

Meaningful Action Guide



Understand what it means to take action in meaningful, respectful ways and get ideas for your next steps as a school or workplace



WHAT



WHY



HOW

AUSTRALIANS
TOGETHER



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PART ONE

Introduction

Actions are more meaningful if they're done the right way.

This guide has been created with ideas and tips to help you on your journey to meaningful and respectful action.

Your school has an important role to play in giving young Australians opportunities to develop a deeper understanding and knowledge of First Nations histories and cultures. If you're here, you know just how much this matters, and are ready to start or continue your school's journey to a brighter future.



Australians Together Learning Framework™

Our resources follow a framework of 5 Key Ideas that are designed to shape a new narrative for all Australians. Before you take action, it's important to ensure you have the knowledge, understanding and empathy needed to do so in meaningful and respectful ways.

You can learn more about the framework and download a copy [here](#).



No matter where you are on your journey, we recommend you focus on learning about The Wound, Our History, Why Me? and Our Cultures before moving on to My Response.

You might like to explore our [Discover and Learn](#) section, full of articles organised by our Learning Framework. Or, you can get an overview of the Learning Framework in one of our [Professional Learning courses and workshops](#).

We've created this guide to help you find a meaningful path for your school as you begin to consider your response. It has been co-created with First Nations writers, educators and cultural advisers.

How to ensure your actions are meaningful and respectful

As you learn about this country's shared history and the impact it continues to have today, your first reaction may be to take action straight away. It's important to remember that how you respond is just as important as what you do. Sometimes we can jump to action before we're ready, or take an approach that's not sensitive or respectful.

To help you take a considered approach to action, we've outlined three things to keep in mind as you start and continue your journey.

Be informed

Being informed means understanding the action you're considering before you start; what it is, why it's important and how to approach it.

Once you know what's involved in taking an action, you also need to determine whether it's the most meaningful and appropriate way for your school to get involved. To do this, you need to understand the bigger story it's part of, the cultural and historical significance of the action, and the different perspectives of First Nations Peoples. It's important to remember that every community has its own histories, cultures and stories, so make listening and learning your main focus on the journey.

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Do I understand the what, why and how of this action?
2. Have I considered First Nations Peoples, histories and cultures in my local area?
3. Is this the right action for our school?

Work together

If meaningful change and healing are to happen, we have to work together.

A together mindset means prioritising relationships over outcomes. When connecting with First Nations people in and beyond your school, focus on listening and learning, rather than moving quickly towards the action you have in mind. It may mean that you have to put aside some of your ideas of how things should be done in order to truly collaborate.

As you embark on (or continue) your journey, make it a priority to share your vision and identify ways to meaningfully involve staff, students and families. This will help your whole school community to walk together with a shared purpose and commitment.

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Are we making relationships our first priority?
2. Are we taking a collaborative approach?
3. Have I clearly communicated our vision and why we're on this journey with our school community?

Be committed

A committed school community is one that understands why embedding First Nations perspectives across their school matters, believes they can make a difference, knows their role in change, and is on the journey for the long-term.

Help to grow this commitment among your staff, students and families by ensuring everyone understands that there's a connection between what happens on your school grounds, and the bigger picture of better lived experiences for First Nations Peoples.

Show your commitment in a tangible way by documenting your vision and plans, setting timeframes, and allocating responsibilities. Share your commitment (in the appropriate level of detail) with your school community so there's understanding and accountability. We also recommend including this as part of your onboarding for new staff, so everyone's aware of the journey so far, and your commitments for the future.

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Does everyone in our school understand why our commitment matters?
2. Have we documented our vision and commitments?
3. Are we being held accountable to the commitments we've made?

PART TWO

Taking action in your school

Below are five areas to consider as part of a comprehensive response. Browse each section to discover ways you can take action, and get advice on how to do this in a respectful way.

**Engaging
leadership**

**Supporting
teacher
practice**

**Getting
students
involved**

**Connecting
with local
community**

**Celebrating
First Nations
cultures**

In each section, you'll find a list of ideas for taking meaningful action. They're divided into 'Getting started' and 'Going further'. Some actions are in both sections as there's natural overlap between each area.

If you're not sure where to begin, we suggest selecting 1 to 3 actions from each area you feel you could achieve in the next 1 to 2 years.

On the website you'll find more information on the action ideas in this guide:



What's this action?



Why's this action significant?



How do we take action in a respectful way?

Engaging leadership

Engage key decision-makers to drive meaningful and lasting change.

Embedding First Nations perspectives across your whole school means engaging all parts of the school community, from students to staff to leadership. Engaging leadership is essential because without their buy-in and support, it's hard to make meaningful and lasting change. This might include your Executive Leadership team, Board, Aboriginal Education Officers or Liaisons, Heads of Department, Curriculum Coordinator, or any other key decision-makers in your school community.

Many leadership teams are eager to involve a local Elder or First Nations leader as their first step towards deeper engagement, but we recommend starting with some foundational learning. We have [Professional Learning](#) sessions to support you and your leadership team to understand the current context by diving into the history that's brought us here today, and why it's important for the whole school to engage. If you're considering engaging locally, it's important to remember building relationship, rather than asking for something, is the first step.

Getting started

- Hold Professional Learning sessions with your leadership team.
- Establish a working group of leaders, staff, students and parents.
- Identify a 'champion' to advocate at leadership level.
- Invite your leadership to attend key First Nations events.
- Include an Acknowledgement of Country in email signatures.
- Factor in time for planning sessions for learning area departments.
- Encourage staff to take small steps to build confidence.
- Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) or a dedicated plan.
- Share your plans with the wider school community.

Going further

- Look for, vet and share relevant resources with learning areas or year levels.
- Embed First Nations perspectives into onboarding for new staff.
- Support teachers to engage more in First Nations Professional Learning.
- Invite a First Nations Elder to share with your Board and leadership team.
- Learn more about appropriate language and terminology.
- Include an Indigenous adviser on your school council.

Head to australiantogether.org.au/meaningful-action-guide to get more information on each of the actions listed above.

Supporting teacher practice

Equip and support teachers to embed First Nations perspectives in a meaningful way.

Helping students build an understanding of and appreciation for First Nations histories, cultures and perspectives isn't just something all teachers are required to do – it's important for the future of Australia. If students connect with these perspectives throughout their education, they'll become adults with the understanding and empathy needed to build a brighter future.

Encouragement for teachers to get started

1. As a teacher, **you're trained to approach topics you don't know everything (or much) about**. You already have the skills you need to learn more about First Nations perspectives and embed these into your teaching. It's about leaning into these, and using them to navigate an area that may feel unfamiliar.
2. **Allow yourself time to learn, and to start small** when it comes to embedding First Nations perspectives into your teaching.

If you're not sure where to start, our [Learning Framework](#) gives an overview of the five key areas for teachers and students to discover and learn about. You can read through our vast array of First Nations stories, activities, resources and more on our [website](#), and get an overview in one of our [Professional Learning](#) sessions.

Start to incorporate what you're learning into your teaching, and as you grow your confidence, you can go further and deeper.

3. This journey may involve **getting comfortable with feeling uncomfortable**. There's always a chance you won't get it all right, say the wrong thing or not know how to respond when a student raises a challenging topic.

As a teacher, it's not your job to be a cultural expert, but to model the journey of listening, learning and curiosity to your students. This is a journey; it takes time and you may not always get it right, and that's okay. Invite your students to join you. If we don't change our approach because we're unsure, positive change will never happen!

Getting started

- Understand why embedding First Nations perspectives is so important.
- Build your understanding of First Nations histories, cultures and perspectives.
- Build your confidence to teach in a culturally respectful way.
- Audit your current approach to teaching First Nations perspectives.
- Support teachers to engage more in First Nations Professional Learning.
- Start embedding First Nations perspectives in small, meaningful ways.
- Review any existing resources that may be disrespectful to First Nation Peoples or cultures.
- Explore ready-made curriculum aligned resources relevant to your learning area.
- Factor in time for planning sessions for learning area departments.

Going further

- Look for, vet and share relevant resources with learning areas or year levels.
 - Consider First Nations pedagogies in teaching and learning activities.
 - Follow First Nations organisations and individuals online.
 - Incorporate local First Nations words and numbers into teaching.
 - Create a standing meeting item to discuss First Nations perspectives.
 - Invite student participation in your Acknowledgment of Country.
-

Getting students involved

Engage students as active participants in your school's journey.

Taking a whole-school approach to embed First Nations perspectives includes staff, leaders and students. Think about how you're actively involving all students in the journey and seeking their input and ideas on the actions you plan to take.

Including students will not only give you a source of fresh ideas, but also help them to be more engaged and take pride in the outcome, because they were part of making it happen.

Getting started

- Invite student participation in creating and sharing an Acknowledgment of Country.
- Get students to help organise or lead activities during key events.
- Establish a working group of leaders, staff, students and parents.

Going further

- Establish a First Nations community space for students, families and local community.
- Involve students in projects celebrating cultures around the school.

Head to australiantogether.org.au/meaningful-action-guide to get more information on each of the actions listed above.

Connecting with local community

Prioritise building relationships, and make meaningful connections that foster mutual respect.

A school that's committed to meaningful actions not only looks at what needs to happen within their classrooms and across the whole school, but also the wider community. The histories, cultures and Peoples of the land your campus is on will differ for every school community, which is why a focus on relationships, listening and learning should be the priority. This should start with First Nations families already connected with your school, before going to the wider community.

1. **Prioritise relationships over outcomes, and focus on listening and learning.** Your role in this isn't to bring your experience or desired outcomes, but to sit and listen. Building relationships is a two-way process, so if you're hoping someone will share their story and experiences, be willing to do the same.
2. **Recognise that each** First Nations language group has their own customs, values, stories, cultures and histories. There are important nuances to understand; for example:
 - Different people hold different cultural responsibilities.
 - Sometimes it's more appropriate for school leaders to initiate connections with Elders, while in other communities this wouldn't be the case.
 - People may prefer different words or titles.
 - Traditional Custodians aren't always the same as Traditional Owners.

Go into your conversations with the posture of a learner, so you can better understand the local histories and cultures your school is part of. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you're unsure of something such as titles, responsibilities and expectations, as this is an appropriate way of showing respect.

3. **Go out before inviting in.** If you're looking to connect with local First Nations Elders, leaders or community, we suggest starting by attending local First-Nations-led events. It's important for community to see that you're interested and committed. Volunteering your time and services to assist with local events is another great way to get more involved and demonstrate your commitment.
4. **Don't make it a one-off.** What matters most is that you show up consistently, year after year. It shows that the relationships you're building matter, the journey you're on is a priority to you and your school, and you understand that real change takes time.
5. **Be mindful of 'cultural load'.** There's growing demand on the time of Elders and First Nations leaders to engage with organisations of all kinds. This is particularly true during key events like National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week. Not only are Elders and leaders often expected to give time and share cultural knowledge, but also difficult experiences from their life and community. You can help by considering the things above, but also in practical ways, such as timing (e.g. hosting cultural awareness training at a time of year that's less busy) and ensuring you remunerate anyone who shares their time and knowledge with your school.

Getting started

- Learn more about appropriate language and terminology.
- Connect more with First Nations families in your school.
- Attend local First Nations events.

Going further

- Invite First Nations families to share experiences and hopes for the school.
- Connect with local Elders.
- Connect with local First Nations organisations and cooperatives.
- Learn and build your school's potential through partnership.
- Organise cultural incursions and excursions.
- Include an Indigenous adviser on your school council.

Celebrating First Nations cultures

Show you're committed to greater action, with small but important demonstrations that increase cultural respect and understanding.

Visibly celebrating and acknowledging First Nations Peoples, histories and cultures across your school shows you're on a journey of embracing and valuing First Nations perspectives as a whole school. By doing this, you're starting to build cultural safety and demonstrate respect for First Nations families and community members.

When part of a committed, respectful and comprehensive response, celebrating and acknowledging First Nations cultures in physical ways can be very meaningful.

What's cultural safety?

We begin to build cultural safety when we're aware of the ideas, values, customs and social behaviour that drive our own assumptions and decisions, and how these things can influence others. So, cultural safety is more than being aware of differences, showing respect and ensuring people don't experience discrimination. This awareness can help to create spaces of deep learning and collaboration, where all perspectives are valued, and everyone feels safe to be themselves.

Visibly celebrating and acknowledging First Nations cultures is a great way to show that your school's on this journey, but it's important to remember that people make a place safe, not things.

This's why we recommend listening and learning as the first step. You can start to explore the importance of culture through our interactive [Culture and Identity Activity](#), or as a group in our [Building Confidence Workshop](#).

Getting started

- Help your staff understand why celebrating cultures matters.
- Display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags at the front of your school.
- Create and perform an Acknowledgement of Country.
- Develop a whole-school value that embraces and respects First Nations perspectives and experiences.
- Display the AIATSIS '[Map of Indigenous Australia](#)' in classrooms.
- Stock the classroom with First Nations novels and picture books, including bilingual books.
- Display First Nations educational posters.
- Incorporate First Nations decorations (such as cushions, artwork) in classroom spaces.

Going further

- Invite a local Elder to perform a Welcome to Country.
- Host a smoking ceremony.
- Display the National Apology or Uluru Statement from the Heart in a central location.
- Celebrate different forms of First Nations cultural expression, like art, music, stories and song.
- Display artworks by First Nations artists (especially local artists).
- Collaborate with First Nations artists to create artwork for special projects or events.
- Include a First Nations focus in newsletters and social media.
- Promote events and community news to your staff.
- Include First Nations Peoples, languages and cultures in names and signage.
- Celebrate culturally significant national events.
- Have school houses represented by First Nation names or local totems.
- Host a screening of *The Last Daughter*.
- Learn about local First Nations foods.
- Engage with local language/s in the classroom.
- Engage with local First Nations Dreaming and Creation stories.
- Involve students in creating and performing an Acknowledgment of Country.
- Display First Nations objects in the classroom.
- Organise cultural incursions or excursions.
- Incorporate First Nations play resources like toys, puzzles, games and natural objects.
- Establish a garden of Indigenous plants as an outdoor classroom.

* Read more about [building a culturally responsive Australian teaching workforce](#) from AITSL.

Head to australiantogether.org.au/meaningful-action-guide to get more information on each of the actions listed above.

PART THREE

Start small, start somewhere

If you're not sure where to begin, we recommend focusing on four main steps.

1. Start with listening and learning

It can be tempting to jump to doing, but remember you're embarking on a journey of change, and you need to bring everyone along with you. That's why starting with listening and learning is essential.

This may take the form of self-paced online learning to build consistent understanding across all your staff, or a group workshop where you can share the experience of listening, learning and considering what your school's journey might look like.

Read more about the [Professional Learning](#) we offer on our website.

2. Feature Country recognition, signage and visible acknowledgements of culture

Acknowledging the Country you're on and increasing the visibility of First Nations cultures (e.g. with artwork) in your school is one way to show you're on the journey. It's a great way to increase cultural respect and understanding, and demonstrate that you're taking steps towards greater action.

An [Acknowledgement of Country](#) can be applied in many places, from a verbal Acknowledgement at events and meetings, to signage at the front of the school, or acknowledging Country in email signatures and on your website. Artwork can also be displayed in key locations around your school, or commissioned for special occasions. It's important to remember to approach the purchase and commission of artwork in the correct manner – read more about that [here](#).

3. Attend First-Nations-led events and build relationships with local Elders and leaders

A good first step is to consider taking part in First Nations events and activities already run in your local community. Events are held regularly during [National Reconciliation Week](#) and [NAIDOC Week](#). Read more about finding local events [here](#).

You can then start to build relationships with First Nations community Elders and leaders, but remember, many cultural advisors are in high demand and only have so much time. Read more about this, and other important things to keep in mind, in the section on [Connecting with local community](#).

4. Communicate the 'why' behind your actions to your school community

As you begin taking action, it's important to bring everyone along on the journey. This includes all staff (teaching and non-teaching), students, parents and any other relevant wider community members or partners.

There are a few simple ways you can start to demonstrate and communicate about the journey you're on:

1. Include an Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of school events, and explain why this is important to your school.
2. Include a First Nations focus in your existing communications, like newsletters, social media or your website.
3. Create a special information sheet or booklet about your journey, what's been happening, what's coming up and why.

At each of these points, explain why they might see new signage or artwork in the school; why you might be attending or celebrating particular events and what this means.

Explore more in the online guide

- ✓ Get detailed information on the actions listed in this guide.



What's this action?



Why's this action significant?



How do we take action in a respectful way?

- ✓ Save actions you're interested in taking, and curate a list for your school.
- ✓ Download information on the actions you'd like to take.
- ✓ Start planning at australiantogether.org.au/meaningful-action-guide.