5 strategic pillars, each with their own objectives and strategic priorities to ensure local, strategic community outcomes:

1. Social justice - we stand for social justice through equity, community, access and cohesion
2. Truth-telling - we centre First Nations voices in truth-telling towards healing, reconciliation and dispelling myths
3. Economic prosperity - we nurture economic equity and participation and remove barriers

4. Cultural rights - we champion cultural rights, recognition and practice
5. Engaged communities - we collaborate to embed engagement, shared decision-making and accountability.

The Framework's governance will include a steering committee that comprises senior First Nations and non-First Nations staff. The steering committee will provide oversight and guidance that ensures relevant work is aligned with the framework.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council adopt the First Nations Strategic Framework, as shown at Attachment A to the subject report;
- (B) Council note the community insights and research to develop the First Nations Strategic Framework 2026-2030, as shown at Attachment B to the subject report; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor amendments to the First Nations Strategic Framework 2026-2030 in order to correct any minor drafting errors and finalise design, artwork and accessible formats for publication.

Attachments

Attachment A. First Nations Strategic Framework 2026-2030

Attachment B. First Nations Strategic Framework - Community Insights Report

Background

1. The Council of the City of Sydney acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of Australia. The City acknowledges the Gadigal of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of this place.
2. Key strategic relationships for collaboration and consultation include the Principles of Cooperation with Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council signed in 2006 and the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel in 2008.
3. The 4 interconnected projects of the Eora Journey have been a strategic focus in delivering Sustainable Sydney 2030. Significant progress has been made across these projects:
 - (a) Recognition in the public domain:
 - (i) Welcome to Redfern by Reko Rennie in 2012
 - (ii) Born in darkness before dawn by Nicole Foresheew in 2013
 - (iii) Yininmadyemi: thou didst let fall by Tony Albert in 2014
 - (iv) Yananurala (the Sydney harbour walk) name and project commenced in 2021 and
 - (v) bara by Judy Watson in 2022.
 - (b) Significant cultural event:
 - (i) NAIDOC in the City since 2012. Under the direction of First Nations suppliers including Rhoda Roberts, Deadly Vibe, 33 Creative, Gadigal Information Service and We Are Warriors.
 - (c) Eora Journey Economic Development Plan adopted by Council in 2016.
 - (d) Local Aboriginal knowledge and culture centre: 119 Redfern Street opened in May 2024.
4. The City's inaugural Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan was adopted in 2015. This was followed by the Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan from 2020 that was extended until 2024. In May 2025, Council adopted the Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2025-2028. These plans have strengthened the organisation's work by progressing our employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, engagement with First Nations businesses and increased staff capability through learning and development.
5. In 2023, we undertook internal and external reviews of our strategic actions, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures, including our reconciliation action plan. We committed to continuing with a reconciliation action plan while also developing an overarching framework to ensure greater strategic alignment and visibility of all the work we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

6. The Framework was developed using a range of artefacts from community insights and relevant strategic research. To identify the priorities and aspirations of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to inform this organising framework we used existing consultation reports, existing engagement mechanisms, external research and internal co-design activities. The community insights were analysed against our current commitments and a range of methodologies to direct how this Framework can best align to deliver local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community outcomes.
7. The Framework is a unifying structure, bringing all our work and commitment together. It will increase visibility, allowing us to better support and manage the work and ensure it aligns with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's needs and aspirations.

(a) The Vision - First Nations self-determination, prosperity and wellbeing.

(b) Guiding principles.

These shape how we work, how we listen and how we build trust. The principles remind us why this work matters - they inform our decisions and help us understand the powerful impact this work has when it's done well.

(i) This is Aboriginal land

(ii) Listen deeply

(iii) Trauma informed

(iv) Be brave

(v) Community led

(vi) Anti-racist

(c) Strategic pillars

Under each pillar are objectives and opportunities that focus the work towards the vision. They are informed by what we've heard from the community and aim to strengthen impact and outcomes in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

(i) Social justice - Enabling equitable opportunities promotes socioeconomic justice. Community wellbeing and upholding fundamental rights are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

- i. Social support addresses local First Nations needs and priorities.
- ii. Strengthen self-determination of First Nations housing justice and access.
- iii. Transform our systems to ensure First Nations access and inclusion.
- iv. Speak out and take action to eradicate racism.

- (ii) Truth-telling - Truth-telling measures foster mutual understanding and healing. To continue our reconciliation journey, we must confront hard truths and listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
 - i. Elevate the voices and perspectives of First Nations people.
 - ii. Brave responses to our colonial history that dispel myths.
 - iii. Increase community awareness and understanding.
 - iv. Facilitate conversations to promote healing and reconciliation.
- (iii) Economic prosperity - Partnering with, committing to and investing in community led action to develop long-term sustainable economic equity and opportunities for community to thrive.
 - i. Create economic opportunities supporting local First Nations business enterprise.
 - ii. Targeted economic development through business programs.
 - iii. Strengthen relationships with local First Nations businesses.
 - iv. Support local community approaches to sustained First Nations employment.
- (iv) Cultural rights - First Nations cultures are respected, supported and celebrated. We recognise Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights to ensure protection and prosperity.
 - i. Recognise and uphold Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights.
 - ii. Support the community's aspirations to practice, nurture and rejuvenate First Nations cultures.
 - iii. Connecting with and caring for Country is led by First Nations community and knowledge holders.
 - iv. Engaging, immersive, world class celebration of the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- (v) Engaged communities - Collaborative engagement supports community decision-making and partnership enabling community control. Relevant, appropriate and consistent two-way dialogue supports informed decision-making and information access.
 - i. Develop systems and processes to support Indigenous data sovereignty and governance.
 - ii. Embed representation and influence of First Nations people in decision-making.
 - iii. Agile relationships with First Nations community-controlled organisations, Elders, young people and leaders.
 - iv. Increase community oversight and participation through culturally appropriate communications and reporting.
- (d) The framework also includes enabling tools and ways of working, which along with the principles, guide and support staff who are delivering the work.
 - i. United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
 - ii. Principles of cooperation
 - iii. Cultural protocols
 - iv. Indigenous cultural and intellectual property guidelines

- v. Strategic consultation and engagement
- vi. Connecting with Country framework
- vii. Cultural learning and capability
- viii. Strategic consultation and engagement
- ix. Strategic framework evaluation tool

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

8. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This plan is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 1 - Responsible governance and stewardship - the Strategic Framework supports information access and shared decision-making by strengthening Indigenous data sovereignty and embedding First Nations representation.
 - (b) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - the Strategic Framework supports environmental sustainability through First Nations-led Caring for and Connecting with Country.
 - (c) Direction 3 - Public places for all – The Strategic Framework advances truth telling and cultural safety by elevating First Nations voices and confronting colonial myths.
 - (d) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - The Strategic Framework promotes equity by addressing systemic barriers and transforming systems to support First Nations access and inclusion.
 - (e) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities - the Strategic Framework promotes social cohesion and civic engagement by actively addressing racism and increasing community understanding. It supports healing, reconciliation and strong relationships with First Nations organisations, Elders and young people.
 - (f) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life - The Strategic Framework supports First Nations cultural rights and responsibilities by protecting Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, strengthening cultural practice and renewal, and delivering world class cultural celebration.
 - (g) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy - The Strategic Framework strengthens economic opportunities for First Nations communities by supporting local business enterprise, delivering targeted economic development programs, fostering strong relationships with First Nations businesses, and enabling community-led approaches to sustained employment.
 - (h) Direction 10 - Housing for all - The Strategic Framework supports First Nations housing outcomes by strengthening self-determination in housing justice and access.

Organisational Impact

9. The Framework is an organising structure for existing commitments across our strategic and operational activities.
10. A set of resources will be developed to support staff to align their work to the objectives and guiding principles of the Strategic Framework.
11. It proposes a new steering committee as the governance approach to monitor successful implementation. This is to ensure the work is having the desired outcomes and is sustainably managed with existing resources.

Risks

12. The framework supports an innovative and efficient approach to prioritise and manage our existing strategic commitments.
13. The First Nations Strategic Framework is within our risk appetite relating to Service Delivery that determines we have a cautious to open appetite for our strategic, community development, urban planning and creative functions and services.

Social / Cultural / Community

14. The Framework is focused on aligning the work that we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures to achieve local, meaningful outcomes addressing the community's hopes and needs.
15. The social benefits of the Framework are aimed to address areas of most need, including housing, addressing racism, and truth-telling to foster mutual understanding and healing.
16. The cultural focus of the Framework supports the rights of First Nations peoples to practise, protect and rejuvenate culture. This strengthens our commitments that engage deeply with recognition and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures.

Environmental

17. The environmental outcomes stem from how the city engages with First Nations knowledge holders to learn from and work closely with to care for and connect with Country. This seeks to ensure an approach that is not simply extractive or transactional but about restoration and rights of First Nations cultures.

Economic

18. The economic impacts of the Framework are a priority to ensure prosperity of First Nations communities as they choose. There is extensive evidence demonstrating how investing in First Nations businesses improves social and cultural outcomes that are underpinned by self-determination.

Financial Implications

19. There are no new budget implications with the Framework. All projects and activities that deliver on the objectives are within current and planned projects for which budget is already allocated or identified.

Relevant Legislation

- 20. Local Government Act 1993.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

- 21. The term of the Framework will be 5 years from 2026 to 2030.

Public Consultation

- 22. Targeted consultation and engagement on the Framework was conducted with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory panel on 2 occasions in 2025. The framework was shared with Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council in November 2025.
- 23. The Framework will not go on public exhibition. The framework is an organising structure of existing commitments and priorities to better strategically align to meet local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs and aspirations.
- 24. The Framework was developed using consultation and research including engagement for the Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2025-2028 done in February 2025, feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory panel, reports from the 2019 First Nations dialogue forum and data from the 2021 Census and relevant social, economic and wellbeing research.
- 25. Community feedback is sought through targeted consultation on individual projects and initiatives as is standard practice.

KATE DEACON

Executive Director Strategic Development and Engagement

Preston Peachey, Program Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy

Attachment A

**First Nations Strategic Framework
2026-2030**



First Nations strategic framework 2026-2030



Acknowledgement of Country

The City of Sydney acknowledges the Gadigal of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Owners of this place.

We acknowledge the enduring connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. We recognise this is unceded Aboriginal land.

We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present whose knowledge, leadership and wisdom pave the way forward for us all.

We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.



Artwork story

This artwork captures an expansive view of Country from above. Freshwater rivers weave through ochre landforms toward the harbour, where they meet with saltwater. These lands and waterways reflect the deep, enduring relationship between land, water and people.

White dotted lines, like bubbles on water, trace the seasonal journey and ancestral pathways of whales. These animals are of great significance to many Aboriginal people and central to the history and story of the place we now know as Sydney.

Small, vibrant circles scattered across the landscape mark community gathering places and symbolise the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who come together and build connections on Gadigal Country.

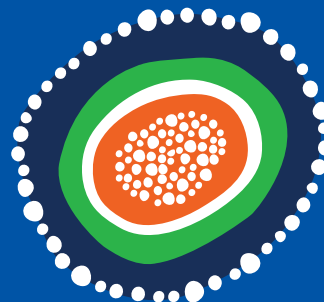
At the heart of the artwork, a large radiant circle represents the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Sydney. White u-symbols surround this circle representing First Nations community, leaders and champions, who lead with care and purpose. This artwork honours their dedication, grounded in lived experience.

Small green plants and seedlings reveal an abundance of life and growth, symbolising renewal and resilience. Surrounding circles represent the many partners who work alongside the City of Sydney to realise our shared vision.

This artwork was created by Mumbulla Creative, an Aboriginal creative agency based on Gadigal and Wangal Country. Charmaine and Jason Mumbulla work with organisations to tell their stories through art.

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Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land

The lands and waters of Gadigal Country carry the stories of the relationships and interactions that shaped today's community. The foundations this country was built upon.

The Gadigal and neighbouring clans of the Eora and nearby nations endured the brunt of invasion. The establishment of Sydney's colony saw a violent and rapid impact on the lives and livelihoods of Aboriginal people. Tens of thousands of years of knowledge, trade, agriculture, kinship and lore were all impacted by reckless and destructive colonisation of these lands. Their social systems were displaced with European understandings of people and property.

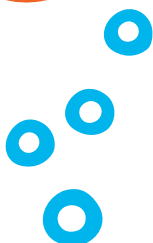
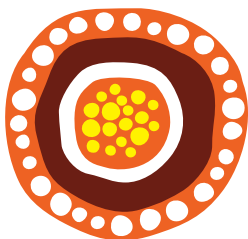
The community today includes people whose cultural and family ties have always been here, alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been here for generations. These communities have asserted their rights and fought for basic freedoms to live free from harm and exclusion, so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can thrive and prosper. This community is home to many strong, proud, defiant leaders and everyday people who stand up for their community in the face of injustice.

In the City of Sydney local area, communities led the way in creating autonomous, human rights focused essential services, as well as dynamic cultural institutions. These lands have nurtured generations of leaders, from health to housing, law to theatre and education to business. Innovative and revolutionary actions began here that stood up for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The legacy and impact of those actions continue to resonate across the nation.

The City of Sydney stands alongside and supports resilient self-determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Thousands of protestors march towards Victoria Park on 26 January for Yabun.

Photo / Joseph Mayers / City of Sydney



Facing the facts: inequity, racism and systemic failures

Across the nation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are vastly diverse, making up 3.8% (2021 Census) of the total population. This includes more than 250 distinct language groups – nations of people with long histories, culture, kinship, governance, economies and relationships with Country.

Government and colonial interaction with First Nations people has ranged over time from extermination and protection to assimilation and integration. All the while, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have fought for the very freedoms, rights, responsibilities and obligations they and their ancestors always had on these lands. The resulting tension and enduring impacts continue to cause profound harms that still affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.

Policies of exclusion, and supposed welfare and protection, pervaded the 1800s. In the 1900s, the government's Aborigines Protection Board continued with widening powers of control over the lives of Aboriginal people. The 1938 Day of Mourning organised by the Aborigines Progressive Association was held in Sydney on the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet to protest national celebrations. This protest highlighted the injustices faced by Aboriginal people and also demanded citizenship rights.

First Nations people have always fought back and stood up for their human rights through various forms of resistance, diplomacy and organising.

First Nations people fought in world wars before they were even citizens with voting rights. Children continued to be removed from families while fathers were fighting overseas. Over the past 100 years widespread civil rights movements and leaders campaigned for land rights, constitutional change and stood up to rampant racism.

When progress has been made, it is led by self-determining First Nations people and comes after great loss, often with obstacles and restrictions. Rights and freedoms need to be paired with reform and justice to close the gaps in socioeconomic inequities and ensure the future wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for generations to come.

Despite the challenges, First Nations people and cultures continue here today. It's vital that we recognise and understand the significance of this, and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to remain and strengthen their ties here. Not only to acknowledge and celebrate culture, but to nurture the community's practice, revitalisation and repair of culture. In our pursuit to do better, we must reflect and act mindfully to do no further harm.

Now is the time to listen and work together in a way that offers the grace of true self-determination.



Here and now

While the city is a powerhouse of economy and culture for the nation, those same opportunities and more compel Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to live here and forge their future in and around Gadigal Country.

The city is home to more than 3,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and many more who visit for culture, community, work, study, services and recreation. This local First Nations population has declined in recent decades with further displacement and gentrification.

At the personal, household and community levels, the annual Closing the Gap updates highlight small areas of change, while others are stagnant or going backwards.

Statewide realities in **2025** also affect local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, especially where there's disproportionate over-representation:

In NSW **60.7%** of young people in custody were Aboriginal, and for adults 32.4% of prisoners were Aboriginal

21% of Sydney's homeless population are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In the local community, 2021 census data offers insights into the lived experiences shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents and households.



29.5%

of persons attend an education institution, with **8.3%** in university and **3.4%** in TAFE/ vocational study



84.6%

of households are renters, where **43.0%** rent privately and **41.1%** rent from social housing



14.1%

of households are homeowners (mortgagees or outright owners)



46.4%

of persons have one or more long-term health conditions such as mental health, asthma, diabetes, and more



12.1%

of persons **aged 15+** provided unpaid care to a person with disability, health condition, or old age



21.5%

of persons are under the age of 18



59.8%

of persons aged 15+ are in the labour force

Racism

Racism is widespread and deeply rooted in Australia's history and systems. We see its impacts in past policies, laws and official inquiries. These show how racist attitudes and behaviours have become normalised and continue today.

Examples include the denial of Aboriginal peoples' existence, forced removal to missions and reserves, bans on cultural practices, the Stolen Generations, indentured servitude, over-policing, over-incarceration and deaths in custody. These are all signs of ongoing systemic and institutional racism.

In our 2023 community wellbeing survey, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people responded compared to previous surveys. In the previous 12 months, 63% of First Nations respondents had experienced racism. They also reported facing greater challenges with financial security and having a say in decisions that affect them.



The Call It Out First Nations racism register is a partnership between UTS Jumbunna Institute for Education and Research and the National Justice Project. It aims to address the denial of the existence and impacts of racism on First Nations people. This platform addresses underreporting and barriers by allowing people who have experienced or witnessed racism to record these incidents.

Of all incidents reported in 2023/24 the 3 highest were:

- ▶ negative attitudes and stereotyping (23%)
- ▶ discrimination (15%)
- ▶ hate speech (13%)

The report is alarming and spotlights incidents across the country showing who, where and what types of racism are being experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Australian Human Rights Commission engaged with First Nations people across the country to develop the National Anti-Racism Framework.

Their findings highlighted that the 3 key issues experienced in metropolitan areas were:

- ▶ systemic racism (72%)
- ▶ microaggressions (65%)
- ▶ negative media representation (55%)

The overall findings also point to the prevalence of unconscious bias, ongoing impacts of colonisation, over-policing and accountability.

Addressing inequities

In 2024 the productivity commission's Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap indicated that fundamental change is required in how governments approach and carry out this work.

The report highlights the need to share power and work more effectively to address the disparities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to achieve the strategic commitments of the national agreement.

Supply Nation's 2025 report, *Sleeping Giant Rises*, highlights the value of investing in Indigenous businesses. For every dollar spent there's a social return of \$3.66, which benefits business owners, Indigenous employees, their families and communities. Supporting Indigenous businesses helps advance self-determination and brings strong economic, social and cultural benefits.

There is also a push by the federal government to better support authentic majority owned First Nations businesses. It recently changed the criteria to recognise Indigenous business ownership to be 51% or more, no longer recognising 50%. This change addresses fake claims of Indigenous ownership (known as 'black-cladding') and ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have real control and decision-making power. As a result, strategic and targeted procurement is more likely to benefit First Nations communities directly, especially at the local level.

"I want to live in an area that respects my culture and heritage, free from racism and offers ample opportunities for my family and friends to shine."

2023 Wellbeing Survey response



Our role to support, enable and influence

We offer services and programs with and for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with a strong focus on local context, relationships and outcomes. This is reflected across our major strategies and action plans, achieved through our grants, public domain works, community services, public programs and events.

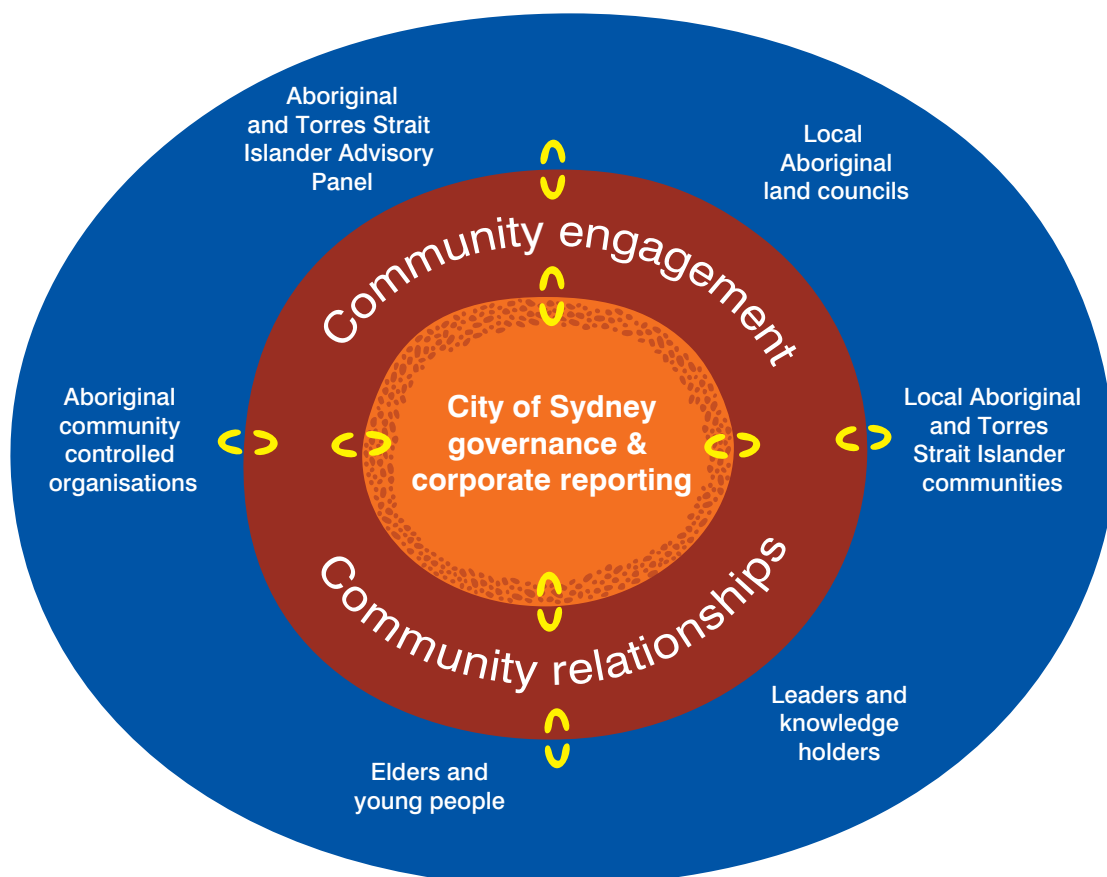
This strategic framework ensures our operational capabilities are directed where they're most needed. It's informed by strategic priorities that align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community advocacy and leadership.

The City of Sydney is uniquely positioned to act at the local level – where decisions directly affect people's daily lives – while also advocating at regional and national levels to help change systems that enable justice and long-term change. We play a vital role in enabling self-determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

initiatives through the support we can provide. Our grants, spaces and procurement directly support community-led opportunities when and where they're identified.

As an ally and advocate, we can help drive change by sharing feedback, building partnerships and using both formal and informal opportunities to speak up. This includes working on major projects and policies such as housing, justice and culture, and shaping local development and laws that support long-term change.

We work closely with the community and all levels of government to help create meaningful and lasting change. This includes partnering with local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and peak bodies, state and federal agencies, and non-Indigenous allies and organisations.



We must do better

The City of Sydney strives to serve the needs and aspirations of Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and recognise their contributions. We do this out of respect and our deep commitment to being an equitable city.

Together, we're building a city that's truly inclusive, respectful and led by the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In doing this we're already working on hundreds of actions – projects, programs and services – spread across numerous strategies and plans. Despite this, the First Nations actions and outcomes are not strategically or operationally connected.

We need a First Nations strategic framework to bring heart, purpose and clarity to this vital work that we're already carrying out.

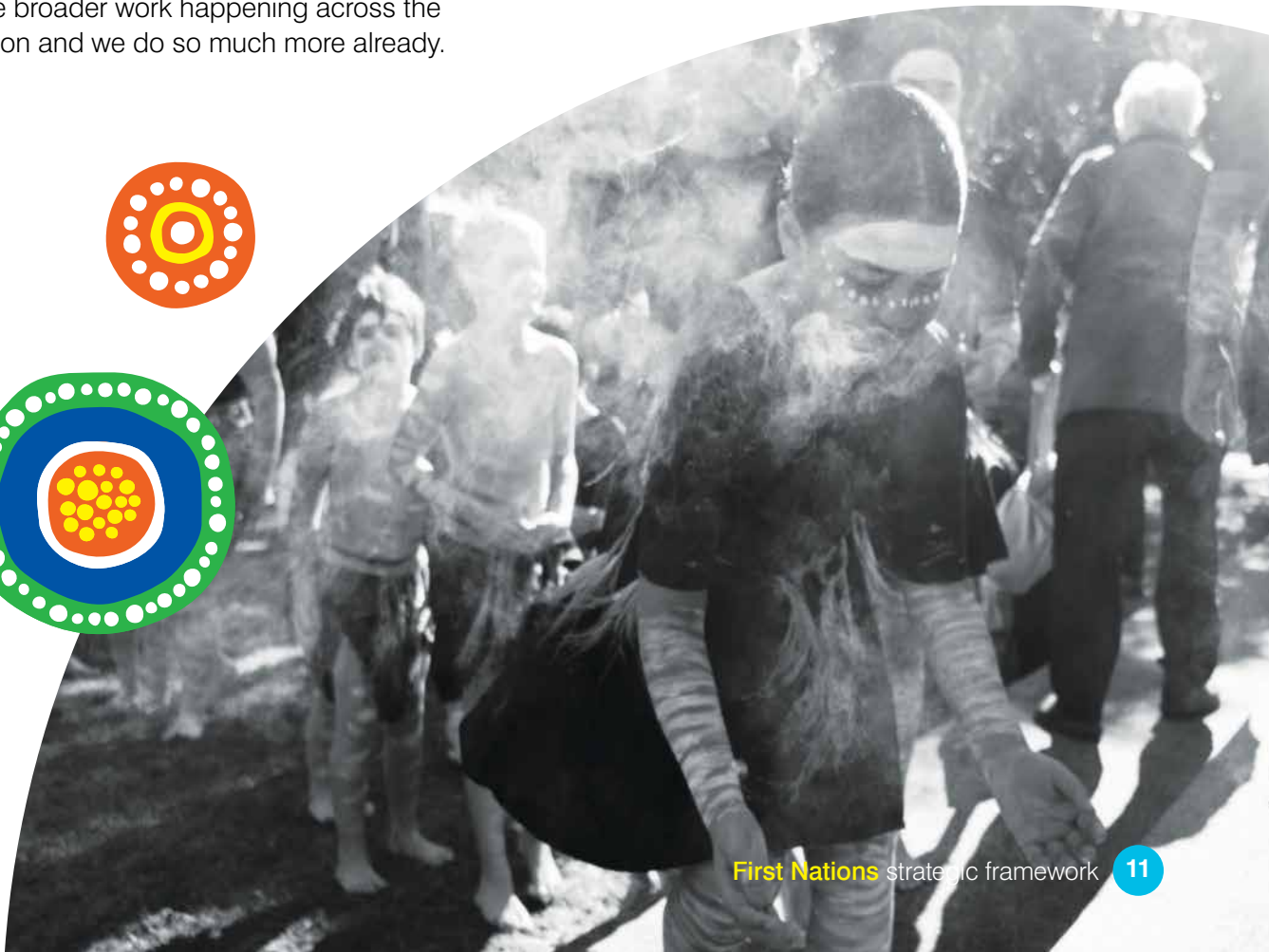
While we have a strong foundation through our Stretch reconciliation action plan and a long-standing commitment since 2015, this is just one part of the broader work happening across the organisation and we do so much more already.

This isn't just policy – it's about real people and real impacts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While we've made a strong start, we must do better. We need to understand these realities and use this framework to ensure more effective and meaningful outcomes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“Decolonising the city of colonial narratives and myths plus telling the truth is critical to the relationship”

Quote from First Nations Dialogue Forum

Smoking ceremony at Redfern Community Centre.
Photo / Chris Southwood / City of Sydney



Introducing the First Nations strategic framework

The First Nations strategic framework brings all our work relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into a single, integrated approach.

The voices of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are at the heart of this work. The framework gives us a deeper sense of purpose and clarity about why this work matters and how, together, we can create meaningful change.

It aligns key City of Sydney activities to ensure our efforts are coordinated, culturally relevant and appropriate and aim to achieve genuine community priorities. This includes the Eora Journey, our reconciliation action plan and economic, social, cultural and environmental strategies and action plans.

This framework also presents an opportunity for reflection so we can best align with the community's needs and ensure we focus where it's needed. It helps us elevate and align the work we do. It will also support us to be responsive through strong community ties.

By connecting our work to the framework's vision, we commit to achieving lasting outcomes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, businesses and communities. This coordinated approach strengthens how we implement, measure and report on our progress – building a future for First Nations self-determination.

The framework elements are:

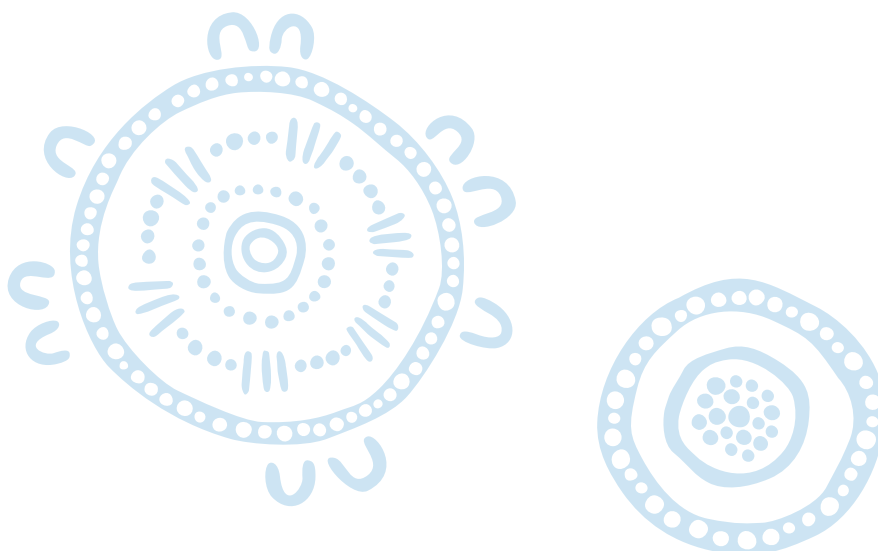
- ▶ **the vision**
echoes the community's aspirations
- ▶ **guiding principles**
inform our decision making
- ▶ **strategic pillars**
guide our work towards the vision
- ▶ **objectives of each pillar**
significant projects to achieve strategic priorities
- ▶ **enabling tools**
project guidance in line with the vision

Developing the framework

The development of the First Nations strategic framework is grounded in what the community has consistently told us and advocated for over many years.

We drew heavily on past City of Sydney consultations, including targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultation reports and ongoing feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel and employee network.

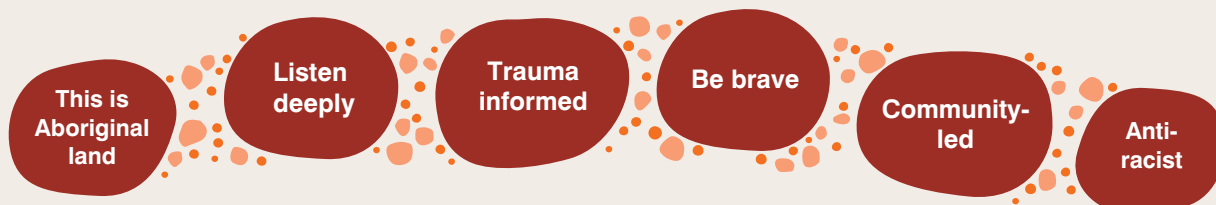
This substantial, longstanding community advocacy and insight has shaped the key themes and objectives of this framework.



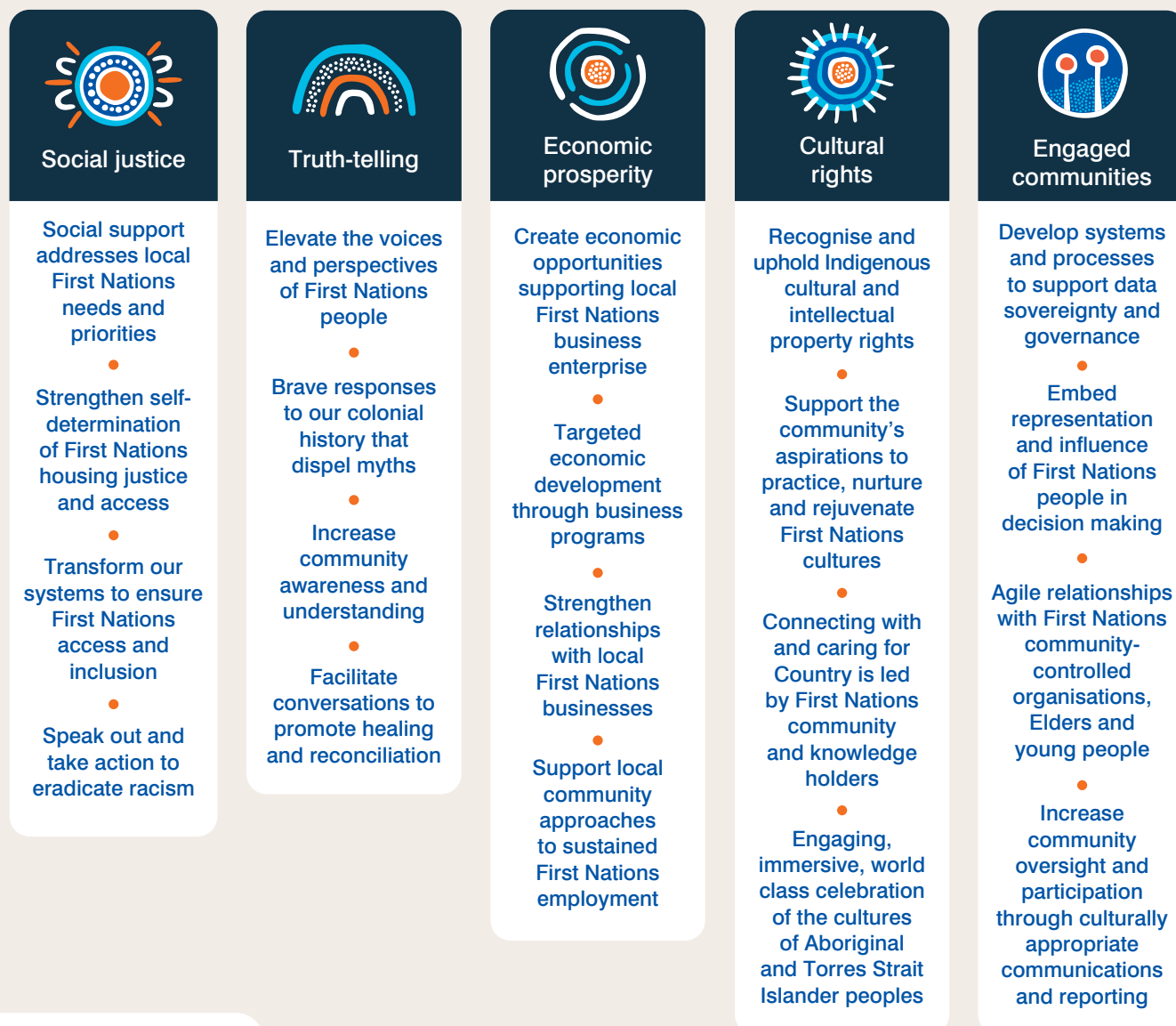
The Framework

VISION: First Nations self-determination, prosperity and wellbeing

Guiding principles



Strategic Pillars



Enabling Tools



UNDRIP



Principles of cooperation



Cultural protocols



ICIP



Connecting with Country



Cultural capability



Strategic engagement



Evaluation tool

The vision

First Nations self-determination,
prosperity and wellbeing



We envision a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people self-determine cultural rights, social justice, economic prosperity, meaningful engagement and healing through truth-telling.

The full expression and realisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, lives, cultures, freedoms and futures must be self-determined. Freely pursuing their destiny in healthy, respectful environments, strong in culture and a dignified existence creates legacies for future generations to enjoy.

This vision is more than a statement – it's a commitment to real lives, systemic change and tangible outcomes. It echoes the voices of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as they tell us they want to define their own priorities and be self-determining.

We'll work alongside and support the community towards sustainable partnership, significant opportunities and prosperity as defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We commit to uphold and recognise the rights and protections of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We acknowledge the colonial systems that cause harm, obstruct opportunities and discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As an organisation, we'll decolonise our approach so we can work more effectively with First Nations communities.

This means we:

- ▶ Stand for social justice through equity, community, access and cohesion
- ▶ Champion cultural rights, knowledge and recognition
- ▶ Enable economic prosperity, equity and remove barriers
- ▶ Centre First Nations voices in truth-telling towards healing, reconciliation and dispelling myths
- ▶ Collaborate to embed engagement, shared decision-making and accountability

**We recognise
that as the community
has told us, and what is
widely known, is that
change is needed:**

**business as usual will not
improve outcomes for
the lives of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander people.**

Guiding principles

These are the heartbeat of our First Nations strategic framework. They shape how we work, how we listen and how we build trust..

The principles remind us why this work matters – they inform our decisions and help us understand the powerful impact this work has when it's done well.

By living these principles, we embed cultural safety into our systems – creating space for truth, respect and genuine partnership.

They're essential to achieving each strategic pillar and to walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in pursuit of self-determination.

These principles remind us that meaningful change begins with how we show up.



➤ This is Aboriginal land

We recognise that our local area is Gadigal Country; its land, skies and waterways have always belonged to Aboriginal people. Sovereignty has never been ceded by First Nations people. Connection to Country is central to identity, wellbeing and cultural continuity. This place is all sacred, all of what we do is on Aboriginal land. The legal fiction of terra nullius has been overturned, and we acknowledge the ongoing harm it has caused. Our work begins with truth: this is, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

➤ Listen deeply

We commit to genuinely listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities beyond words – with time, humility and intent. Deep listening means recognising our unconscious bias, misconceptions and differing worldviews. It means creating space for truth to be heard and understood. Through deep listening, we build trust, strengthen relationships, and ensure our actions reflect what First Nations communities have shared with us.

➤ Trauma informed

We acknowledge the deep and enduring impacts of trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – trauma that is lived, inherited and too often overlooked. A trauma-informed approach means we lead with empathy, cultural understanding and care. It shapes how we create safe spaces, how we listen and how we act. We commit to building systems that honour lived experience, foster healing and support the strength and resilience of the community.

➤ Be brave

We choose courage over comfort. Being brave means stepping away from business as usual and embracing significant, new approaches that centre First Nations self-determination. It means challenging systems that maintain the status quo and taking risks that lead to real change. In our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, bravery is listening deeply, acting boldly and standing firm in our commitment to transformative outcomes.

➤ Community-led

We honour the leadership, knowledge and autonomy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As a city for all, we commit to supporting First Nations communities to stay strong and thrive in our local area. This means our work is not only guided by First Nations voices – it's shaped by community-led and controlled initiatives. We recognise that meaningful partnerships require us to step back, listen and follow. Working in this way means prioritising First Nations decision-making, respecting cultural authority and ensuring our systems enable – not obstruct – community-led self-determination.

➤ Anti-racist practice

We stand against racism in all its forms – interpersonal, systemic and structural. Racism causes real and lasting harm, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience it at disproportionately high levels. Being anti-racist means actively listening when racism is named, calling it out and committing to change. In our work, this means adopting conscious, accountable practices that are brave in the face of racism, dismantle discrimination and building culturally safe environments. We work alongside First Nations communities to implement anti-racist approaches that reflect respect, care and justice in everything we do.

Change begins with
courage, respect and truth.
When we honour Country,
listen deeply and follow
First Nations leadership, we
don't just do the work – we
become **part of the change.**

These principles are our
compass. **Let's be brave**
enough to follow them.

Strategic pillars

The 5 strategic pillars illustrate our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination. Each pillar represents a deliberate and focused area of action, shaped by community voices and grounded in the need for systemic change.

Through these pillars we commit to:

- ▶ addressing the impacts of colonial systems
- ▶ embedding First Nations leadership
- ▶ creating space for culture, autonomy and the opportunity to thrive

The pillars achieve the vision through:

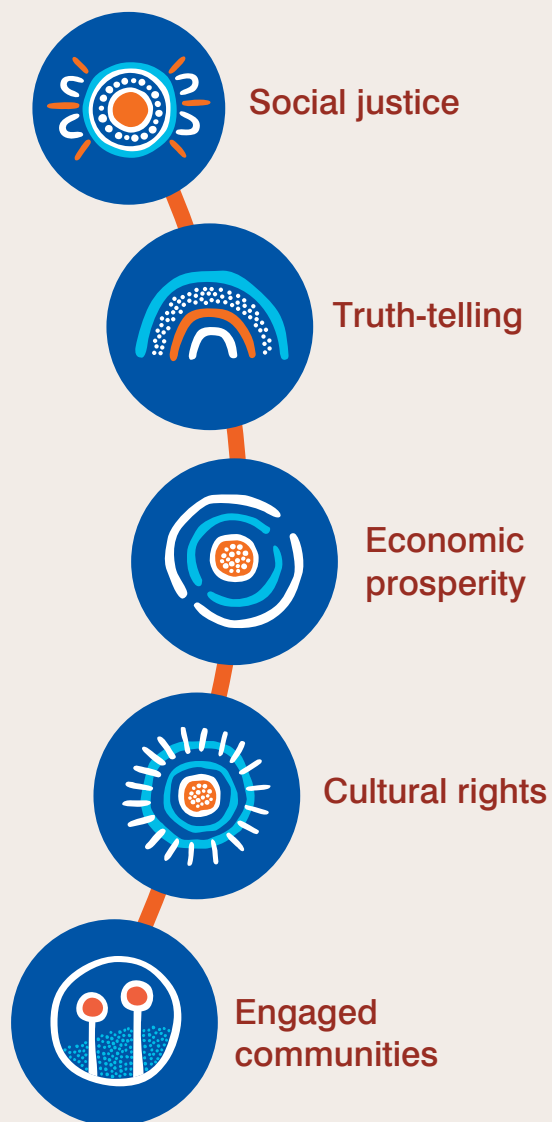
- ▶ enabling a level playing field
- ▶ reconciling differences
- ▶ investing in opportunities
- ▶ embedding holistic benefits
- ▶ increased agency

Objectives

Each strategic pillar is backed by 4 objectives

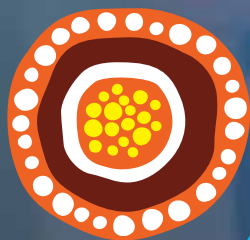
with clear actions and opportunities to achieve our vision. These guide our services, programs and policies to ensure the framework is not just aspirational – but practical, connected and embedded across everything we do.

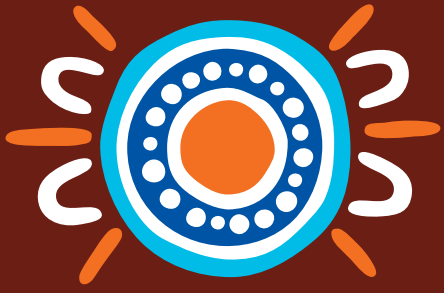
This approach strengthens collaboration across teams and deepens partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It also ensures each strategic pillar leads to real, measurable impact on the ground.



3% performing at NAIDOC in the City.
Photo / Jake Keane / City of Sydney

Together, we
walk forward
guided by
truth, driven
by justice
and united in
purpose.





Social justice

We stand for social justice
through equity, community,
access and cohesion.

Social justice

Enabling equitable opportunities promotes socioeconomic justice. Community wellbeing and upholding fundamental rights are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

Objectives and opportunities

- **Social support addresses local First Nations needs and priorities**
Public programs, grants, procurement and resources are targeted to enable self-determining and sustainable First Nations projects and initiatives.
- **Strengthen self-determination of First Nations housing justice and access**
Partner with Aboriginal housing providers, landowners and the community in planning, design and access to local housing opportunities.
- **Transform our systems to ensure First Nations access and inclusion**
Adapt our systems and processes to increase cultural safety and self-determination.
- **Speak out and take action to eradicate racism**
Implement sustained anti-racism education, awareness and a framework to address systemic issues and manage occurrences.

Strategic actions

- **Cope Street Aged Care**
We're working with service providers to develop residential aged care in partnership with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the heart of Redfern. The future of residential aged care on City of Sydney land on Cope Street is an opportunity to offer much needed housing support for residents to maintain social, cultural and community connections.
- **107 Redfern Street**
107 Redfern Street has long provided much needed cultural and community space. We're now working with First Nations led organisations and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel to create First Nations led spaces and programming. This means self-determined space for Aboriginal creative and cultural use and output in an accessible prominent location.
- **Anti-racism framework**
We've developed an anti-racism framework which includes clear principles, objectives and responsibilities for all employees. This looks at how individuals, teams and the organisation can actively address different forms and levels of racism. A key principle recognises the importance of First Nations centred anti-racism being vital to addressing systems and overt racism both inside and outside our workplace.

Wyanga Aboriginal Aged Care, Redfern.
Photo / Jake Duczynski / City of Sydney





Truth-telling

We centre First Nations voices in truth-telling towards healing, reconciliation and dispelling myths.

Truth-telling

Truth-telling measures foster mutual understanding and healing. To continue our reconciliation journey we must confront hard truths and listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Objectives and opportunities

- **Elevate the voices and perspectives of First Nations people**
Facilitate platforms and expression of truth-telling about our shared histories in partnership with and led by First Nations people.
- **Brave responses to our colonial history that dispel myths**
Address harmful colonial myths and increase recognition of historical truths in the public domain.
- **Increase community awareness and understanding**
Ensure historical narratives promote truth-telling and include First Nations perspectives across our assets and resources.
- **Facilitate conversations to promote healing and reconciliation**
Support cross-cultural dialogue through events, programs and relevant outlets in partnership with First Nations people.

Sydney Town Hall for NAIDOC Week with projections by *We Are Warriors*, artwork by Melnunnie.
Photo / City of Sydney / Abril Felman



Strategic actions

- **Sites of significance markers**
We'll create distinct markers that identify First Nations sites of social, cultural and historic significance in the local area. We'll engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stakeholders in selecting the sites, with a focus on land rights, self-determination and political expression. This will recognise important stories, educate more people and increase the visibility of First Nations voices in the city.
- **Colonial monuments and statues**
We're reviewing colonial monuments and statues in the public art collection and public spaces, as well as ephemera in Sydney Town Hall with a strong First Nations focus. This is to develop an approach for accurate representation that incorporates contemporary and First Nations perspectives. We'll engage the community in developing a way forward that is well informed, brave and culturally safe.
- **Our shared histories**
Through our communication channels, special projects and resources, in line with our updated history policy, we'll ensure historical narratives centre and elevate First Nations voices. Following the colonial monuments review, we'll ensure representation of colonial narratives and our shared history is inclusive and truthful.
- **Truthful conversations**
Through programming in our venues and public talks we'll elevate truth-telling that centres the voices and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is vital to our reconciliation journey and will allow us to move forward as a community. Truth-telling is taking place at different levels across the state and the country, and we'll play a role in this with our local communities.



Economic prosperity

We nurture economic equity and participation and remove barriers.

Economic prosperity

Partnering with, committing to and investing in community-led action to develop long-term sustainable economic equity and opportunities for community to thrive.

Objectives and opportunities

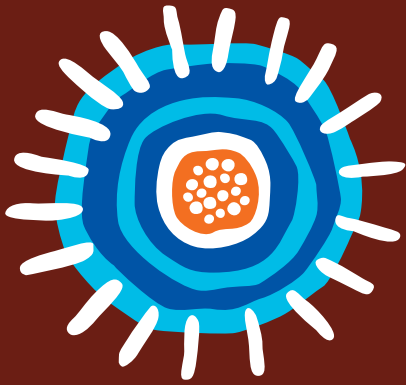
- **Create economic opportunities supporting local First Nations business enterprise**
Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers through projects and make the most of networks and opportunities.
- **Targeted economic development through business programs**
Create a dedicated First Nations business support and skills development program.
- **Strengthen relationships with local First Nations businesses**
Ensure streamlined, consistent and culturally safe engagement and networking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.
- **Support local community approaches to sustained First Nations employment**
Support local Indigenous businesses with strong local First Nations employment through our procurement, grants and programs.

Market stall at NAIDOC in the City.
Photo / Jake Keane / City of Sydney



Strategic actions

- **Innovation and advocacy**
Align our strategic vision for the community with our services to provide economic and social benefit through procurement and networking opportunities. Continue advocacy for local government First Nations procurement strategies that reflect state and federal approaches. Identify and prioritise community assets that can promote and enable Indigenous economic outcomes and partnerships.
- **First Nations business data project**
We're improving our knowledge and connections with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to better design programs that support their aspirations. By maintaining active engagement and a growing network, we'll strengthen relationships and create future opportunities including through our grants and public programs.
- **Indigenous procurement strategy**
We'll create a clear plan to work with First Nations businesses in ways that reflect their goals and what we've learnt so far. We'll focus on supporting First Nations businesses at every stage, especially those that contribute to the community through jobs, support and culture. By raising awareness, offering training, improving our systems and building strong relationships, we can work more closely and effectively with First Nations businesses.
- **First Nations employment**
By increasing engagement with Indigenous businesses, we can positively influence First Nations employment outcomes. First Nations businesses are twice as likely to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These organisations offer greater cultural understanding, safety and ability to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Cultural rights

We champion cultural rights,
recognition and practice.

Cultural rights

First Nations cultures are respected, supported and celebrated.
We recognise Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights to ensure protection and prosperity.

Objectives and opportunities

➤ Recognise and uphold Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights

Work with First Nations experts to develop and improve how Indigenous cultural and intellectual property guidelines are used and adjusting the approach over time.

➤ Support the community's aspirations to practice, nurture and rejuvenate First Nations cultures

Flexible support for First Nations community-led cultural projects with our resources, spaces and grants.

➤ Connecting with and caring for Country is led by First Nations community and knowledge holders

Caring for Country and connecting with Country centres First Nations peoples' cultural responsibilities.

➤ Engaging, immersive, world class celebration of the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Collaborative cultural events led by First Nations people that celebrate, recognise and connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

McConville Reserve transformed by Indigenous social enterprise Wildflower.
Photo / Allira Johnson / City of Sydney

Strategic actions

➤ ICIP guidelines

Adopting Indigenous cultural and intellectual property guidelines strengthens our ability to work respectfully with First Nations people and cultures. These guidelines show us how to value cultural knowledge, traditions and relationships. They help us follow the right protocols, support the community and improve how we work.

➤ Support for culture

Our community and cultural spaces create opportunities for First Nations people to share, strengthen and nurture cultural knowledge. We have the means to adopt culturally safe places and practices to increase community participation. Our grants offer support for various sectors to develop, maintain and celebrate the community's cultural initiatives.

➤ Significant recognition

Calling Country at Sydney New Year's Eve honours tradition and gives space to contemporary First Nations voices on a major public stage. NAIDOC in the City is our main annual event as part of the Eora Journey, and it continues to grow each year with the community. It's important we partner with First Nations communities to celebrate their cultural aspirations throughout the year.

➤ Connecting with Country

We recognise Country is sacred and connection to Country holds deep importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Connecting with Country practice needs to be nurturing and reparative, not just taking and using First Nations cultural knowledge and heritage. It's important to follow cultural protocols, share benefits fairly and give proper credit. Whether it's through design, public art or managing parks, connecting with Country means working closely with First Nations people.





Engaged communities

We collaborate to embed engagement, shared decision-making and accountability.

Engaged communities

Collaborative engagement supports community decision-making and partnership enabling community control. Relevant, appropriate and consistent two-way dialogue supports informed decision-making and information access.

Objectives and opportunities

➤ **Develop systems and processes to support Indigenous data sovereignty and governance**

Ensure the relevant data we collect and hold from and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is managed in line with Indigenous data sovereignty principles.

➤ **Embed representation and influence of First Nations people in decision making**

Create and strengthen systems that share decision-making power and put self-determination into action.

➤ **Agile relationships with First Nations community-controlled organisations, Elders and young people**

Authentic regular engagement and collaboration throughout the organisation with First Nations Elders, young people and leaders.

➤ **Increase community oversight and participation through culturally appropriate communications and reporting**

Accessible First Nations-specific reporting and communications using appropriate language, imagery, networks and channels.

Strategic actions

➤ **Reporting and communications**

Visual tools, appropriate language and relevant channels will help to communicate effectively with First Nations audiences. This is vital for reporting on our work and activities directly engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultures and history. We use the same holistic and targeted approach to promote opportunities to the community like our grants, procurement, employment, programming and events.

➤ **Community engagement and consultation**

We'll continue to develop our approach to ensure culturally appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement and relations. This will inform how we work with our stakeholders, advisory panels, formal and informal relationships and day-to-day interactions. This means appropriate consultation processes that meet the community where they are, their expectations and begin early in our projects and activities.

➤ **Research, data, archives and collecting**

We're working to better follow Indigenous data sovereignty and governance principles. This means giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities more control over the data we collect and hold about them. These principles are based on self-determination and help ensure that data is used in ways that respect culture, support communities and guide informed decision making.

Friends gather at George Street Plaza in the city.
Photo / Jake Duczynski / City of Sydney



Enabling tools

These tools are foundational resources, policies and guidelines to support how we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. When followed, they enable consistent respectful community-led practice and culturally safe action across all areas of the organisation.

In the planning stage, before any work begins, we review the enabling tools to determine what aspects will need to be included.

When enabling tools aren't used we risk doing harm. Cultural safety is compromised, trust is broken and the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are sidelined. Actions can become inconsistent and disconnected from the community's needs and expectations. It means missing opportunities to listen, to learn and to lead with integrity.

These tools are not optional – they're essential to ensuring our work is respectful, accountable, and supports First Nations self-determination.



United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

This United Nations declaration provides a global benchmark for how we engage, relate to and work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It encapsulates our commitment to self-determination, cultural safety and equity. The declaration provides the ethical and legal parameters for respecting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It supports our alignment with both national and international obligations in advancing First Nations rights and justice.

- We actively engage with the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as part of our planning and build it into our work.



Principles of cooperation

The Principles of Cooperation were established in 2006 as a formal agreement between the City of Sydney and the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council. Under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983, their responsibilities are in support of and accountable to Aboriginal people in the local area. The principles of cooperation outline how both parties work together as equals in a spirit of trust, transparency and shared commitment to Aboriginal communities. We meet regularly and engagement can include services, advice, formal feedback and endorsement.

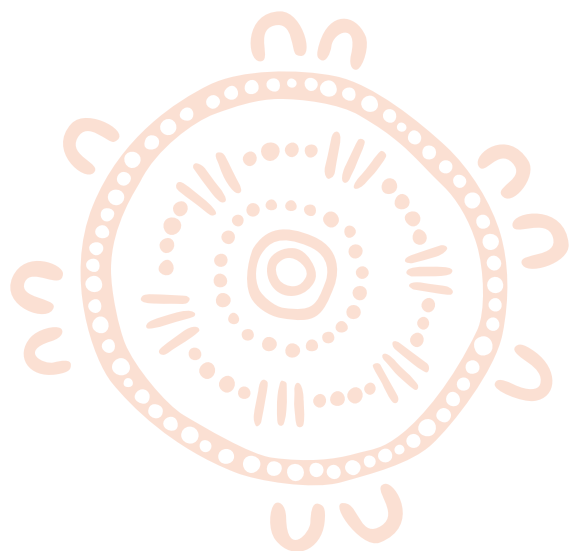
- We're committed to consistent and respectful consultation with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.



Cultural protocols

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols provide clear, informative support for engaging respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and cultures. They outline expectations for Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country, identity, cultural events, use of imagery and language, and engaging with Elders and the community. These protocols ensure consistency across the organisation and help embed respect, accountability and integrity.

- We are familiar with these protocols and refer to them as needed.





Indigenous cultural and intellectual property guidelines

These guidelines refer to the principles and protocols that protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over their cultural knowledge, stories, art, language and traditions. They ensure respectful, ethical and culturally safe engagement by offering clear direction on consent, attribution, ownership and use. This means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people retain control over how their culture is represented, shared and acknowledged. Recognising Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights is a commitment to justice, cultural integrity and self-determination.

- **We use the guidelines to understand consent, ownership, protections and compensation.**



Connecting with Country framework

The Connecting with Country framework, developed by the NSW Government Architect, provides direction on embedding Aboriginal perspectives into planning, design and place-making. It supports meaningful engagement with Country as a living entity and cultural responsibility. It helps embed Country-centred thinking into projects – from early concept to completion – in partnership with the community. The framework supports ways for Aboriginal people and their knowledge about caring for Country to inform design for respectful, sustainable and nurturing places.

- **This is an important tool used for design, capital works and planning projects.**



Cultural learning and capability

We each carry a shared responsibility to honour and understand the rich history, cultures and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is an act of reconciliation and connection. We're building cultural capability through a clear, strategic journey – from awareness to proficiency. With eLearning, face-to-face training, on-Country experiences, and cultural events, every step is designed to develop and embed respectful practice.

- **All employees will deepen their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Australia's colonial history.**



Strategic consultation and engagement

A First Nations community engagement strategy will set out our commitment to meaningful, respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, businesses and organisations. It's grounded in cultural protocols and community leadership – recognising Elders, young people and knowledge holders as central to self-determination.

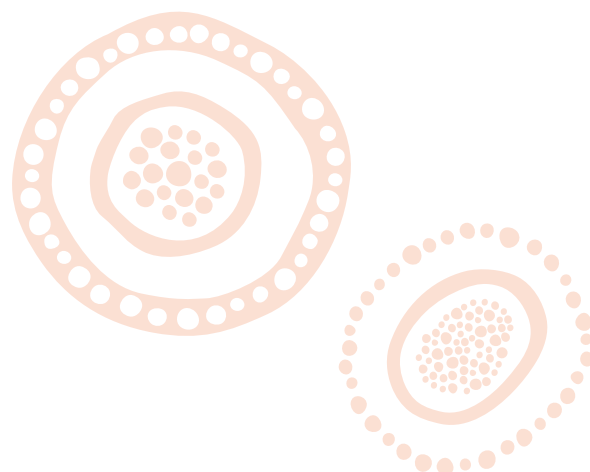
This approach is about engaging early, listening deeply and shared decision-making with First Nations people. We meet where the community is at, guided by their needs, preferences and timelines. This means First Nations voices shape our planning, policy and service design – placing self-determination and community-led decision-making at the centre of everything we do.

- **We ensure we have the right time, resources and people to support culturally appropriate engagement, consultation and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**



Evaluation tool

This evaluation tool keeps us accountable and focused on the vision. It helps teams reflect, improve and ensures our work aligns with the vision of this framework. It guides teams to engage with communities in line with our principles and enabling tools. The tool empowers employees to reflect on their approach and make improvements – so we can do this work better, together.



First Nations involvement

Our role in supporting First Nations self-determination is achieved through meaningful inclusion, ownership and decision making by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As focused as we are on outcomes, it's critical that self-determination is at the centre of how we achieve them.

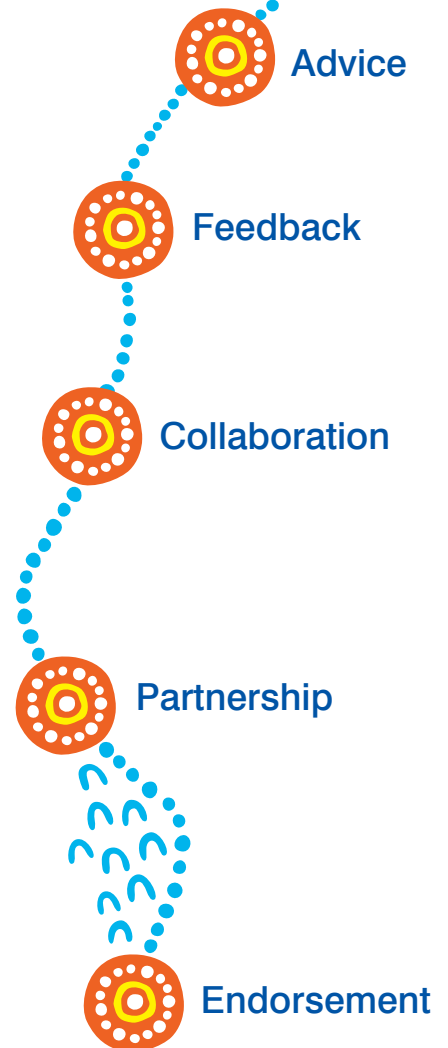
Anything with, relating to or about First Nations people, culture or stories must involve First Nations people.

There will be different approaches and requirements depending on what we're doing. Whether we seek advice on a project, or endorsement of an approach or recommendation. This includes working with City of Sydney First Nations employees who bring rapport, knowledge and networks, while striving to maintain and build trust.

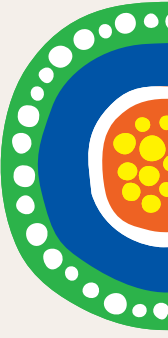
Two of our major stakeholders are the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel. Our engagement with these groups is paramount.

We do the work with:

- ▶ City of Sydney First Nations employees
- ▶ Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel
- ▶ Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- ▶ Elders, leaders, knowledge holders
- ▶ Indigenous businesses and suppliers



Strategic alignment



The First Nations strategic framework interweaves with our major strategies and action plans. It directs us to work towards the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples while achieving Sustainable Sydney 2030–2050 Continuing the Vision.

Our role alongside the various partners working with First Nations communities includes projects, programs and services, supporting opportunities and advocacy for deeper systemic change. We do this important work along with all levels of government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and enterprise, and wider mainstream sectors. We're aligned in our goals of self-determination and closing the gap.

Since 2015 we've been part of the national movement with Reconciliation Australia and their 5 dimensions: race relations, equality and equity, historical acceptance, institutional integrity and unity. The reconciliation action plan methodology has been pivotal in our growth which has been focused on the pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities.

We've committed our support to implement the Closing the Gap priority reforms:

- ▶ formal partnerships and shared decision-making
- ▶ building the community-controlled sector
- ▶ transforming government organisations
- ▶ shared access to data and information at a regional level
- ▶ employment, business growth and economic prosperity.

This is embedded within our community strategic plan.

We recognise the expanded definition of wellbeing for First Nations people. As outlined in the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023, wellbeing is less individualistic and includes culture, spirit and Country.

Implementation, monitoring and reporting

Achieving true structural and social change will take time. This framework supports us to start working in a way that puts self-determination front and centre, which will be more visible and measurable in our work. We'll report progress each year to Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel.

This framework will be implemented through our operational services, programs, projects and events. Internal oversight will be through a dedicated steering committee to monitor implementation, identify gaps and address challenges. This will be informed and supported by internal collaboration and corporate reporting systems.

Developing a dedicated First Nations wellbeing survey will allow us to monitor change over time. The survey features tailored questions to understand further cultural and community relevant insights. It will be managed in partnership with the local First Nations community to support strong participation and Indigenous data sovereignty and governance.

Consistent, relevant and effective reporting to and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will enhance informed decision-making, leading to better community outcomes. The goal is to be able to observe and measure impacts in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our journey so far

Since flying the Aboriginal flag above Sydney Town Hall from 2002, we've made incremental progress in relationships, recognition, and community and economic development milestones.

The **Eora Journey** is a series of First Nations projects across **4 distinct pillars**:

- ▶ recognition in the public domain
- ▶ economic development plan
- ▶ significant annual event
- ▶ local knowledge and culture centre.

The Eora Journey recognition in the public domain projects have produced public artworks to celebrate and honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the city. Multiple works in the coming years will be focused on Yananurala along the harbour, from Woolloomooloo to Pyrmont.

The Eora Journey economic development plan has helped us to develop our relationships with First Nations businesses and networks. It has supported local enterprise, employment and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

NAIDOC in the City is the annual significant event in the heart of the city. This has seen us working closely with First Nations creatives and businesses on this major event. It shares stories, celebrates people and culture through music, art and dance, and offers opportunities to be immersed in culture.

119 Redfern Street is the local Aboriginal knowledge and culture centre, which opened in 2024. The venue creates a space for community access and programming on the main street of Redfern.

As we implement our third reconciliation action plan, these plans have developed staff engagement throughout the organisation and improved our work across the pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities. This has enhanced outcomes across procurement, employment and staff development. Reporting on the plan has advanced the way we measure and share our progress with the community.

The Sydney Barani website, Barani Barrabugu booklet and self-guided tours on our Culture Walks app continue to share stories of the Aboriginal histories of our local area.

Our grants and sponsorship program has grown to engage with and respond to First Nations communities. Through consultation, dedicated information sessions and accessible application processes, we've increased applications and support. This includes the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collaboration fund.

Signage along Sydney harbour foreshore for Yananurala, part of the Eora Journey: recognition in the public domain.

Photo / Chris Southwood / City of Sydney

Yananurala
Walking on Country



Glossary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, First Nations and Indigenous

We use these terms to respectfully refer to the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters now called Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognises the distinction and inclusion of people on mainland Australia and the peoples of Zenadth Kes, the islands between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea. First Nations is inclusive too, while recognising the status as distinct nations of self-determining people who've belonged to this place for thousands of generations. Indigenous is a term often used in national and international instances, which we also use in that context.

Aboriginal community-controlled organisations

Organisations set up and governed by a majority of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to provide services or programs. These organisations embody self-determination, community connection and cultural leadership.

Country

More than a geographical place, Country refers to the lands, waters, skies, and spiritual and cultural connections to First Nations peoples. Country is central to identity, wellbeing and community.

Connecting with Country

A framework developed by the NSW Government Architect that guides architects, planners and designers to embrace Aboriginal knowledge, values and connection to Country in urban development and place-making.

Cultural protocols

Guidelines developed in consultation with the community that outline appropriate, respectful ways of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultures and customs. These may relate to ceremonies, communication, use of imagery and consultation practices.

Cultural safety

An environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel safe, respected and free from racism or discrimination. Cultural safety is achieved through ongoing learning, reflective practice and change in attitude and behaviour by individuals and systems.

Indigenous data sovereignty

The right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to govern the collection, ownership and application of data about their people, communities and lands. This is self-determination in practice, where First Nations communities can make informed decisions through access to information.

Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP)

The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over their cultural heritage, including knowledge, cultural expressions, stories and symbols. Unlike intellectual property, ICIP is not currently protected by law but recognised as rights and best practice for ensuring strong and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Self-determination

The right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to freely make decisions about and keep control of their own lives, communities, cultures and futures. This is a foundational principle of this framework and reinforces all directions, objectives and principles.

Truth-telling

The practice of acknowledging and confronting the true, largely untold, history of colonisation in Australia. This includes recognising the impact of invasion, dispossession, racism, and resistance. It centres the voices of First Nations peoples in shaping shared understanding.

Attachment B

First Nations Strategic Framework - Community Insights Report

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Overview

Project background

In 2023 we undertook internal and external reviews of our strategic actions working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures, including our reconciliation action plan. We committed to continuing with a reconciliation action plan while also developing an overarching framework to ensure greater strategic alignment and visibility of all the work we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

City staff have been implementing new ways of working to strengthen our internal systems and processes to manage the work sustainably. The strategic framework is a unifying structure, bringing all of our commitments together for better visibility of the work we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This allows us to better support and manage the work, ensuring it aligns with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's needs and aspirations.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the research, engagement inputs and sense-making activities that inform the development of the First Nations Strategic Framework.

While no new standalone consultation process was undertaken specifically for the framework, it is shaped by a range of existing engagement mechanisms, cultural governance forums, research and internal co-design activities already embedded within the City of Sydney's ways of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This document demonstrates how the First Nations Strategic Framework reflects the aspirations, priorities and concerns consistently raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders, and how those insights informed the vision, pillars, objectives and principles of the Framework.

Our research process

The process

The Framework is intended to organise and prioritise our existing work. This means rather than seeking new ideas and input, we looked at what we already have heard, what we are committed to and what are some examples of best practice approaches to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We used a layered research and engagement approach that brought together existing evidence, targeted engagement findings and internal sense-making.

The research process included:

1) Review of existing strategic commitments and priorities

- Current City of Sydney strategies and plans that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes
- Relevant external frameworks, strategies and action plans
- Relevant state and national policy directions: Closing the Gap – targets and outcomes, Aboriginal Lands Right Act NSW (ARLA NSW), OCHRE – NSW Aboriginal Affairs, NSW Aboriginal Land Council.
- Productivity Commission’s review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

2) Review of research reports

- Findings from previous consultation processes with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including:
 - Stretch RAP community consultation 2024 and 2025
 - First Nations Dialogue Forum 2010 and 2019
 - 119 Redfern Street community consultation community consultation
 - First Nations Cultural sector consultation report
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce strategy consultant’s report
- Internal and external review of our strategic commitments and action plans including the Stretch RAP.
- 2023 Community wellbeing survey results
- Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community profile based on 2021 census data

3) Engagement through existing forums

- Feedback and advice from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel. The draft First Nations Strategic Framework was presented on 20 October and 30 November 2025. This included reflecting their continued advocacy and priorities as well as feedback from Stretch RAP planning workshops.
- The draft First Nations Strategic Framework was shared with Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council in October 2025.
- Insights from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee network RAP workshop in 2024.

4) Internal co-design and sense-making

- Development of a visual storyboard to map recurring themes and priorities. The insights were collated to highlight themes and layers of concepts as a starting point.
- Alignment testing between community insights, existing commitments and draft framework elements. Cross referencing the themes and insights reflected in policies and reports from other sources.

First Nations Strategic Framework – community insights report

- Identify where local insights are backed up by research from other agencies, and demographic insights.
- Iterative refinement of the Framework over time as themes were clarified and tested.

Our research findings

Analysis of existing strategic commitments and priorities

Analysis of the artefacts and evidence revealed a high degree of alignment and consistency in the priorities and issues raised in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs and aspirations. This analysis highlighted recurring priorities, identifying both high-level aspirations and direct, grassroots community outcomes. It also enabled us to distinguish themes focused on addressing the systems and processes that shape how we do the work.

Existing City of Sydney strategies

Across existing City of Sydney strategies and plans, we looked at our commitments and varying approaches to working on social, cultural, economic and environmental projects and operations. This highlighted:

- The importance of long-term commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes
- The need to address systemic and structural barriers within our systems
- A focus on economic participation, employment and procurement
- Workforce capability, cultural safety and leadership accountability
- Our focus on access to culture, cultural respect and community participation
- How can we strategically align to best meet community need and expectations
- The opportunities to prioritise according to most impact
- A structure to align our commitments within the framework
- The breadth and scope of our commitments can support meaningful community outcomes

External frameworks and research

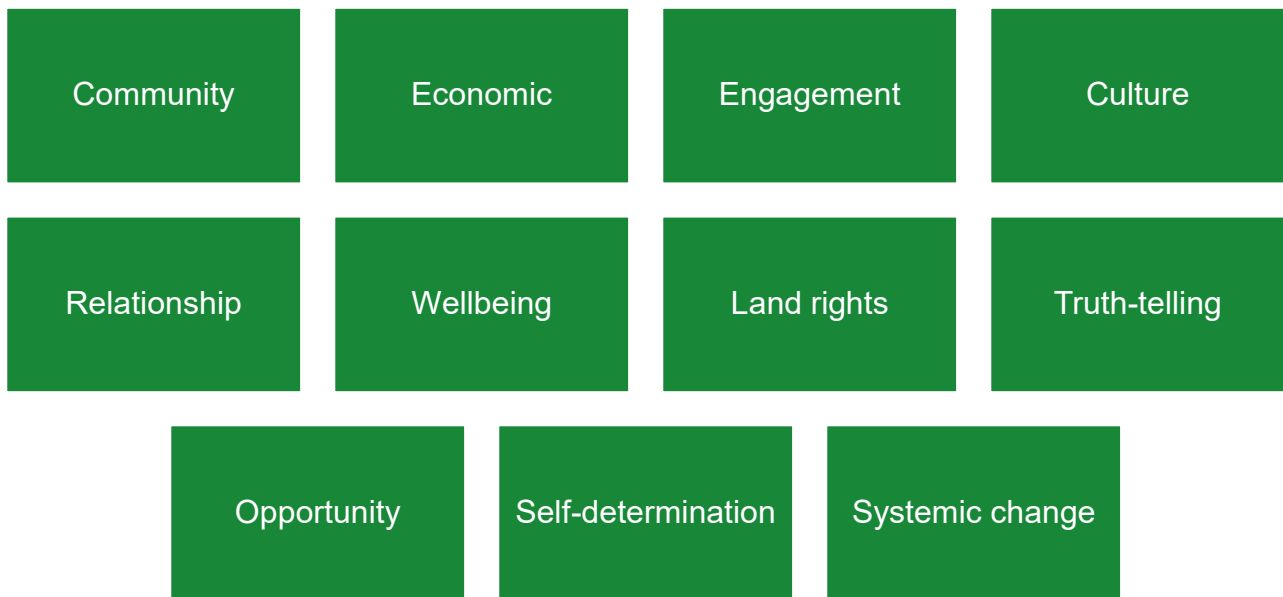
External frameworks and research reinforced:

- The central role of self-determination both as an outcome and a process
- The importance of First Nations-led decision making and governance
- The need for outcomes focused approaches rather than symbolic commitments
- The interconnectedness across sectors. For example, how economic action supports social impact, and how environmental engagement can strengthen cultural support
- The foundational rights that need to be embedded in our work
- The need for governments to transform their approach to work more effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The City of Sydney is committed to the Closing the Gap priority reforms. The Framework both needs to align and be guided by the reforms. The review of the Productivity Commission's review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap also reinforces the urgency and need for governments to refresh their approach.

Findings from research reports and existing forums

The initial review of community insights were consolidated and grouped into recurring themes. These were derived numerous consultation exercises in recent years that continually referred to consistent needs for support, opportunities and addressing systemic challenges. The recurring themes were:



Each theme covered a range of ideas and sentiments that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have told us across numerous consultations:

- **Community:** community connectedness, supporting local Aboriginal community-controlled initiatives and addressing displacement.
- **Culture:** cultural authority, practice and sharing, authenticity, cultural knowledge, rights outlined in United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights.
- **Economic:** justice, financial security, remuneration, enabling economic participation through employment and entrepreneurship.
- **Engagement:** consultation practices, how we communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and embedding open communication.
- **Relationship:** building and nurturing trust, deepening existing relations and formalising agreements.
- **Wellbeing:** support for vulnerable communities, addressing racism, cultural safety, healing and culture.
- **Land rights:** justice, access to space, housing and addressing gentrification.
- **Opportunity:** creating meaningful opportunities, access to employment, engagement with businesses and responding to community.
- **Self-determination:** representation in decision-making, community-led, autonomy, support for community initiatives and solutions.
- **Systemic change:** reviewing systems, recognising and addressing barriers to access and participation of First Nations people.
- **Truth-telling:** the history of this place, addressing colonial mistruths, statues, important for healing and reconciliation.

Informing the framework

The findings from community insights and desktop analysis all inform development of the Framework. The insights from artefacts, engagement and internal sense-making were synthesised into the core themes to build and organise the framework. We use the themes to guide the content of the Framework so that the sentiments of the community are strongly reflected. We considered how the City of Sydney can have impact and develop the framework to prioritise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's needs and aspirations.

It was important to align with our key strategic documents. We reviewed relevant priorities including those in our reconciliation action plan, our commitments to Closing the Gap priority reforms alongside our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols and Principles of Cooperation with Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Vision – these insights guide the aspirations and outcomes that focus our work over the next 5 years. These need to be about the future state that the priorities strive toward. This reflects how the City of Sydney can best support, empower and enable.

Guiding principles – the insights from community and other research inform how we approach this work and guide our decision-making. These are underpinned by cultural safety in our local area.

Strategic pillars – the community priorities and other strategic methodologies shape how the Framework organises the work. The pillars need to cover the areas of work that we focus on in a way that highlights how we do the work.

Objectives – These are the specific examples and diverse areas that demonstrate what we focus on, be it social programs, economic development, housing, cultural practice or information access.

