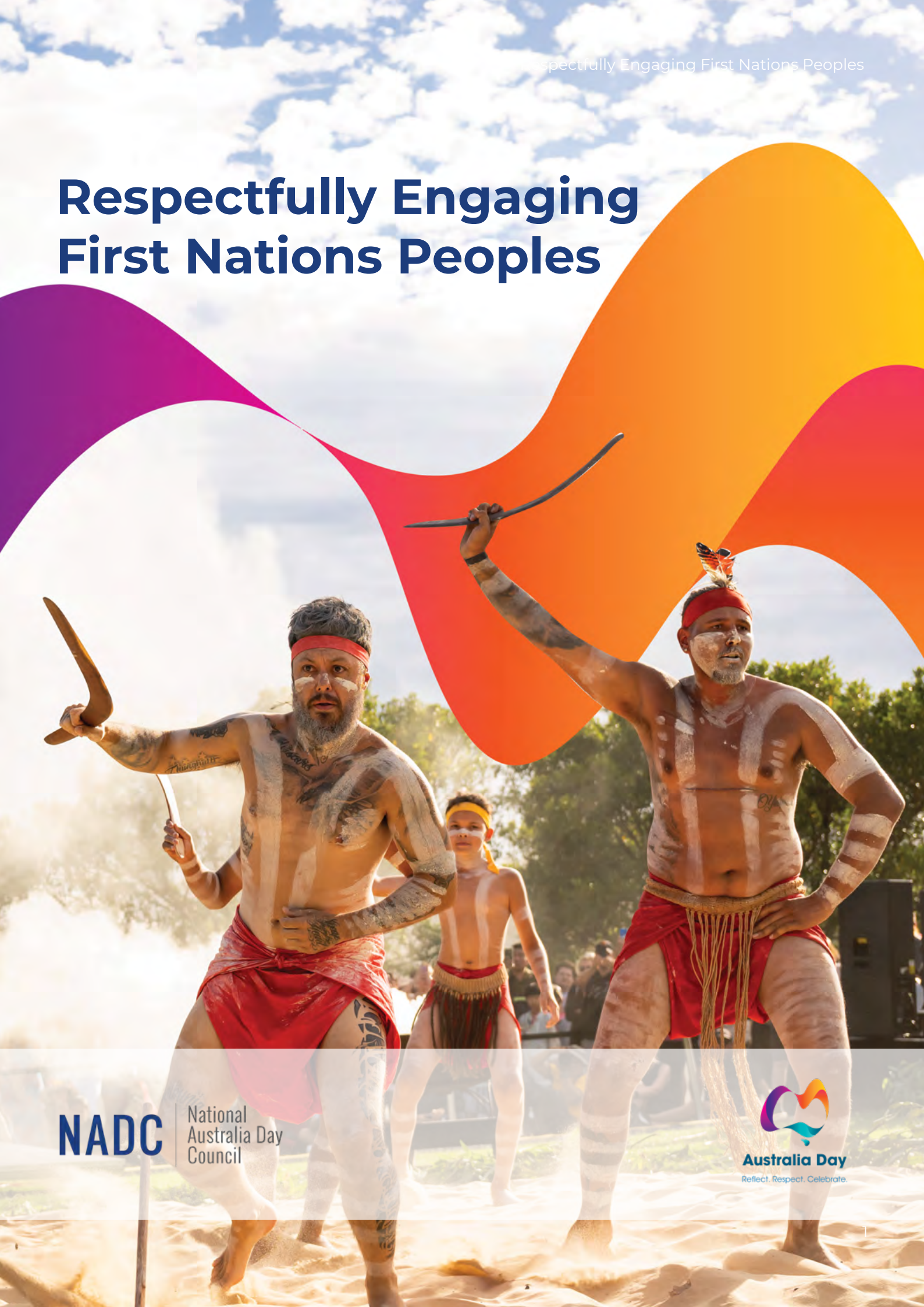
Respectfully Engaging First Nations Peoples



NADC National Australia Day Council

Australia Day
Reflect. Respect. Celebrate.

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Smoking Ceremony by Tony & Trent Lee, Darwin Waterfront Lagoon
Photo courtesy of Australia Day Council Northern Territory

We-Akon Dilinja – Morning Reflection, Victoria
Photo courtesy of City of Port Phillip and Boonwurrung Land & Sea Council

About

The National Australia Day Council (NADC) was established to inspire national pride and unity for all Australians regardless of location, age, gender or background.

Working closely with our network of affiliate state and territory organisations, local government authorities and not-for-profit community organisations, hundreds of Australia Day events are delivered each year nationwide that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and Australia's multiculturalism under the banner of 'Reflect. Respect. Celebrate.'

Australia Day

What Australia Day means to each of us depends on who we are, where we come from and how we came to be Australian.

It's an opportunity to **reflect** on where we are going as a nation and how we are all defined by the land on which we live, work and play, from the freshwater to the saltwater, the rainforest to the desert.

It's a day to listen to each other and **respect** each other's stories, contributions and the deep connection to Country that First Nations people have.

And it's a day to **celebrate** being Australian.

That's why the NADC is encouraging state and territory organisations, local government authorities, community groups and Indigenous communities to partner in delivering authentic and inclusive Australia Day messaging and events.

Australia Day events can acknowledge our past, while also respecting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' survival, resilience and enduring culture.

We’re all part of the story

This booklet has been designed as a guide on how to respectfully engage and work collaboratively with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and to encourage effective and meaningful participation together on Australia Day.

It details how state and territory organisations, local government authorities and community groups can consider partnering with their local Indigenous communities to deliver inclusive and culturally appropriate events around the country.

We-Akon Dilinja – Morning Reflection, Victoria
Photo courtesy of City of Port Phillip and Boonwurrung Land & Sea Council

Where to start?

Indigenous communities must be engaged from the planning phase and beyond your event. This is key to establishing trust-based relationships and sustainable decision-making processes.

Make contact with your local Indigenous community

A good starting point is reaching out to one of the following organisations to find out who best to approach:

indigenous.gov.au - www.indigenous.gov.au/culture-and-capability
Reconciliation Australia - www.reconciliation.org.au/
National Indigenous Australians Agency - www.niaa.gov.au/

Introduce yourself and extend an invitation to meet with the relevant representative

Explain that your organisation wishes to discuss the possibility of engaging local Indigenous communities to deliver authentic and inclusive Australia Day events.

Seek to develop a relationship, meet face to face, get to know one another and understand each other. Engage key people early in the process. There may also be local protocols to consider. If so, seek advice on how best to follow these.

Don’t rush the process

Understand that relationship building is very important and takes time to develop. The final messages and events are significant, however, the development of the relationship is also important.

Agree on project governance

Set out what is expected from all involved and their responsibilities, i.e. frequency and timing of meetings, approval processes, event promotion, reporting and any applicable fees or payments.

Discuss the important things that are to be highlighted from a cultural perspective as well as how these should be delivered.

Before each meeting consider drafting an agenda, take minutes and share them with attendees so everyone has a record of what was said and agreed to.

Australia Day means different things to different people

It’s important to not assume all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will want involvment in your event.

For some, it is a day of mourning. For others, a celebration of the survival of people and culture, and the continuous contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to Australia.

Things to consider

- Weave Indigenous ceremonies into your celebrations or have a separate event for reflection, ensuring it is explicit and included in all promotional materials
- Be mindful of authentic local rituals – these can vary from community to community
- Be prepared for honest stories to be told even if they are raw or difficult to hear
- There is much to reflect on and much to celebrate – consider doing this through ceremony and ritual, playing it out through song, storytelling or vestment rather than formal speeches
- Include everyday people, not just dignitaries and community leaders
- Achieving a meaningful outcome may take considerable time, but success is seeing relationships formed and dialogue opened towards working together

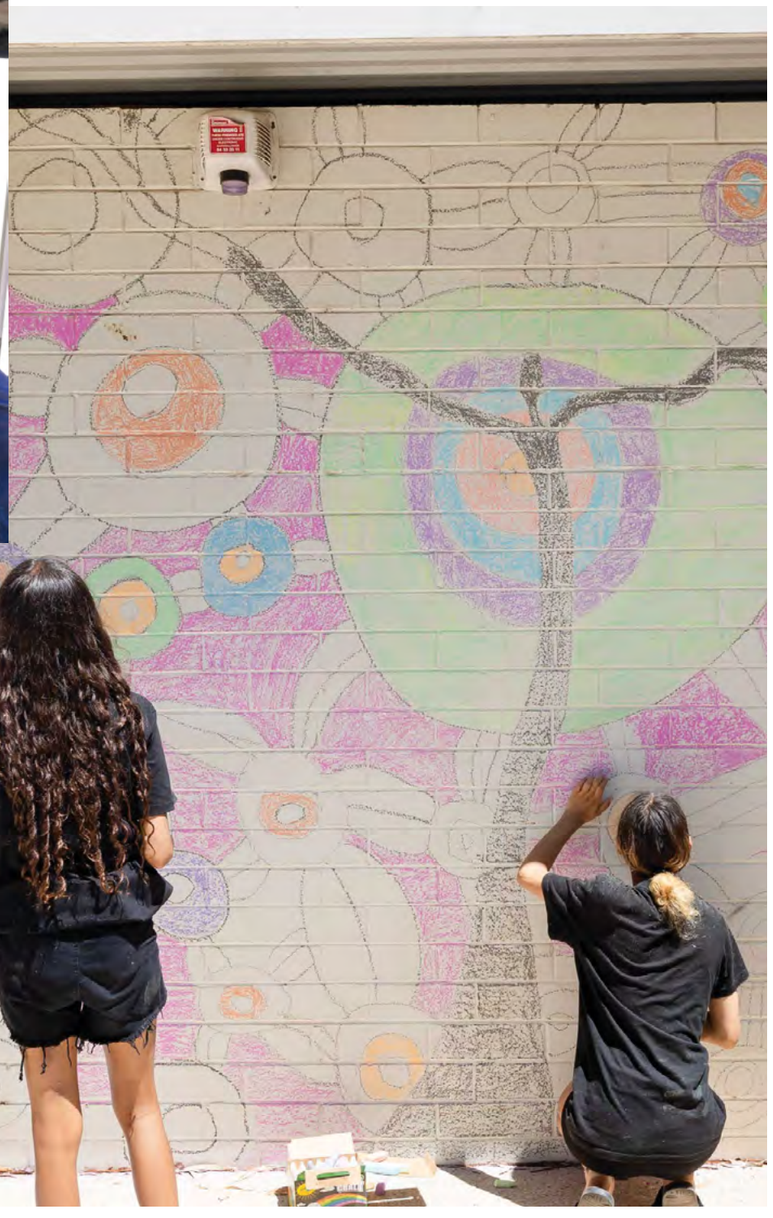
Event ideas

- Welcome to Country/Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies
- Smoking ceremonies
- Local history walks
- Morning mourning activities
- Cultural performances
- Keynote addresses and dinner talks or Chamber of Commerce breakfasts
- Panel discussions/seminars
- Yarning circles
- Art displays, bush tucker walks and cultural custom displays
- Local language lessons

Uncle Major Moogy Sumner at Mourning in the Morning - Smoking Ceremony, Elder Park/Tarntanya Wama, Adelaide
Photo courtesy of Australia Day Council of South Australia

Event examples

Each year, hundreds of meaningful collaborations take place across the country that include Aboriginal acknowledgement and significant First Nations elements in local Australia Day events.



Australia Day 2024 Pool Party
City of Kalamunda, WA

Art played a significant role on the day at Kalamunda Water Park, with displays, murals and projects showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creativity and storytelling.

The event by the City of Kalamunda also gave the 800 attendees a sensory exploration of traditional cuisine and flora, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers, musicians and artists offered authentic perspectives and performances.

Each activity was carefully curated to ensure cultural sensitivity. Local Indigenous leaders and cultural experts were engaged to guide City of Kalamunda in delivering these elements in a respectful and inclusive manner.

Indigenous elements included:

- Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony by Noongar Elder Neville Collard (pictured right)
- Attendee participation in the preparation of damper, a traditional Aboriginal bread (pictured above)
- Bush tucker tastings introduced participants to the unique flavors and significance of these ingredients in Indigenous culture
- *Bigger spirit connecting* (pictured far right), a First Nations chalk artwork by Nerolie Bynder, beautifully symbolised unity and represented a timeline in history with the places of the Noongar Nation, the original inhabitants of the south-west of Western Australia.

Photos courtesy of City of Kalamunda Council

Narrandera Shire Australia Day events 2024
Narrandera Shire Council, NSW

Celebrations commenced early in Narrandera with a community breakfast followed by an Australia Day Ceremony at Lake Talbot Water Park. Up to 900 attendees participated across the Shire's events program.

Their Australia Day ceremony opened with a Welcome to Country, digeridoo performance, singing and dancing, followed by official speeches, musical performances, flag raising and Australia Day Awards.

Narrandera Shire offered a range of elements that honoured Indigenous Australian heritage and recognised our history:

- Welcome to Country and performances by local dance group Dinawan's Connection (pictured below right)
- A Survival Day March hosted by Narrungdera NAIDOC Committee arranged down Narrandera's main street, East Street to celebrate the oldest living culture as a part of their story
- A First Nations Cultural Tour was fully subscribed with locals enjoying a great educational experience about the place in which they live
- Australia Day Ambassador Welcome Dinner catered by First Nations chef Rebekah Rogers showcased Indigenous Australian flavours, with explanations provided for each of the dishes (see menu on right)

Photo courtesy of Narrandera Shire Council

Front and back cover image: WugolOra morning ceremony at Barangaroo, Sydney
Photo courtesy of Australia Day Council of NSW and NSW Government

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