

NSLA Indigenous Cultural Capability Audit: 2022

Background

Following the formal [Culturally Safe Libraries Program](#), NSLA members in Australia agreed to run an annual Indigenous cultural capability audit for five years from 2021. This is the second audit in that series.

The intention of the audit is to hold ourselves to account in making necessary improvements to policies and practices involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, visitors and collections. The audit also helps to fulfil NSLA's obligation to the broader library sector – as sector leaders and according to commitments under the UN *Sustainable Development Goals* – to transparently demonstrate and promote cultural capability. The audit has been designed to reflect the [ATSILIRN Protocols](#).

Analysis of results

Taking 2021 results as a benchmark, results from the 2022 audit can indicate not only the strengths and weaknesses in cultural capability for Australian NSLA libraries, but where our efforts are improving, where they are slipping backwards, and which member libraries can demonstrate best practice in specific areas. Results are summarised here in the following categories:

- Improved since the previous year
- Declined since the previous year
- No change since the previous year

Regardless of whether there has been an improvement, decline or no change, results within each category have been assigned a colour to indicate an overall status assessment: 'weak/red' (1-3 of 9 libraries), 'fair/orange' (4-6 of 9 libraries), or 'strong/green' (7-9 of 9 libraries). Further analysis and examples from member libraries are provided in *Section 2* to give nuance to the raw data.

Improved since the previous year

- Percentage of **governing body members** identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (9-25% for 4 libraries; 0% for 5 libraries up from 11-12% for 2; 0% for 7 in 2021)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific **governance substructures** (5/9)
- **Communications strategies** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (2/9)
- Mechanisms to ensure **cultural safety of library communications** (8/9)
- **Promotion of programs and services** directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (6/9)
- Dedicated **Indigenous collections teams** (8/9)
- **Dedicated spaces** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients (4/9)
- Prominent display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **flags** in libraries (6/9)
- Indigenous **collections policies** that support acquisition of material by and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (4/9), and **community consultation** in this area (6/9)
- **Retrospective catalogue record enhancement** to address use of offensive terms and to add culturally appropriate names, places and subject descriptions (8/9)
- Mechanisms for improving the **cultural safety of programs and services** (7/9)
- Review of **corporate policies** to better incorporate Indigenous cultural protocols and principles (6/9)
- Identification and reporting of **performance measures** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **collections and programs** (6/9)

Declined since the previous year

- Documented **affirmative action strategies** for recruitment and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (3/9)
- **Support networks** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander library staff (4/9), including support with career development (2/9)
- Mechanisms to respond to **breaches of cultural safety and workplace racism** (0/9)
- Adoption of formal policies for recognition and protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (**ICIP**) (2/9)
- **Promotion** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **collections** through findings aids, tours, websites and exhibitions (8/9)
- **Assistance to communities** in establishment or maintenance of knowledge centres for repatriated works (4/9)
- **Active partnerships** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or organisations in the past twelve months (8/9)
- Adoption of **RAP** or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement strategy (2/9)
- Identification and reporting of **library-specific performance measures** to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **employment** (4/9)
- **Procurement policies** including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers (7/9)
- Participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in development of most recent **strategic plan** (1/9)

No change from the previous year

- Provision of **mandatory** Indigenous cultural capability **training** to all staff (8/9)
- Mechanisms to respond to incidences of **lateral violence** between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff (0/9)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **artworks** on display (9/9)
- Participation in significant **cultural events** (9/9)
- Documented policies for identification and handling of **secret and sacred** or offensive materials (3/9), and consultation on these policies (3/9)
- Routine allocation of language designators and culturally appropriate names, places and subject descriptions to **catalogue record metadata** for Indigenous collections (8/9)
- Mechanism specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a **'right of reply'** to collection descriptions pertaining to themselves or their communities (4/9)
- **Repatriation** of original records or provision of copies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a result of consultation (6/9)
- Mechanisms to seek **feedback** on programs and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (2/9), to a degree that this feedback can be summarised (1/9)
- **Involvement in design and delivery** of education and training programs relating to Indigenous collections and services (6/9)
- Programs delivered in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **languages** (3/9)

Summary of findings

The highest-voted barrier to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by NSLA libraries shifted from **strategy** in 2021 (leadership, mechanisms to instigate change) to **staff skills** in 2022 (ability to put knowledge into practice).

This may point to a positive shift in the perceived enthusiasm and awareness of library leaders, and the introduction of library-wide strategies to demonstrate cultural capability. It also clearly reveals a vital next step for libraries: to introduce the practical mechanisms necessary to put those strategies into practice. As per 2021, money was not considered to be preventing progress, with budget ranked the lowest of the five barriers listed.

Strengths

Australian NSLA libraries continue to be strong in collections work – enhancing catalogue records and promoting collections through exhibitions, learning programs and finding aids; as well as in provision of cultural capability training to staff; involvement in cultural events; and programming partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Some are very strong in community consultation and co-design; others are still communicating one way (to rather than with). Libraries with dedicated Indigenous collections teams have increased from 5 to 8 since 2021; and the proportion of governance body members identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has noticeably increased.

Weaknesses

Overall workforce statistics showed little change, with a difference in the numeric result for several libraries due to the arrival or departure of one person. This points to an issue with mechanisms to ensure the cultural safety of programs and communications. While libraries ranked strongly on this question, the reality of the ‘mechanism’ is often one staff member or a small team. Our cultural awareness may be outstripping our resources. This could (partially) explain why adoption of formal ICIP protocols has been stalled in two libraries and not attempted in some others.

Our track record is weakest on complicated measures such as dealing with workplace racism and lateral violence involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members; and providing channels for the ‘right of reply’ from communities to collection records pertaining to them. Audit respondents continue to point to broader departmental policies on workplace behaviour or generic feedback mechanisms to address these kinds of concerns.

NSLA libraries overall could be stronger on support networks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and especially in supporting career progression. Collective support of the NSLA Blakforce group should be acknowledged here, and plans for a collaborative approach to mentorship and work exchange.

Dissemination

This report will be distributed to the NSLA Board, NSLA First Nations Advisory Group, NSLA Heads of Collections Advisory Group, and NSLA Heads of Corporate Services Advisory Group. It will be published on the NSLA website for general access.

SECTION 2: Summary of long-form responses

1. Workplace (Q3-14)

Percentage of library's workforce identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

%	# libraries 2021	# libraries 2022
<1%	2	2
1-2%	3	4
3-5%	3	2
>5%	1	1

Percentage of library's governing bodies identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

%	# libraries 2021	# libraries 2022
0%	7	5
<10%	0	1
10-15%	2	2
>15%	0	1

While workforce statistics did not markedly change, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on **governing bodies** increased significantly in 2022.

Results showed a mild shift in the way in which libraries demonstrate **formal recognition** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the workplace, with the greatest increase being in email footers and an Acknowledgement of Country on website homepages.

Examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific **governance structures** in place include NLA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections Reference Group and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and Education Reference Group; SLQ's Indigenous Advisory Group; LANT's Aboriginal Advisory Group and parent department's Office of the Elder-in Residence; and the South Australian Government's Aboriginal Reference Group. One library was not permitted to establish a governance structure within its directorate and another referred to ongoing relationships with key members of the Indigenous community but no formal structure.

Almost all libraries were providing mandatory **cultural capability training** to staff. This is largely facilitated through NSLA's consortia agreement with AIATSIS, which has since 119 staff across six libraries enrolled in the six months prior to this report.

Two libraries reported having a formal **affirmative action strategy**, including NLA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy (under review) and the NT Government's Aboriginal employment strategy, special measures recruitment strategy, and Aboriginal employment development program.

Two libraries referred to formal **support networks** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff: LINK at NLA (the Library's Indigenous Network of Knowledge) and the ACT Indigenous Network. Three libraries referred to informal networks. SLQ runs a First Nations Graduate Program and provides secondment opportunities to First Nations staff. Libraries Tasmania cited its whole-of-government Aboriginal Employment Strategy.

No libraries had mechanisms in place specifically to respond to **breaches of cultural safety and workplace racism**, nor to incidences of **lateral violence** between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members. All referred to cultural capability training as a preventive measure or to broader departmental codes of conduct or internal policies on bullying and workforce behaviour, and cited staff training, intranet updates or presentations as the means by which these policies are communicated.

2. Community engagement (Q15-25)

Approaches to **community engagement** ranged from the activities of specialised branches or individuals in identified roles, to social media accounts for specific parts of the library (SLQ's kuril dhagun and Indigenous Knowledge Centres), and focus groups with First Nations audiences to gain a better understanding of barriers and opportunities for engagement (NLA).

Social media was a popular medium for communication, but interviews on radio and TV were also cited (SLQ), and some libraries had established audiences for very targeted programs such as SLWA's Better Beginnings 'Little Fulla Yarns' program, 'Maawit Mart' Noongar translation and 'Nyamangarru Jalygurr' Yawuru translation of Baby Ways book.

Mechanisms to ensure that **library communications are culturally safe** were generally human – Indigenous engagement branches or individuals in identified roles – working closely with communications and marketing staff in most cases. Some libraries (such as SLV and SLSA) have protocols in place for content relating to First Nations peoples. SLWA referred to the more sophisticated in-built mechanisms within the *Storylines* program, allowing for content restriction or additions to collections data.

A positive shift since the 2021 audit was an increase in the number of dedicated **Indigenous collections 'teams'**. In three cases, though, this referred to one or two people. Dedicated spaces for community visitors are now provided at SLWA, SLNSW and SLV, with a space at Libraries Tasmania identified for this purpose to be established in 2023. Overall the design of these spaces has been Indigenous-led.

Artworks were on display in all libraries, ranging from carpets to paintings and collection items. Libraries ACT has incorporated Indigenous artwork into the design of its public spaces as privacy screens on glass walls. Participation in **significant cultural events** was also across the board, though some mentioned that participation was driven by First Nations staff. Most held events for Reconciliation Week, and participated in community events for NAIDOC Week. Other examples of events were a Kurna reburials ceremony (SLSA), and a showcase of First Nations digital collections at all major library events (SLQ).

The primary **barrier to community engagement** was rated as staff skills. Budget was ranked lowest of the five barriers suggested, beneath strategy, staff awareness and structure. Other barriers identified were:

- Generalised distrust of the library or a lack of relevance to regional Aboriginal communities
- Library ownership of Indigenous issues (a need to lift cultural capability)
- Being a national institution with hundreds of First Nations communities represented in the collection and a small Indigenous engagement team
- Staff confidence in taking proactive steps toward Indigenous engagement; fear of making mistakes or causing offence
- COVID slowing down opportunities for in-person visits and community engagement
- Limited availability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the library sector
- Leadership at local, state and federal levels
- Locating the person with the required decision-making authority within remote communities
- Geographical distance to regional and remote centres
- View of libraries as quiet places, not welcoming
- Historic treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – not welcome or actively banned from libraries – with memories persisting in families and communities

3. Indigenous collections (Q26-36)

Most libraries referred to a section of a broader **collections policy** with a focus on First Nations material, rather than a separate policy for this material. SLNSW does have a separate policy completed but not yet endorsed. The NLA's CDP includes principles for First Nations collecting.

Just two libraries have a policy for **ICIP** (NLA, SLNSW) both awaiting endorsement after a very long gestation, but SLSA also has an ICIP policy in draft form under review by its Aboriginal Reference Group.

Deeper **community consultation** on collections is in early stages for some libraries. LANT has recently recruited a new position of First Nations Collections and Content Coordinator. SLWA is consulting with First Nations communities in developing its Aboriginal Collections Plan. SLV has a mature cultural

permissions process but has only recently launched its Victorian Indigenous Research Centre. Both LANT and SLWA are doing new work to address handling and labelling of **secret and sacred materials**.

Most libraries are actively **reviewing catalogue records** to make language improvements. SLWA has scanned and analysed retrospective issues, with procedures for remediation now being introduced. NLA's collection management staff are working closely with Indigenous engagement staff to enhance record description, replace outdated terminology and add relevant Austlang codes. SLV notes that catalogue updates are made when directed by communities.

Despite this good work, mechanisms designed specifically to facilitate **right of reply** are not well implemented. SLWA's Storylines database includes this functionality for the specific communities involved, and its general catalogue records encourage viewers to report images or records with cultural safety issues, while SLV's Cultural Permissions Program facilitates right of reply, but most libraries cited the general functionality built into their systems for community feedback.

Libraries were very strong in examples of First Nations **collection promotion**, and most pointed to a dedicated website section on First Nations collections. SLWA cited its Storylines database, Aboriginal languages collection, Aboriginal family history sessions, Katitjin - online guide to Aboriginal collections, exhibitions, and First Nations Author book collection available to staff. Libraries Tasmania hosted two exhibitions in 2021-22 relating to Tasmanian Aboriginal history and culture. SLQ runs a permanent space with a changing program of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and stories in kuril dhagun, as well as a permanent display of Black Opium artwork. SLNSW runs regular workshops and training by the Indigenous Engagement Branch with communities, Elders, public libraries and Stolen Generation organisations. NLA has hosted recent exhibitions and highlighted items in the NLA's Digital Classroom and through Trove collection features.

Most libraries did not cite active **repatriation** projects, but SLNSW has assisted in building four digitisation hubs in regional Aboriginal culture centres this year, and is undertaking ongoing work to support digital keeping places through the NSW-Mukurtu Hub. SLWA's Storylines work continues, and LANT referred to the Papunya Bilingual Collection Digitisation project, Friends of Kahlin historical records and images and Anindilyakwa Cultural Centres.

4. Programs and services (Q37-42)

Libraries' responses about **mechanisms to ensure that programs and services are culturally safe** were stronger in 2022 than in the previous year. The primary caution here is that these mechanisms often entail a small team or just one member of staff.

SLWA's Indigenous Community Liaison Officer consults with staff providing services and programs to Aboriginal people and communities, and the library also consults with its own Aboriginal Reference Group. Likewise at SLSA, the Indigenous Collections Coordinator liaises with Aboriginal communities; and the same for Libraries ACT with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordinator. NLA works through its Indigenous Engagement Section and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Groups. SLQ develops programs using codesign principles and engages with First Nations communities across Queensland. SLV's Victorian Indigenous Research Centre leads development of programs and services that are culturally appropriate and responsive to community needs.

Many libraries referred to the ongoing provision of cultural capability training for staff as a factor in ensuring the cultural safety of programs and services.

Regarding **mechanisms to seek feedback from community members**, most libraries referred to general telephone or online services open to the public. SLQ initiated a satisfaction survey including Indigenous Councils, and NLA has sought feedback via focus groups as part of audience research work. SLWA was the one library that provided a summary of recent feedback received – from a Community Arts Network

partner exhibition for NAIDOC Week. SLQ was able to provide data from its 360° online survey with State Library clients. This research demonstrated that Indigenous Australians were significantly more likely to have learnt about one of the SLQ sites via Facebook, and that half of all those identifying as an Indigenous Australian expressed interest in SLQ's historical collections or photographs.

Almost all libraries reported **active partnerships** with First Nations communities over the last twelve months. Examples include:

- SLWA: Better Beginnings Little Fulla Yarns program in Kimberley region; partnerships with Noongar and Yawuru language centres for translations of Baby Ways book; significant representation of Aboriginal speakers and content at Disrupted festival of Ideas 2022; close working relationship with Sam Lovell in development of exhibition of his private archives; partnership with Community Arts Network WA for NAIDOC exhibition; partnership with Indigenous Liaison staff in Corrective Services to deliver Storylines sessions to Casuarina, Bunbury and Boronia Pre-Release Centre; Northside Whadjuk Elders Group
- SLSA: Participated in the STEM Aboriginal congress in September 2021 and welcomed 23 students and teachers for a journey of discovery at the State Library of South Australia's workshops, viewing collections about Ngarrindjeri inventor David Unaipon.
- NLA: Exhibitions staff partnered with Gail Mabo to select material and curate an exhibition in honour of the 30th anniversary of the Mabo decision. Likewise, elders Kuarna and Ngarrindjeri elders provided cultural advice to the content of the Illustrating the Antipodes exhibition. Deadly Dialogue events have been driven and delivered by First Nations presenters in collaboration with Indigenous Engagement staff.
- LANT: Larrakia Aged Care; Friends of Kahlin (Stolen Generations); Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists; Nungalinga College; Tiwi Heroes: WWII Encounters (exhibition); ANU Tiwi Women's Project; Jackie Huggins, Ngaire Jarro & NT Writers Centre; Charlie King : In memory of Ningardi; Writing in the Sand, an authorised biography of NT band Yothu Yindi by Matt Garrick, joined by founding members of Yothu Yindi, Witiyana Marika; Tiwi Heroes: WWII Encounters (exhibition opened by Gibson Farmer Illortaminni, Chair, Tiwi Land Council).
- TAS: Participated in Youth Speakout in 2022 for the first time in collaboration with Reconciliation Tasmania and are doing this again in 2023.

Most libraries that had involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the **design and delivery** of education and training programs were referring to internal staff.

Examples of programs delivered in language were:

- Story and rhyme times delivered in Noongar language (SLWA)
- Range of Indigenous language programs (SLQ)
- Story times, children's education programs in Ngunnawal and in Wiradjuri languages, and also an introduction to Ngunnawal language for adults (Libraries ACT)
- Tiwi Heroes: WWII Encounters (exhibition brochure, introductory panel, and video material in Tiwi language) (LANT)
- Yinnaar Birrum's Dilly Bag story time, puppetry, song and shake a leg activities being shared with children at West Coast libraries includes Indigenous language but is not solely in an Indigenous language (TAS)

5. Policies and procedures (Q43-48)

Three libraries reported being party to a departmental Reconciliation Action Plan, rather than a library-specific one. NLA has moved to an 'Innovate RAP'. SLV is developing a RAP as part of 2022-23 planning. Libraries Tasmania is developing a document entitled *Raising the bar - Libraries Tasmania's journey to*

becoming a culturally safe library and archive. The aim of this document is to promote its commitment, priorities and actions for 2022-2023.

Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **collections and programs performance measures** was more widely adopted than reporting on employment statistics. NLA's last annual report included a case study on Indigenous collecting activities including feedback from Indigenous contributors to the collection. SLV reports on enquiries addressed through its Cultural Permissions Program. SLNSW has specific targets for acquisition and digital repatriation in relation to First Nations collections.

Those libraries reporting on **performance measures to support employment** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were doing so to meet departmental requirements, however NLA is reviewing its own Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy and SLQ is drafting a First Nations Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

A majority of libraries had reviewed **corporate policies and procedures** in the past twelve months to better incorporate Indigenous protocols and principles. Libraries ACT has added the use of AIATSIS Thesauri into contracts with suppliers of library materials and metadata. Libraries Tasmania has developed protocols for the description of and access to photographic content in collections that relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. SLSA has updated its 'Permission to publish material with Aboriginal content' forms and procedures. LANT is in early stages of writing a policy to identify and label publications with images of human remains. SLNSW has a First Nations Collecting Strategy awaiting approval. NLA has updated its fellowships applications forms, reference and digitisation workflows, web governance and media and communication policies, and acquisitions and selection and collection description procedures.

Just one library had involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in development of its last strategic plan, but two have plans to do so in 2022-23 (LANT and SLWA).