

# CULTURAL GOVERNANCE



In this tool, you will find:

- » Guidance and resources for CaFIS providers on best practice cultural governance in children and family services
- » How to build and strengthen cultural governance
- » How to embed values such as cultural respect, safety and collaboration at every level of the CaFIS program, from design through to leadership practice and project levels.

## KEY GUIDANCE

Cultural governance allows Aboriginal culture to be placed at the centre of a service or program and is critical to the success of services and programs for Aboriginal families. Culturally competent and culturally safe service delivery begins with Aboriginal leadership and governance at the system and organisation level and filters through all levels of the organisation (DHS 2015, p. 58).

Meaningful membership and representation of Aboriginal people in the governance of organisations, programs and services are critical for setting the framework of underpinning values such as cultural respect, safety and collaboration (McGuinness & Leckning 2013).

## Cultural governance and the CaFIS program

Cultural governance is required at every level of the CaFIS program, from service design to site selection to contract management through leadership practice. Without strong cultural governance in CaFIS sites, trust can't be built, and services can't be culturally appropriate, safe or trauma-informed (Social Compass 2020, p. 27).

## Common features of cultural governance

Common features of cultural governance include Aboriginal boards, cultural frameworks and protocols, Aboriginal staff members, and provision of cultural training for non-Aboriginal staff (Social Compass, 2020, p. 23). Essential components include:

- » Culture, law, language and land are at the centre of all aspects of the program. For the CaFIS program to engage well with Aboriginal families, cultural knowledge must be centred, with culturally appropriate and culturally strong supports, activities and tools.
- » The program design is locally relevant. Programs such as CaFIS should resonate with the needs, realities and priorities of Aboriginal parents, families and communities.
- » Aboriginal involvement and leadership are built into all levels of a program and service delivery. Most Aboriginal communities have elected local councils, boards, and committees that represent their local community. The program should be a community-led and controlled intervention with Aboriginal leadership to ensure its cultural appropriateness and local relevance.
- » There is trust between communities, the sector and government. The relationship between service providers and family's needs to be based on trust and mutual respect. Where Aboriginal families have no trust in the sector and government, whether through historical or recent governmental approaches, serious and necessary work must be done to ensure consultation with Aboriginal families and communities, consideration and incorporation of their views, collaboration and transparency.

"It's very important to have your own people to talk to, that sort of stuff. It makes a difference when families know there are Aboriginal workers here, you know, you have your own people here. And also other staff who 'get it' – who don't jump straight into the problem and who don't judge"  
(Participant/Receptionist in SNAICC 2019, pp. 28-29).

## BEST PRACTICE CULTURAL GOVERNANCE RESOURCES

The following resources have been selected for their provision of best practice cultural governance in children and family services:

- 1 Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) Indigenous Governance Toolkit
- 2 SNAICC's 'Creating change through partnerships' resource
- 3 Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) resources

These three resources are summarised in this section, beginning with the Indigenous Governance Toolkit (AIGI), as this is of most relevance to Aboriginal organisations.

### Indigenous Governance Toolkit (AIGI)

The Indigenous Governance Toolkit (AIGI 2013) developed by AIGI is an online toolkit that provides practical and customisable templates, tools, tips and examples of cultural governance in action. These are provided to guide organisations in building and strengthening their governance as well as developing a collective vision, commitment and understanding. Templates and tools in this Toolkit that can support the work of CaFIS providers include:

- » A 'check-up' tool on conflicts of interest for people who sit on a governing body and on whether your organisation's processes are properly accountable
- » A decision-making template for recording decisions made alongside tips on questions to ask before making decisions
- » A governance development and action plan template
- » Tips and templates that guide organisations through producing a Governance Reference Manual.

### SNAICC's 'Creating change through partnerships' resource

SNAICC's 'Creating change through partnerships' resource (SNAICC 2020) is an introductory guide to partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in child and family services. It highlights the importance of strong cultural governance, alongside meaningful community participation, in achieving access to services and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This resource describes four key strategies that CaFIS providers can adopt in building and maintaining partnerships:

- 1 Build your and your organisation's cultural competence
- 2 Spend time building respectful relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and their organisations

- 3 Listen and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine how you can support capacity for community-led responses
- 4 Establish the processes, governance structures and accountability required for effective and sustainable partnerships.

The final strategy is particularly important in ensuring that CaFIS services have clear and effective cultural governance structures that support and provide the capacity for community-led responses.

SNAICC also provides the following eight principles for partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and non-Indigenous service providers (SNAICC 2020, p. 7):

- 1 Commitment to long-term sustainable relationships based on trust
- 2 Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history
- 3 Commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- 4 Aim to improve long-term wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities
- 5 Shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives and activities
- 6 Valuing process elements as integral to support and enable partnership
- 7 Redressing unequal or discriminatory relationships, structures and outcomes
- 8 Working differently (by developing cultural competence and safety in service delivery) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

### Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) resources

APO NT provides guidance on Aboriginal organisational governance models (Smith 2015). Guidance is aimed at non-Aboriginal organisations engaging in a partnership-centred approach in delivering services in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (APO NT 2017).

The APO NT resource on Aboriginal organisational governance models provides resources and guidance of particular use to CaFIS providers (Smith 2015). APO NT also provides the following partnership principles for non-Aboriginal organisations who are working with Aboriginal organisations and communities in the Northern Territory (APO NT 2017):

- » Consider their own capacity: Non-Aboriginal organisations should objectively assess whether they have the capacity to deliver effective and sustainable outcomes in the NT context.
- » Recognise existing capacity: Non-Aboriginal organisations will recognise the existing capacity

and particular strengths of Aboriginal Non-Government Organisations (NGO) and identify how they can contribute to further developing this capacity.

- » Research existing options: Non-Aboriginal organisations should thoroughly research existing Aboriginal service providers and development agencies before applying for service delivery contracts or prior to considering community development projects.
- » Seek partnerships: Where there is an Aboriginal NGO willing and able to provide a service or development activity, non-Aboriginal organisations should not directly compete with the Aboriginal service provider, but seek, where appropriate, to develop a partnership in accord with these principles.
- » Approach to partnership: Non-Aboriginal organisations will be guided by the priorities of the Aboriginal NGO in developing a partnership. Partnerships will be based on building and strengthening, rather than displacing, Aboriginal organisational capacity and control. Processes for developing partnerships will need to recognise the inherent power imbalance between large non-Aboriginal organisations and small Aboriginal organisations, and will need to allow sufficient time for partnership development.
- » Recognise, support and promote existing development practice: Non-Aboriginal organisations acknowledge that many Aboriginal organisations already have robust and effective development practices embedded in a cultural framework, although some of this may be implicit and undocumented. Non-Aboriginal organisations agree to recognise and support these practices, including through partnership arrangements.
- » Work together with Aboriginal people to create strong and viable Aboriginal organisations: Non-Aboriginal organisations recognise Aboriginal organisations and communities as lead agents in creating sustainable governance and leadership in Aboriginal communities in the NT, and agree to work within structures and processes that provide Aboriginal decision-making control. This may require formal delegation of power and the dedication of self-generated resources to assist with this process.
- » Ensure Aboriginal control, not just consultation: Non-Aboriginal organisations agree that Aboriginal organisations need to be in the 'driver's seat' and have control of development initiatives, services and programs delivered to their communities. This should include having input to decisions regarding resource allocations and staffing.
- » Develop a clear exit strategy: Where the desired outcome is for local Aboriginal organisations to deliver services or provide a development role, non-Aboriginal organisations will develop a mutually agreed, transparent exit strategy in consultation with their partners. Contracts with government should

incorporate a succession plan and long term planning for local Aboriginal organisations to deliver services, with appropriate resourcing included.

- » Ensure robust evaluation and accountability: Non-Aboriginal organisations will develop a robust accountability framework and evaluation process together with partner Aboriginal organisations and communities.
- » Cultural competency and appropriate development practice: Aboriginal organisations and non-Aboriginal organisations will seek to work together to share learnings and establish effective development practice and cultural competency standards for development projects and service delivery initiatives.

#### Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services for the purpose of disseminating important information for the benefit of the public. While the Department has used its best endeavours to ensure the information included is correct as at the time of publication, the Department makes no representation or warranty about the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of any of the information provided. The information is provided on the understanding that the Department is not providing professional advice and individuals and organisations should obtain their own appropriate professional advice before relying on any of the information provided in this document.

References used in the creation of this document

Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) 2013, 'Indigenous Governance Toolkit', 12 July 2021, <<https://toolkit.aigi.com.au/>>.

Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) 2017, 'APO NT Partnership Principles for working with Aboriginal organisations and communities in the Northern Territory', <<http://www.amsant.org.au/apont/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/21070504-APO-NT-Partnership-Principles-Updated-version.pdf>>.

Department of Human Services (DHS) 2015, 'Human services standards evidence guide', Department of Human Services, VIC.

Di Smith, 2015, 'Organising Aboriginal governance: pathways to self-determined success in the Northern Territory', APO NT, <https://irp.cdn-website.com/0174bec0/files/uploaded/Dr%20Diane%20Smith%20report%20for%20AGMP%20combined%20PDF.pdf>

Kate McGuinness and Bernard Leckning 2013, 'Bicultural practice in the Northern Territory children and families sector: Practitioners' reflections of working two-ways', Menzies School of Health Research, Centre for Child Development and Education and Strong Aboriginal Families, Together (SAF,T), Darwin, Northern Territory.

SNAICC 2019, 'Service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood development: A multiple case study from New South Wales and Queensland', SNAICC, Melbourne.

SNAICC 2020, 'Creating change through partnerships', SNAICC, Melbourne, <[https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/1148\\_SNAICC\\_PartnershipBook\\_LR-Final.pdf](https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/1148_SNAICC_PartnershipBook_LR-Final.pdf)>

Social Compass 2020, 'Evaluation of the Intensive Family Support Service for the Department of Social Services', Department of Social Services, Darwin.