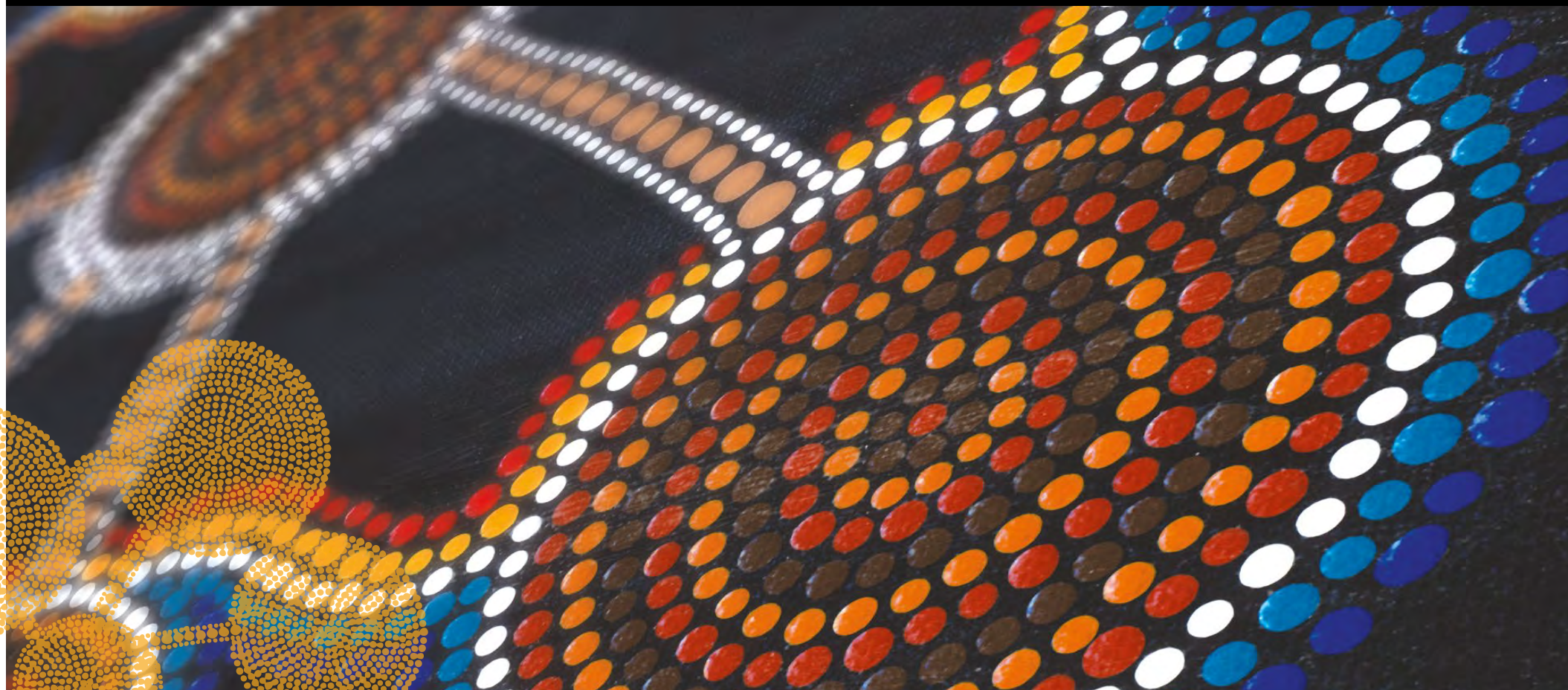




Australian Government

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability

A Framework
for Commonwealth
Agencies





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Introduction

1. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework (the Framework) provides a basis for building the cultural capability of the Commonwealth public sector¹.
2. The Framework explains the skills, knowledge, and practices that employees need to perform their duties in a culturally informed way. It offers a model to support the development of these skills across the sector.
3. The Framework supports employees and leaders to:
 - take culturally informed approaches to their day to day work;
 - ensure policy, programs, and service delivery reflect, and are appropriate to, the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
 - engage effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on relevant issues; and
 - foster workplace cultures that respect and value the skills, experiences, and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and communities.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is diverse and thriving. Tapping into this multiplicity of experience and understanding through a lens of cultural competence will reward all Australians.”

Russell Taylor, Principal, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

¹ For the purpose of this Framework, the Commonwealth public sector refers to all corporate and non-corporate Commonwealth entities under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, and any other bodies that employ staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*.



Cultural Capability in the Commonwealth Public Sector

4. Commonwealth public sector employees affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a range of ways. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens are among the most disadvantaged people in Australia. The Australian Government is committed to achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and specific priorities have been set in health, employment, and education.
5. Improving outcomes in these and other areas cannot be achieved without cultural capability. Equally crucial is the ability to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the development and delivery of policy, programs, and services that affect them.
6. Capability models provide a framework for identifying key workforce capability requirements². The Cultural Capability Framework enables agencies and managers to identify skills and practices that support good outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
7. As an employer, the Commonwealth public sector is committed to the attraction and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, as outlined in the *Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy*³. Greater cultural capability among managers and employees will improve employment opportunities and experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. This in turn will drive improved attraction and retention outcomes.

² ANAO (2008) *Management of Recruitment in the Australian Public Service*, Audit Report No. 31, Performance Audit, Australian National Audit Office, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia.

³ Australian Public Service Commission (2015) *Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 1 July 2015*.

About the Framework

8. The Framework is not prescriptive. It provides a basis for senior executives, human resource (HR) practitioners, and line managers to develop practical strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability in their agencies. Individual employees may also find the Framework useful as a guide for personal development.

The framework model

9. The Framework highlights three domains of cultural capability, drawing upon the KNOWING, DOING, and BEING framework used by Snook et al (2012)⁴. In each domain there are core and functional areas of capability that can be applied at any classification. The cultural capabilities can be integrated into agency capability frameworks and used in conjunction with existing frameworks for leadership, core skills, and management expertise.
10. Cultural capability requires continuous development and practice in all three domains, as shown in Figure 1—a continuous process of learning.

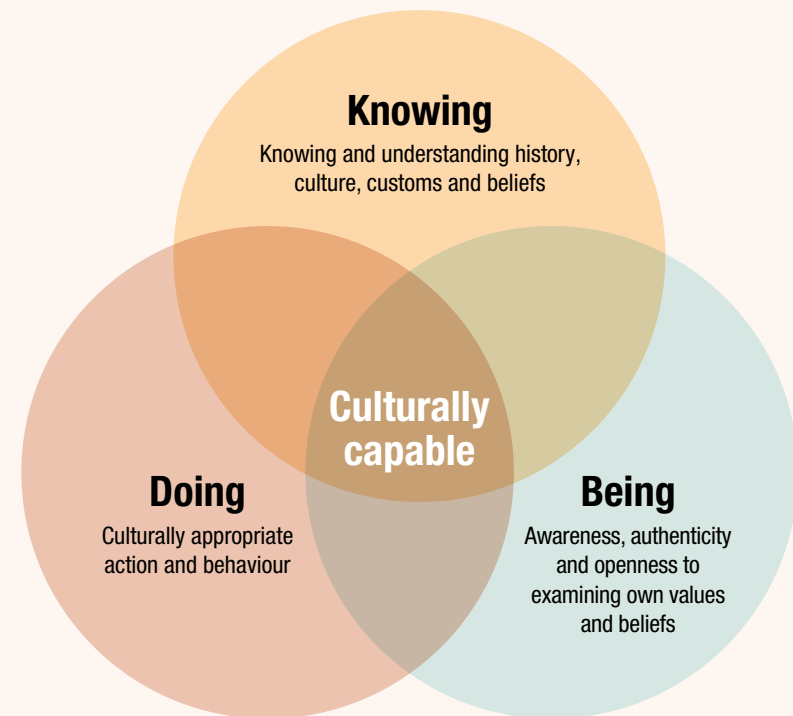


Figure 1: The Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Model. Effective practice in all three domains contributes to an employee becoming culturally capable.

⁴ Snook, Scott, Nitin Nohria, and Rakesh Khurana, (2012, XV) *The Handbook for Teaching Leadership: Knowing, Doing, and Being*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications



Cultural capability domains

Knowing

- Gaining knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, customs, histories, and place-based circumstances.
- Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples current and past interactions with government.

Doing

- Taking action in a culturally appropriate way.

Being

- Demonstrating authentic respect for culture in all interactions. Being aware of personal values and biases and their impact on others.
- Having integrity and cultural sensitivity in decision-making.

Knowing | Doing | Being

- Continuously building capability across all three domains.
- Cultural capability is a process of continuous learning.

Applying the framework

Australian Public Service Commission

11. The Commission supports the Framework by providing good practice advice, strategies, and resources⁵. The Commission helps agencies to share cultural capability development strategies, case studies, initiatives, and research to develop employee skills and improve agency practices.

Agency Leadership

12. Agency heads and senior leaders may use the Framework to develop their own cultural capabilities as well as championing initiatives to develop the cultural capability of all employees.
13. Many levers can be used to develop cultural capability across the workforce, including the agency's corporate plan and strategic documents. More targeted policy documents may include Workplace Diversity Programs, Reconciliation Action Plans, Indigenous Employment Strategies, human resource strategies, and learning and development plans.

Agency Business

14. Where services or programs are being delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or communities, the Framework can be used to guide assessment of the cultural capability of those contracted to deliver these services. Cultural capabilities may be outlined in the contract and tender proposals as an integral part of the requirements.

⁵ Resources on cultural capability are available on the APSC website: www.apsc.gov.au





Strategies for HR practitioners and managers

15. The Framework assists HR practitioners and managers to identify the cultural knowledge, skills, and personal attributes needed to deliver the agency's outcomes.
16. The Framework can be used to:
 - **Recruit for cultural capability**—inform the content of job advertisements and recruitment processes.
 - **Assess cultural capability**—identify, analyse, and benchmark workforce capability strengths and gaps at a whole of agency, team or individual level.
 - **Develop cultural capability**—support the development and delivery of targeted learning and development initiatives.
 - **Lead with cultural capability**—clarify the cultural expectations of leaders in their day to day work and as managers of others.

- **Improve workforce planning**—identify the workforce requirements for current and future agency functions where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are affected.
- **Improve performance management**—increase cultural capability for all employees through integration into performance frameworks.
- **Support mentoring and coaching**—transfer cultural understanding and skills against targeted areas of capability.
- **Support procurement and intellectual property**—build understanding of the cultural implications of procurement policies and intellectual property laws and policies, including those relevant to Aboriginal art and heritage.

Measuring success

17. The Commission will work with agencies to measure the usefulness of the capabilities.
18. Surveys conducted for the purposes of the annual State of the Service Report will be used to measure the impact of the Framework in improving retention and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait employees.

The cultural capability map

19. The Framework's cultural capability map spells out two core capabilities and five functional capabilities.

Core cultural capabilities

Foundation

20. Foundation cultural capabilities are the baseline capabilities for all employees, regardless of their role, function, agency, or classification. These are the essential cultural capabilities for all Commonwealth employees.

Leadership

21. Leadership is a practice rather than a position and it can be practised at all levels⁶. The leadership capabilities are important in setting direction and embedding culture. They should be developed and applied by anyone exercising leadership responsibilities.

Function-specific cultural capabilities

22. Certain functions and work activities are more likely to impact outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Employees performing these functions or activities need additional cultural capabilities.

Community engagement

23. Employees who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will achieve better outcomes if engagement, consultation, and negotiation are culturally informed. The 'community engagement' cultural capabilities support effective community engagement activities.

Individual service delivery

24. Many employees deliver services directly to members of the public, including to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The 'individual service delivery' cultural capabilities support effective interactions and communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aimed at improving service delivery.



⁶ Page 7, *APS Leadership and Core Skills Strategy: 2014-15 refresh*, Australian Public Service Commission



Policy formulation

25. The 'policy formulation' cultural capabilities target employees responsible for developing policy that may impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The impact may be direct or indirect.

Program delivery

26. Program delivery is undertaken throughout Australia, both in cities and in regional and remote areas, and is often contracted to third parties. The 'program delivery' cultural capabilities provide a base level for employees undertaking this function. Specific local knowledge and insights may also be needed to be effective in this work.

Research

27. Employees engaged in research projects that involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities require 'research' cultural capabilities. These help employees take a culturally informed approach to the research method, publication, evaluation, and management of outcomes.



Commonwealth public sector

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability map, core cultural capabilities

Foundation—All Commonwealth employees regardless of role, function or level		
Knowing	Doing	Being
<p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the legislative frameworks, policies and agency plans relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the impacts of historical events and previous policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the current issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how this is framed by history the significance of cultural events and celebrations such as NAIDOC, Sorry Day and Reconciliation the significance of cultural protocols, practices, and definitions of family, and how these impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their world views and shared connections to land and culture Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business within the agency and the outcomes the agency is responsible for delivering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages with cultural events, celebrations, and commemorations Communicates respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, clients, and colleagues Uses diverse knowledge and experiences to achieve outcomes As appropriate, advocates regard for the relevance and importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, heritage, values, and protocols Learns about societal and kinship systems and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to observe protocols and maintain cultural systems Works towards eliminating racism through own actions. Adapts communication methods and styles when required to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Undertakes ongoing cultural learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is sensitive, empathetic, and respectful towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage Considers and respects the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and encourages this in others Actively seeks out and values the diverse views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Identifies and challenges inappropriate behaviours in others Is aware of own personal and cultural biases and how these impact their own perspectives, and puts in place strategies to overcome these Acknowledges the contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to Australian society.

Commonwealth public sector

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability map, core cultural capabilities

Leadership—Set the direction and embed the workplace culture through leadership		
Knowing	Doing	Being
<p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the value of leadership practice in developing and implementing policy and legislation—especially in complex areas the cultural context and the impacts of past events, policies and programs and their relevance to emerging issues, challenges and opportunities the sources of knowledge resting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, stakeholders and networks the broader implications of the government's agenda for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates expectations in relation to cultural awareness and diversity Leads the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to deliver the Government's priorities in a culturally appropriate way Acknowledges and shows appreciation for contributions and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in achieving outcomes Works in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve shared outcomes Makes careful observations to understand the underlying dynamics shaping an issue Models inclusive behaviours and challenges and deals promptly with inappropriate behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively learns from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about their culture and supports others to do so Encourages and draws on different cultural experiences and knowledge Respects and supports the social and kinship systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Has an authentic and respectful interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, policy, and implementation matters Takes the perspective of others, seeking to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' points of view and experiences Engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in a sensitive and equitable manner Displays moral courage, including speaking out when observing inappropriate behaviour.

Commonwealth public sector

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability map, function-specific cultural capabilities

Community engagement—Engage, consult or negotiate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities		
Knowing	Doing	Being
<p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural models, protocols and community dynamics and uses this to shape consultation approaches and engagement with communities • priorities and needs of specific communities • process and protocols of community engagement in the community's context • the impact of attitudes, beliefs and past experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the engagement and consultation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works within cultural and community protocols to deliver results • Facilitates, encourages and values the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members • Allows adequate time for community members to consider issues and engage productively • Ensures ongoing communication to discuss outcomes, actions and initiatives with the community • Identifies and resolves conflict productively and respectfully to build trust and maintain relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows respect for community perspectives and needs • Responds positively to differences and communicates respectfully • Identifies opportunities to learn and develop cultural understanding • Listens carefully to ensure all views are shared and understood.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability map, function-specific cultural capabilities

Individual service delivery—Deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities		
Knowing	Doing	Being
<p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">the issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities at the local level and more broadlythe protocols for providing culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clientsthe opportunities for working across jurisdictions at a local levelthe kinship systems within the local community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Applies appropriate flexibility in service delivery to meet the cultural needs of individualsMakes information accessible, culturally appropriate, and targeted to the audienceManages and resolves conflict with respect for the individual and their cultureCreates a safe interpersonal environment by listening and showing a respectful interest in culture, past experience, and personal circumstances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Shows sensitivity and respect for culture in responding to individual needs and circumstancesActively seeks opportunities to deliver outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clientsIs flexible and willing to tailor approaches to create culturally appropriate solutionsRespects the complexities of kinship systems and supports individuals and the community to meet cultural and kinship obligations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability map, function-specific cultural capabilities

Policy formulation—Formulate policy that may impact directly or indirectly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities		
Knowing	Doing	Being
<p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the tiers of government and how these relate to one another in developing policy that impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural beliefs, customs and requirements in the policy development process cross portfolio and whole of government issues and priorities as they impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and the dynamics of engaging with them respectfully possible unintended consequences or disproportionate impact of ‘mainstream’ government policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieves policy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities through connecting with other agencies and working co-operatively Identifies local issues and develops local level strategies to implement changes in policy Recognises and attributes the expertise and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in developing policy Draws on evidence through appropriate resources, knowledge, networks and consultation in policy development Shares the vision for success by actively engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in policy development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes opportunities to connect and partner with other agencies on policy development that impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Actively engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders Creates a shared understanding of the cultural issues on policy Shows respect and professionalism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities throughout the policy development process Recognises the unique nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Commonwealth public sector

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability map, function-specific cultural capabilities

Program delivery—Deliver outcomes through programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities		
Knowing	Doing	Being
<p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • government policy in the context of achieving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities • the cultural context for decision making and the implications for program delivery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities • the processes and requirements of funding, grant administration, contract management, purchasing arrangements and program guidelines and how these can be adapted to meet specific community needs • key community stakeholders and their role in their community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies appropriate flexibility in program delivery to meet the specific cultural needs of the community • Consults the community to develop and implement local level strategies • Builds and continues to strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities • Involves community stakeholders in program delivery and advocacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows respect and behaves professionally towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in all program delivery circumstances • Supports and enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers to deliver program outcomes • Collaborates with other agencies and those working on the ground in delivering programs to achieve outcomes • Builds the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities • Builds trust with the community by listening and showing a genuine, respectful interest in the community's specific issues and opportunities.

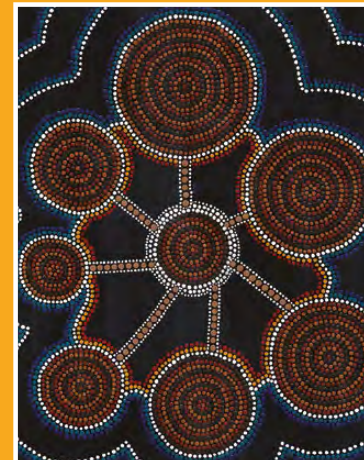
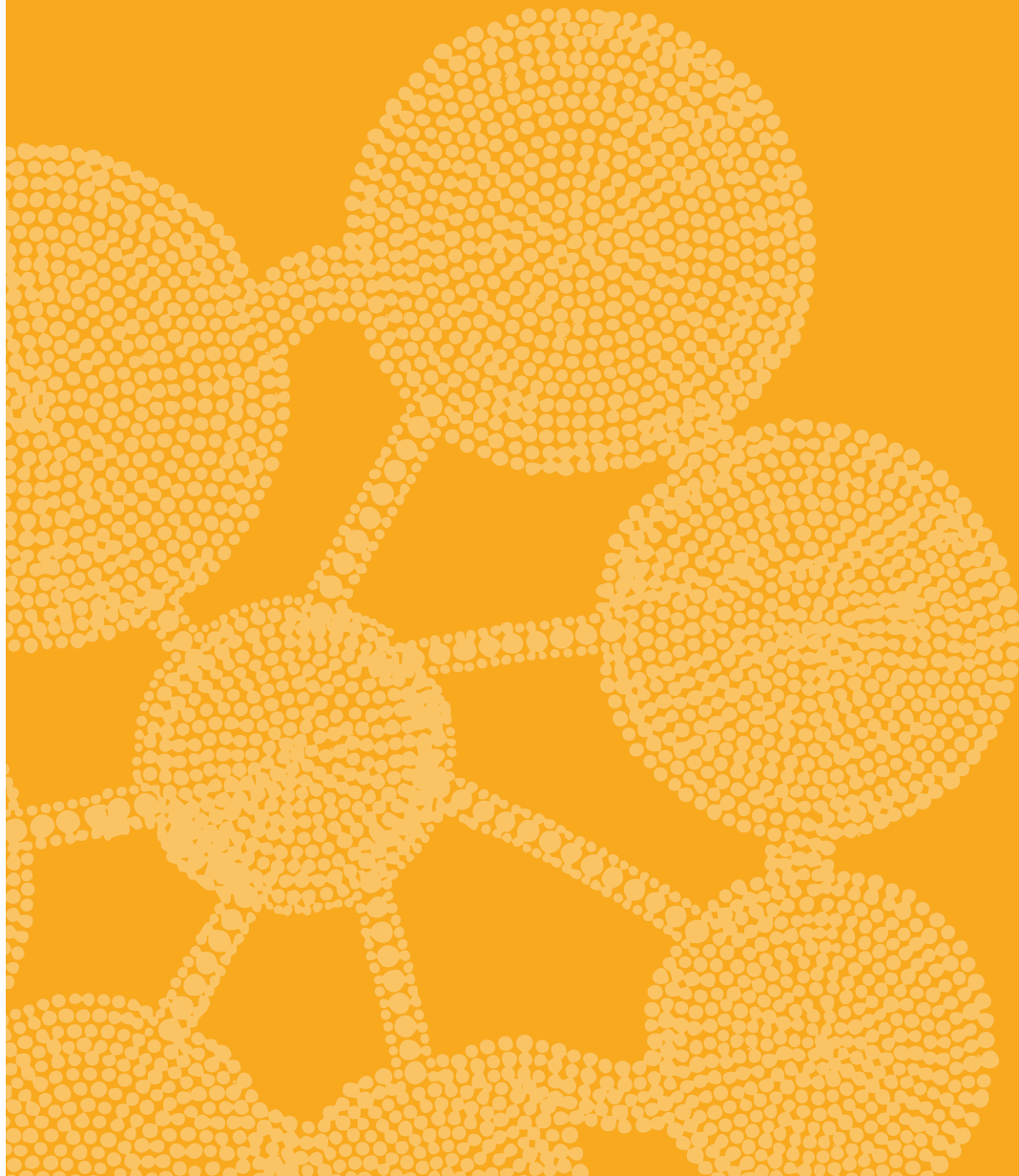
Commonwealth public sector

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability map, function-specific cultural capabilities

Research —Research, monitor and evaluate projects that involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities		
Knowing	Doing	Being
<p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the requirements and principles provided in the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies⁷ good practice research methods and the cultural requirements of conducting research with or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the heritage, cultural and intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as they apply to research that research should be for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. the impact of mainstream research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies evidence based research methodology, underpinned by ethical and culturally acceptable practices Achieves outcomes that ensure equitable benefits for participating communities Research is conducted in line with community expectations and cultural protocols, and allows for ongoing opportunities for community involvement Data is gathered, interpreted, analysed, and presented in ways that are most useful and least disruptive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commits to meaningful engagement and reciprocity⁸ between the researcher and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities Identifies verbal and non-verbal cues and responds with sensitivity and respect Is empathetic and non-judgmental when undertaking and using research Shows respect for the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledge and materials when designing and undertaking research Engages and negotiates in good faith, with the intent to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

⁷ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2012) *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia

⁸ Reciprocity in this instance is a commitment to return research results to communities in an appropriate, accessible and timely manner



**Contributing artist
Sarah Richards**



I am a Nyiampaa descendant of the Wongaibon tribe which is located in the Riverine area of NSW. I am a mostly self-taught artist who paints modern Aboriginal artworks as a hobby. I draw my inspiration from my childhood spent by the sea and my trips back to the bush. Now that I live in Canberra, I make regular trips out to the Riverine area to find further inspiration for my paintings. These trips back are when I feel most at home.

'Journeys' artwork (pictured)

'Journeys' is about all the participants of the APS Indigenous Pathways program and their journeys from their respective state or territory to the central meeting place, the Australian Capital Territory, to complete the program and achieve their goals.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community and pay respect to elders both past and present.

Please be aware that this report may contain images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away.

