



Working with Aboriginal People in Aboriginal
Communities

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Welcome to CYP

Cape York Partnerships is one of a number of strong organisations that are supporting the people of Cape York Peninsula to develop “capabilities to choose lives they have reason to value”. We have done this by living and working in the communities we support and by engaging with local individuals and families in these communities. By living in and visiting Cape York communities, our employees are able to see not only the issues, but, more importantly, the great reform work being conducted by CYP and other regional organisations and

difference the reforms make to people’s lives.

Moving to a remote community is not always easy. There are challenges and barriers that people do not find in more towns or cities. We also ask that our employees, volunteers and secondees to adhere to our employment policies which include the abstaining from alcohol in communities. This may affect traditional ways of socialising, but, this is necessary to address the key issue of alcohol abuse in the communities and is an important foundation of our work.

The benefits of living in a remote community far outweigh the challenges. Integrating into a community, getting to know the residents, forming friendships, spending time in outstations and learning an Aboriginal Australian language is an experience that not many people have an opportunity to be a part of.

This guide will provide you with hints and tips on living and working in a community. I hope you enjoy your time and get as much out of your Cape York experience as possible.

Noel

About this manual

This manual is designed to provide employees with information to enable them to work in remote communities and with Aboriginal people. It does not articulate the diverse and rich cultures of Aboriginal peoples in Cape York as there are many publications that can do this.

Generally, employees do not require an extensive knowledge of Aboriginal cultures to carry out their work. However, many Aboriginal people are keen to share their cultures with employees and employees are encouraged to pursue opportunities to learn about these cultures.

There are a number of Cape York Partnerships' (CYP) policies referred to in this booklet. CYP employees should always refer to the relevant policy for a full understanding of the contents.

The final section of this document provides extra references for anyone wishing to read further.

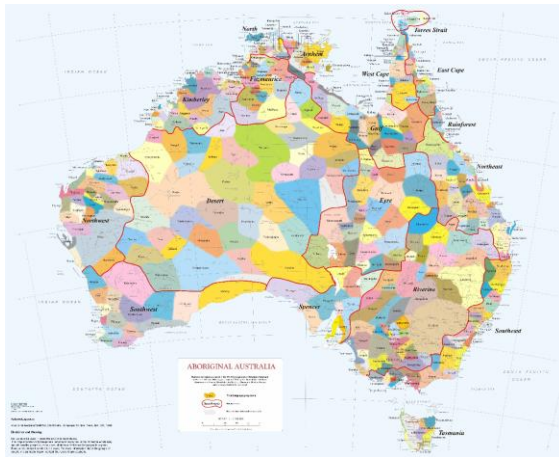
Aboriginal People

Aboriginal or Indigenous Australians are a people who descend from Aboriginal Australians, identify as being Aboriginal and are recognised as Aboriginal by members of their community.

Aboriginal heritage includes Aboriginal people from across mainland Australia, Tasmania and other islands such as Stradbroke Island and Groote Eylandt. It also includes Torres Strait Islanders from the Torres Strait Islands, which lie between the tip of Cape York and Papua New Guinea.

Aboriginal cultures are both unique and extremely diverse and are among the world's longest surviving cultures dating back over 60,000 years.

Prior to European colonisation, more than six hundred separate nations or language groups lived on mainland Australia.



Today, Indigenous Australians make up approximately two per cent of the Australian population.

Aboriginal identity is often multi layered. Aboriginal people may identify through, a language group, a clan and/or a family. They may also identify with a town or community they come from.

In some parts of Australia, Aboriginal people may also identify through nation groups that link into Australian states. For example:

- Koori is often used to refer to Aboriginal people from NSW and Southern Queensland;
- Koorie is often used to refer to Aboriginal people from Victoria;
- Noonga is often used to refer to Aboriginal people from Western Australia;
- Nunga is often used to refer to Aboriginal people from South Australia;
- Palawa is often used to refer to Aboriginal people from Tasmania;
- Murri is often used to refer to Aboriginal people from Queensland and North West NSW.

This practice is less common in Far Northern Australia where Aboriginal identity is more often associated with language and clan groups.

In Cape York the term Bama (variation being Pama) is often used by Aboriginal people to refer to aboriginal people from the Cape York region.

Engaging with Aboriginal people

Protocols

A growing number of government and academic institutions – including indigenous institutions – have tried to prescribe ways for non-Aboriginal Australians to better engage with Aboriginal people.

There is no easy way to capture the complexities of Aboriginal culture without resorting to generalised assumptions and racial/cultural stereotypes. Such circumstances are likely to lead to confusion in regards to “appropriateness” and potential offensiveness. Often the term “protocols” is merely used to mean respect.

CYP believes in allowing employees to apply common sense and rational thinking and be sensitive, respectful and professional when it comes to engaging with Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal Customs

The traditional customs and languages of Aboriginal people are very diverse and fluid. While many Aboriginal people still practice elements of their traditional customs and speak their traditional languages, many others have declined or are evolving.

There are some practices which employees are likely to come across among some Aboriginal people in Cape York. The following are a few examples:

- The terms “uncle” and “aunty” are often used among Aboriginal people as a form of respect for older people in the community, sometimes even among people who are not blood relations. There has developed a practice among some governments and businesses to adopt this terminology. Employees, who are not Aboriginal or related, should avoid using such terms and should refer to people by their Christian names, the exception being when an employee has formed a close relationship and has been requested to do so.
- Traditional Aboriginal family relationships are often complex. Their kinship system is determined by family connections, land, marriage and connection to the language groups and estates. Most Aboriginal people are more than happy to talk about what language group or family group they are from, or how they are related to someone else. Employees are encouraged to ask these types of questions of Aboriginal people as it is a great way to strengthen relationships and learn more about Aboriginal people.
- Some Aboriginal people are forbidden from talking directly to, touching or even being near some other family members. This is often described as an “avoidance relationship” or commonly explained as a person being a “poison relative”. People practicing such relationships may choose to communicate with this relative indirectly through a third party. This practice is often very discreet and an employee may not even realise such a custom is taking place. If an employee is engaging with an individual or family and is informed that an avoidance relationship exists between family members, the employee should allow the family to work through how the meeting can continue and still meet customary obligations.
- Some Aboriginal people do not speak of, or show images of, anyone who has recently passed away. Other Aboriginal people are proud to show their relatives images when they pass away. To be safe it is best to avoid using images or names of people who have passed away in the past year or so unless contact has been made with the family. If an employee needs to refer to a deceased person to a family member they should refer to the person in terms like ‘the old lady,’ ‘him’, ‘young girl’, etc. Aboriginal people, and even employees, may share the same name as a

person who has passed away in the past year. Some Aboriginal groups may give this person a different name for that period.

- Many traditional owners have cultural rules relating to behaviour on traditional lands. For instance, it may be forbidden to enter, swim or even fish in areas of special significance. Employees are expected to abide by such rules. These areas are not usually signed or indicated on a map. Employees need to take special care when seeking to go to homelands and should ask the traditional owners if there are any special rules about areas they wish to visit.

Communicating with Aboriginal people

There is extensive diversity in the education levels and understanding of English among Aboriginal people. While many children today routinely have lower than average literacy levels, and many adults did not receive a formal education, there are always exceptions to this and varying degrees of literacy. Employees should not presume Aboriginal peoples literacy levels or how familiar people are with business and government.

Tips for Communicating with Aboriginal people

The following tips provide advice on communicating with Aboriginal people:

- Speak simply and clearly.
- Take time to explain new concepts or unfamiliar words.
- Refer to people by their first name as you would any other adult. Do not use familiar terms unless you are related, it is your custom or the person/s has requested it.
- Observe people's reactions; check that complex topics are being understood. If you feel you are not being understood, ask if the point needs clarifying and then break down the point more.
- Silence doesn't necessarily mean that people don't understand. People may be remaining noncommittal out of respect for senior people to speak first.
- Be careful with humour, especially sarcasm, it may be interpreted differently than you intended and cause offence.

Tips for presenting information to Aboriginal people

The following tips provide advice on presenting to Aboriginal people:

- Develop your 'script' prior to the presentation (PowerPoint is a good tool for this).
- Seek out advice from colleagues who have experience in delivering similar presentations.
- Use pre-approved presentations or gain leadership approval.
- Break down complex ideas into simple points.
- Aim for simplicity rather than simplistic - don't 'dumb it down'.
- Use diagrams, metaphors and simple sentences.
- You may only get one chance to convince people so don't waste time being ill-prepared.
- Test run the presentation on colleagues.
- Speak to colleagues to clarify background information about the group or particular person.
- Prior to meeting, set up equipment and check it works.

Living in Aboriginal communities

Working and living in a remote community

CYP has learnt that employees, who integrate into communities by making friends with local aboriginal families and spending time outside work getting to know them, tend to have better work and living experiences in remote communities. They often form stronger relationships and networks across the community which often result in more effective outcomes.

There are many amazing and fascinating people, cultures and country in remote communities and this is an opportunity to experience a unique environment that few others in Australia ever get to experience. All employees should maximise their opportunities to get to know people and integrate when they are in these communities.

Many people will also experience some challenges living in a remote community. These include the limited services available and the scarcity of entertainment, retail outlets and the distance from metropolitan areas where these things are available.

It is understandable that employees living remotely may from time to time feel isolated from amenities and their family and friends.

To support this, permanent employees living remotely are all offered support via remote community benefits. For further information on these benefits, please refer to the Cape York Partnerships Human Resources policies available on the Cape York Partnerships intranet site.

Role modelling welfare reform principles

All employees, volunteers and secondees need to be able to role model welfare reform principles in communities where the majority of CYP activity occurs.

All employees need to have an understanding of and live by welfare reform principles whilst working in or visiting Cape York.

The agenda of CYP means it places certain policy restraints on employees that travel to live and work in remote communities. This includes the blanket ban on alcohol, drugs, gambling and smoking as a way of supporting indigenous leader and not contributing to the substance abuse problem. CYP regards abstinence and alcohol management as the best response to the current substance abuse epidemic. Refer to the CYP Alcohol, Drugs, Gambling and Smoking Policy for more detailed information.

Tips for preparing to live in a remote community

Employees should understand that there may be limited social opportunities when living in a remote community. You should plan for this prior to arrival. The following tips provide advice on preparing to live in a remote community:

- Review websites and set up online accounts to purchase mail order goods. There is a large array of online stores and outlets to purchase clothes, music and other goods.
- Supermarkets in Cairns can help to set up accounts for goods to be delivered to communities. Further details on this and other services available in communities are available on the Cape York Partnerships site fact sheets.
- Set up a blog or an online diary for families and friends to read about what you are doing.
- Join social networking sites to communicate with friends and people with similar interests.

- Purchase items that can be taken to the community for leisure activity such as hobbies, books, DVDs, games etc.
- Sign up to a remote course of study.

Tips on integrating into a community

The following tips are helpful to build strong relationships with Aboriginal people:

- When you first arrive in a community let your partners know you have arrived.
- Seek out the many opportunities to form friendships with the people in a community. Use your manager and others familiar with the community to introduce you to people.
- Socialise with local families in town or on homelands.
- Seek out hobbies or activities and take with them you to the community.
- Team up with other colleagues and travel to other places in the Cape with Aboriginal people.
- Go away with families on the weekend.
- Join a local sporting team or exercise group or start your own.
- Set up a local activity involving children.
- Try and organise social events that do not involve drinking such as sporting events or barbeques.
- Set up or join a book club.
- Volunteer for other project or regional organisation events.
- Take every opportunity to learn Aboriginal Australian languages from people in the community.

Tips for leisure activities in a remote community

Employees should understand that there may be limited social opportunities when living in a remote community. You should plan for this prior to arrival. The following tips provide advice on ideas for leisure activities in a remote community:

- Seek out hobbies or activities (e.g. art, craft, books) and take with them you to the community.
- Undertake a remote course of study.
- Learn a language or advance your skills.
- Team up with other colleagues and travel to other places in the Cape.
- Socialise with local families in town or on homelands.
- Join a local sporting team.
- Join a mail DVD service (such as Bigpond Movies) and take a DVD player.
- Hold barbecues for your work colleagues or community members.
- Join an online library.

Travelling around Cape York

The remoteness, extreme temperatures, limited services, poor infrastructure like unsealed roads and dangerous animals mean that safety precautions must be taken when travelling around Cape York.

Driving in Cape York is challenging and potentially dangerous. The roads are very dusty, and corrugated and any reasonable rain can change that situation dramatically. It is essential that drivers take all care and ensure that they do not exceed their own capabilities in these conditions.

Saltwater or estuarine crocodiles live in the rivers, swamps and coastlines of North Queensland. Be aware that crocodiles may be present in any water hole or river. They can be found up to hundreds of kilometres away from the sea. If you are travelling in Cape York, you should seek advice from locals about crocodiles before swimming, camping, fishing or boating.

Visiting Homelands and Outstations

If you are invited to visit homelands or an outstation, you should first clear the trip with your Manager, even if the visit is outside office hours. If any trip is taken outside of work hours for recreation, employees are still seen as an agent of CYP and should therefore abide by CYP's policies in working with Aboriginal people.

All employees must have the permission of the Traditional Owners prior to visit the homelands regardless of the land's Native Title status and need to understand and obey the rules and advice given by Traditional Owners.

Tips for planning a trip in Cape York

The following tips provide advice on planning for a trip in Cape York:

- Always ensure that the vehicle is roadworthy, has enough fuel for the journey and carries at least one spare tyre and the equipment needed to change tyres as well as a first-aid kit. Any employees utilising a CYP vehicle must read and sign off the CYP Vehicle and Travel Policies prior to travelling.
- When planning to travel out of communities and townships, employees should seek the advice of Traditional Owners and the local police about the country you will be travelling in and the facilities at the destination. Employees should tell people where they are going and when they will be back or their presence may not be missed for some time should something go wrong.
- Employees should check the weather forecast and take food, water and emergency equipment, and, if not experienced at driving in remote areas, take someone who is.
- It is also recommended that you take:
 - four to ten litres of water;
 - a sleeping bag;
 - a mosquito net;
 - insect repellent;
 - a torch;

- a first aid kit;
- good hiking boots; and
- an esky and supplies.

Tips for driving in Cape York

- All drivers in Cape York should complete a Drive Safe course prior to driving on non-sealed roads. This will be arranged by Cape York Partnerships.
- Drive according to speed limits and prevailing road conditions at all times. If the vehicles are damaged due to reckless behaviour the driver may be liable.
- Always, drive with headlights on in Cape York. This will ensure that you can be seen by oncoming vehicles in the very dusty conditions.
- If an animal runs in front of your vehicle, do not lock up your brakes to avoid hitting an animal. Apply threshold braking and hit the animal with full steering control. Do not attempt to handle injured animals as they will probably hurt you.
- When negotiating a water crossing approach slowly and if there is any question about the depth of the water, move to the road and stop and walk the crossing to ensure that the bottom is firm enough and you won't be bogged. Very fast flowing water should not be crossed. If there is a good firm bottom and the water is not flowing fast, it is safe to cross up to a depth of the height of your tyres. Be conscious of crocodile risk, particularly if warning signs are in place or if water is dirty and swampy.
- If the vehicle breaks down, do not attempt to walk back to where you came from. If you have advised people of where you're going and when you'll be back you will be found if you stay with your vehicle.
- If you are travelling on your own, it is not recommended that you attempt to change a flat tyre. Flag a passing car – people have a positive attitude towards helping others in the bush. It is also not recommended to travel alone off major roads.

Tips for being croc-wise in Cape York

In areas where estuarine crocodiles live the following tips can be applied:

- Don't walk through water if you can't see the bottom.
- Take extra care during breeding season, from September to April.
- Camp at least 2m above the high-water mark, and at least 50m from the water's edge.
- Never dangle your arms or legs over the side of a boat. If you fall out of a boat, get out of the water as quickly as possible.
- Avoid places where native animals and domestic stock drink.
- Don't return to the same spot on the water's edge regularly.
- Don't linger or do chores near the water's edge.

Resources on Aboriginal people, cultures and Cape York

There are a large number of references available to learn more about Aboriginal people, cultures and Cape York:

Documentaries

Takeover	A 90-minute documentary describes what happened in 1978 when the Queensland government announced its intention to take over management of Aurukun Aboriginal Reserve from the Uniting Church. When the Federal government took the side of the Aborigines the stage was set for a national confrontation. Available from Cape York Land Council.
Mabo: Life of an Island Man	Film Australia. Indigenous history and cultural issues (Torres Strait QLD) Produced by Film Australia 1997. Approx 87 minutes. Available from Cape York Land Council.
Dhuway An Australian Diaspora & Homecoming 1996	Indigenous & Australian history. DVD – 60 minutes. Available from Cape York Partnerships.

Feature movies

Rabbit-Proof Fence	Indigenous & Australian history.
The Tracker	Indigenous & Australian history.

Indigenous TV and radio programs

Message Stick	ABC TV, Sunday 1:30 pm Half hour weekly program dedicated to Australia wide Indigenous issues and current affairs.
Living Black	SBS TV, Tuesday 3:30 pm.
Away!	ABC Radio National, Friday 1:00 pm and Sunday 6:00 pm. Indigenous Art and Culture.
Speaking Out!	ABC Local radio, Sunday 9:30 pm. Culture, lifestyle and political issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia.

Indigenous-related organisations

http://www.aiatsis.gov.au	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
http://www.apunipima.org.au	Apunipima Cape York Health Council.
http://www.balkanu.com.au	Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation
http://www.cyi.org.au	Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership
http://www.indigenous.gov.au/icc	Indigenous Coordination Centres
http://www.iep.net.au	Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships

<http://www.nntt.gov.au> National Native Title Tribunal of Australia
<http://www.reconciliation.org.au> Reconciliation Australia

On-line information sites

<http://www.dnathan.com> Indigenous Languages of Australia
<http://www.medicineau.net.au> Culture Training Manual for Medical Workers in Aboriginal Communities
<http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au> Famous Indigenous People
<http://www.acn.net.au> Australia's Cultural Network, Indigenous Arts Culture and Heritage.
<http://www.sharingtruestories.com> Indigenous communication / Health / education
<http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVLPages/AborigPages/History.html> The Aboriginal Family History Project
<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/community/publications/capeyork.html> The Cape York Justice Study

Indigenous cultural tours and visitor centres

Guurrbi Tours, Hope Vale Spend the day with a Ngul-wara Elder in his ancient country, visiting sacred sites such as the Reconciliation Cave and an ancestral birthing cave. Gentle walks of two or four hours take in dramatic landscapes and important rock art sites. You'll hear the stories, myths and legends behind the paintings and learn about bush tucker, bush medicine and bush craft

Kuku Yalanji Dreamtime Walks, Mossman Gorge Take a relaxed 1 ½ hour walk through the pristine Mossman Gorge with a Kuku Yalanji guide. The Kuku Yalanji, 'people of the rainforest', can teach you about the spirituality of the area as you visit a traditional humpy and rock art sites, and see a creek-side ochre demonstration.

Wujal Wujal Walker Family Tours, Wujal Wujal, Cooktown. Spend time with the Walker family, take a two-hour bush walk with the friendly Walker family, one of the clan groups of the Kuku Yalanji people based at Wujal Wujal, 75km south of Cooktown. The informal tours take you through their ancestral land, part of the beautiful World Heritage Rainforest area. See the rainforest through their eyes and learn about its cultural and traditional significance including the stunning Bloomfield Falls.