

CLOSING THE GAP

In partnership with Local Government: Guidance Factsheet

Many local councils are already engaged in activities that align with Closing the Gap outcomes, through developing Community Strategic Plans. This Factsheet intends to guide and support local councils as they consider how to drive Closing the Gap outcomes that are place-based and adapted to local need, through their plans and delivery programs under the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

Background to the National Agreement

A new way of working together

The former NSW Premier signed the new [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) in July 2020, alongside the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (CAPO) and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). Local government is a party to the Agreement through ALGA and plays a key role in its success.

In this National Agreement, governments agreed to do things differently – by working in partnership and share decision making with Aboriginal organisations and communities to improve outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The National Agreement is centred on four priority reforms to shift the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. NSW has developed a fifth priority reform on employment, business growth and economic prosperity.

The National Agreement also contains 17 socio-economic targets across education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, languages and digital inclusion (see

Appendix A). The first [NSW Implementation Plan](#) sets out a pathway to action commitments.

The Five Priority Reforms

Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making

This priority reform is about genuine partnership between governments and Aboriginal people, to share decision making on policies and programs impacting their lives.

Priority Reform Two: Building the Community Controlled Sector

This priority reform is about increasing services delivered through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector, recognising these organisations usually achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal people and are often preferred over mainstream services.

Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations

This priority reform is about changing the way government works to eliminate racism, embed cultural safety, deliver services in partnership, increase transparency and accountability of funding, and support Aboriginal engagement and culture.

Priority Reform Four: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

This priority reform is about sharing local data and information with Aboriginal communities and organisations. It enables decision making to drive community-led priorities.

NSW-specific Priority Reform Five: Employment, Business Growth and Economic Prosperity

This priority reform is focused on growing partnership with the Aboriginal business sector by expanding opportunities for businesses to deliver government contracts. It recognises Aboriginal businesses are vehicles of self-determination, driving positive employment, training and broader social outcomes.

Local Government – Essential and Equal partners

Local government and the NSW Government have an agreement to achieve strong communities through working together as equal partners.

It is enshrined in the [Intergovernmental Agreement](#) signed in 2019 by the NSW Premier and the President of Local Government NSW. The Intergovernmental Agreement is based on the principles of consultation, communication and collaboration between the two levels of government.

PRIORITY REFORM ONE: FORMAL PARTNERSHIPS AND SHARED DECISION MAKING

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.

Target: There will be formal partnership arrangements to support Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments in each state and territory enshrining agreed joint decision-making roles and responsibilities and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have chosen their own representatives.

All councils are required to engage their communities in the development of their long-term Community Strategic Plans, to identify local priorities and aspirations. Councils should ensure they consult with local Aboriginal communities as part of ensuring the aspirations of all parts of their community are represented in their plans.

Suggested Action/prompt	Existing Examples	Areas to grow
Identify links between local council work and place-based partnerships	Barang Regional Alliance has developed its Regional Development Agenda. The Alliance works with all layers of government; the Australian Government, NSW Government and Central Coast Council to advance actions across six priority areas, including cultural learning, economic pathways and regional data network	Incorporate place-based partnerships and other Aboriginal regional plans into broader local council strategic plans and ensure alignment.
Include local Aboriginal organisations and communities in decision making	Aboriginal Consultative Committee and Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council The Committee meets quarterly and provides a vital link between Council and the local Aboriginal community; respecting the Aboriginal community's right to self-determination and community empowerment. Kyogle Shire Council has consulted closely with Aboriginal community stakeholders in reviewing the Council's Aboriginal Cultural Heritage mapping, considering tourism opportunities and addressing planning barriers to deliver housing on LALC land – including through including relevant priorities and actions in its Local Strategic Planning Statement. (supporting outcome 8, 9 and 15).	Enhance and integrate local Aboriginal organisations into local council governance and decision-making structures. Strengthen engagement on issues the Aboriginal community values or sees as important, building on approaches such as establishing Aboriginal Engagement Frameworks, similar to that established by Wollongong City Council.
Establish formal agreements and/or enhance existing agreements to meet strong partnership elements under the National Agreement (Clause 32)	North Sydney Council and Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council's Principles of Cooperation Agreement sets out how they will work together and establish a framework to consider development proposals.	Explore and participate in Place Based Partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organisations that focus on supporting the aspirations of the local community.

PRIORITY REFORM TWO: BUILDING THE COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED SECTOR

Outcome: There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.

Target: Increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOS).

Suggested Action/Prompt	Existing examples	Areas to grow
Programs and grants to Aboriginal community organisations	Tamworth Regional Council provides the 'Tamworth Grants Hub' to local businesses, community groups, not-for-profits and individuals.	Consider simplifying grant processes to increase access for ACCOs Recognise unique challenges and opportunities faced by ACCOs in assessment criteria.
Facilitate transitional uses of vacant properties, including in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS) and local land councils	City of Sydney agreed to a motion on 26 July 2021 to make unused student accommodation available to women fleeing domestic violence situations. There is potential for programs like this to support outcome 13 (reducing family violence), particularly when delivered in partnership with Aboriginal organisations. City of Sydney has also purchased a building in Redfern to develop into an Aboriginal Knowledge and Culture Centre. Blacktown Council makes land available for Aboriginal organisations to hold events such as NAIDOC.	Work with ACCOs (defined in Clause 44 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap) to explore needs and match vacant buildings. Councils can find out about ACCOs and Aboriginal businesses in their area through local land councils, lists like Supply Nation and the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce and through regional alliances. Facilitate access to safe spaces for cultural and community events.
Partnerships with ACCOs to deliver services that support other Closing the Gap outcomes and targets	Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council coordinates a playschool program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3-6 years, at Munjuwa Aboriginal Corporation. This program aligns with Priority Reform Two and drives outcomes in areas like target 4 (children participating in year before schooling) and target 16 (languages and cultures).	Consider partnership approaches with ACCOs where local Councils are delivering services through ACCOs to meet community-level outcomes.

PRIORITY REFORM THREE: TRANSFORMING GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

Outcome: Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through services they fund.

Targets:

- Decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experiences of racism.
- Increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to feel culturally safe in dealing with government mainstream institutions and agencies

Suggested Action/Prompt	Existing Examples	Areas to grow
Increase representation on local councils	• Reconciliation NSW and LGNSW work to increase Aboriginal representation on local councils and stronger cultural awareness and Aboriginal engagement.	The Office of Local Government has commissioned a report to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation at councillor level. Findings will inform local council efforts.
Increase the number of staff employed within councils	• Newcastle City Council set targets for Aboriginal recruitment and retention mechanisms, by creating cultural safety and investing in long term career planning and development e.g. <i>Newcastle City Council Aboriginal Employment Strategy (2018-2021)</i>.	Work to increase Aboriginal employment and leadership across all levels including frontline staff, managers, executives
Develop Reconciliation Action Plans as a first step and work to eliminate racism within local councils	• Mid Coast Council incorporates support for Aboriginal languages into cultural planning e.g. <i>Mid North Coast Council's Cultural Plan 2036</i>. • Blacktown Council is identifying opportunities to increase Aboriginal employment outcomes in the workplace, and eliminate racism through effective anti-discrimination strategies e.g. <i>Blacktown City Council Reconciliation Action Plan 2021-2023</i>.	Adopt Plans that reflect the aspirations of local Aboriginal communities in eliminating racism in the local area, through either Reconciliation Action Plans or local community campaigns that raise awareness on issues related to racism.
Increasing education and awareness	• North Sydney Council has developed guidelines that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally appropriate ways e.g. <i>Aboriginal Protocol Document</i>. • Lake Macquarie City Council trains staff to recognise potentially significant Aboriginal sites and areas of value, in order to protect them e.g. <i>Artefact and site identification training for Council staff</i>.	Increase visibility and recognition of Aboriginal art, artists and culture in the broader community through Local Government Awards, building on successes like Inner West Council's Gadigal Wangal Wayfinding Project and Griffith City Council's Sunshine Super Girl World Premiere and Yarruwala Wiradjuri Cultural Festival.

PRIORITY REFORM FOUR: SHARED ACCESS TO DATA AND INFORMATION AT A REGIONAL LEVEL

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.

Target: Increase the number of regional data projects to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make decisions about Closing the Gap and their development.

Suggested Action/Prompt	Existing Examples	Areas to Grow
Collect standardised datasets in local government for easier comparison across local councils, and share relevant data with community	• Blacktown City Council is a Community Data Project site under the National Agreement that will pilot data sharing between governments and local Aboriginal communities and organisations. • City of Sydney shares information through its Indigenous community profile which Aboriginal community members can access and use to inform their own decision making	Grow the partnership between the Commonwealth, local councils and Aboriginal organisations so that Aboriginal people have access to location-specific data that is available on Closing the Gap outcomes. For example: The five-year digital action plan under the Western Sydney City Deal will see the Western Parkland City become Australia's first digitally enabled smart city. Consider how this might link to better data collection to help close the gap.
Align with or partner with work of place-based partnerships	• Barang Regional Alliance on the Central Coast is working on 'Ngiyang Wayama', the first Aboriginal led and community-controlled Aboriginal Regional Data Network in the country.	Expand data sharing with ACCOs and between all levels of government, across NSW.
Strengthen capacity of Aboriginal organisations to use locally relevant data		Joint training including with private sector and different levels of government on using and interpreting data. Expand recruitment of targeted positions in councils from land management and heritage areas to also include data.

PRIORITY REFORM FIVE: EMPLOYMENT, BUSINESS GROWTH AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW are empowered to access pathways through education, training and employment that align with their aspirations, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses grow and flourish.

Target: An increase in jobs and pathways to employment, and an integrated approach to procurement across the NSW Government.

Suggested Action/Prompt	Existing Examples	Areas to Grow
Increase demand for goods and services provided by Aboriginal businesses and employees	Canterbury Bankstown Council looks to drive local procurement opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and organisations by investigating Supply Nation membership and providing a list of local Aboriginal businesses to council employees e.g. <i>Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan – Canterbury Bankstown</i>.	The 2022 review of the Local Government Procurement Guidelines provides scope to increase Aboriginal participation, by simplifying the process and encouraging councils to set targets and consider Aboriginal Procurement Policies.
Support Aboriginal businesses to grow	City of Sydney identifies actions to facilitate access to affordable space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander retailers; target grant and sponsorship opportunities; and explore initiatives that respond to the impact of non-authentic products and services e.g. <i>Eora Journey: Economic Development Plan</i>. Lake Macquarie City Council has committed to explore ways to exhibit and support young Aboriginal artists and performers e.g. through the EOI process for the Fernleigh Awabakal Shared Track artwork, which a panel of Aboriginal community representatives will assess.	Encourage local Aboriginal contractors for council-commissioned work.
Support employment and training pathways	Lake Macquarie City Council has committed to advocate and promote opportunities to employ and train Aboriginal people within council and other organisations.	Consider hosting employment expos with employers in the community to encourage Aboriginal employment. Explore partnerships with TAFE NSW to enhance training options in the local area for Aboriginal communities on particular skills needed in the Council area.

Appendix A – Socio-economic Outcome Closing the Gap Targets

Outcome	Targets
Everyone enjoys long and healthy lives	Target 1 Close the Gap in life expectancy within a generation, by 2031
Children are born healthy and strong	Target 2 By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight to 91 per cent
Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education	Target 3 By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95 per cent.
Children thrive in their early years	Target 4 By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95 per cent.
Students achieve their full learning potential	Target 5 By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent
Students reach their full potential through further education pathways	Target 6 By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent.
Youth are engaged in employment or education	Target 7 By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent.
Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities	Target 8 By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62 per cent.
People can secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need	Target 9 By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent.
Adults are not over-represented in the criminal justice system	Target 10 By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent.
Young people are not over-represented in the criminal justice system	Target 11 By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by 30 per cent.
Children are not over-represented in the criminal justice system	Target 12 By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent.
Families and households are safe	Target 13 By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50% as progress towards zero.
People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing	Target 14 Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.
People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters	Target 15 • By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests. • By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea.
Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing	Target 16 By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.
People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision making regarding their own lives	Target 17 By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion