

First Nations Governance Group

Cultural Governance Principles

This First Nations Governance Group proposes the following principles and processes for ways of working that supports Cultural Governance.

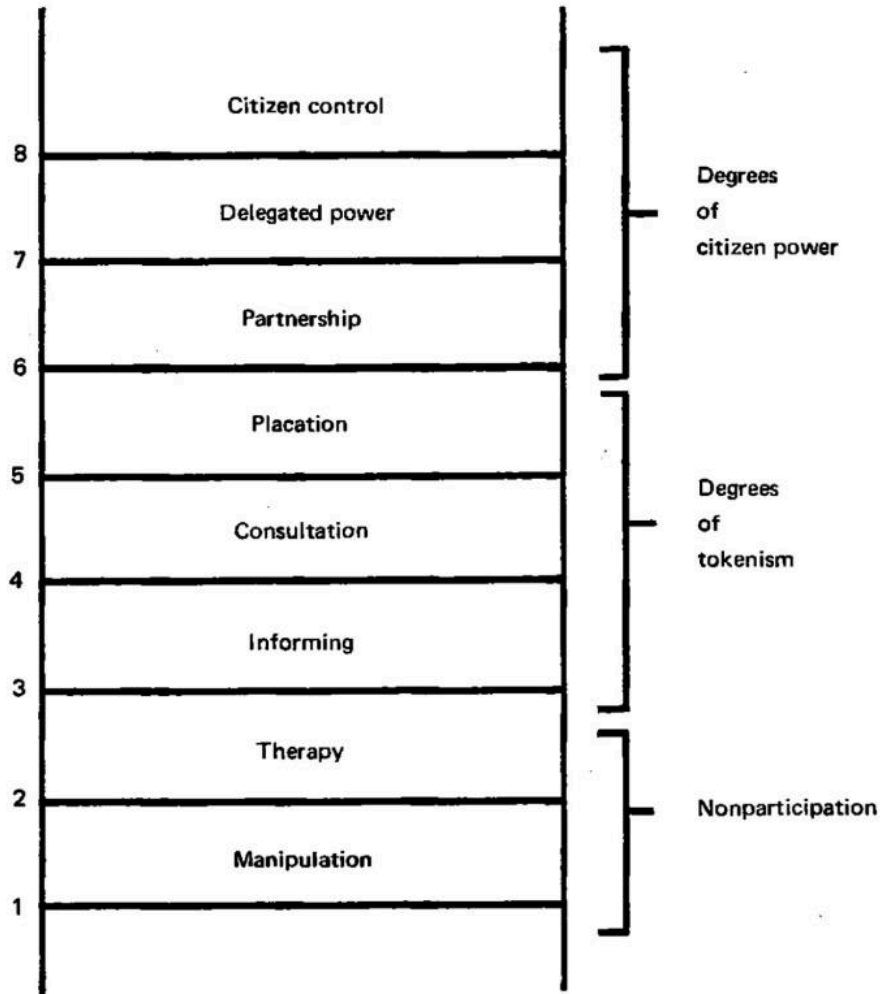
Principles

Cultural Governance requires Truth-Telling

Truth-telling is the foundation for long-term sustainable relationships based on mutual trust. Honest conversations are vital to understand and position the purpose of this First Nations Governance Group. It is important everyone understands the complexities and context of First Nations governance, what's required for two-way working, and what are the benefits for everyone. From this principle this First Nations Governance Group will continue its commitment to truth telling, enabling cultural governance and self-determination. Truth-telling requires stakeholders to understand the necessity to 'sit with discomfort', to feel fragile, to feel uncomfortable. First Nations health staff and patients may experience this continually, we ask non-Aboriginal peoples to sit in this space with us and together we create innovative and positive ways forward for best outcomes.

Cultural Governance repositions power to enable First Nations self-determination.

Cultural Governance is the power and authority for First Nations people, their families and communities to guide and inform all First Nations related matters. A commitment to redressing unequal or discriminatory relationships, structures and outcomes is critical. First Nations stakeholders will have authority in decision-making and/or co-design. This may mean increasing numbers of First Nations people as members of this group. Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation illustrates levels of participatory power and authority. 'Advisory' committees sit at the informing / consultation level. True Cultural Governance requires a mutual understanding that this group or project needs to move beyond tokenism. For this reason this First Nations Governance Group sits at Arnstein's partnership level, a rung below 'delegated power' such as First Peoples Assembly, Victorian Government.



Cultural Governance is about shared responsibility and accountability.

While authority and leadership sits with First Nations peoples, a whole-of-group approach is essential. This means all members hold accountability and responsibility for successful outcomes of shared objectives and activities. This is directly related to the heavy burden of cultural load. Cultural load is the often-invisible additional load borne by First Nations staff, where they are the only, or one of a small number of First Nations employees and are required to sit within both worlds with little to no support.

Cultural Governance is core business, not an add-on.

Cultural Governance is not another 'step' in our practice. It is not just a different approach to practice, or a well-meaning aspiration. Cultural Governance is an essential element at every level of business. Cultural Governance is focused on process as much as outcomes, how things are done is equally important as what is achieved. Valuing process elements is integral to supporting and enabling genuine partnerships and may require engaging new ways of working and doing things differently.

The WA Country Health Service Cultural Governance Framework provides the following useful model for conceptualising Cultural Governance.

2.2. Cultural, Corporate And Clinical Governance

As already stated, corporate and clinical governance will be ineffective if they are not integrated with cultural governance. To summarise these three elements must come together:

- **Corporate governance** holds our service accountable for operating effectively and ethically, in line with the organisation's legislative obligations, policies, practices, code of conduct and other guidelines that apply. It informs and guides due diligence across all aspects of the organisation, including finance, workforce development, and models of practice, programs.
- **Clinical governance** holds our service accountable for optimising the quality of their clinical services and safeguarding high standards of care. It requires that employees are delivering clinical practice according to recognised best practice.
- **Cultural governance** holds our service accountable for ensuring that policies and practices are as effective for Aboriginal people as for all other clients⁷. It requires that employees are working in ways that achieve optimum outcomes for Aboriginal people, families and communities.

To serve Aboriginal people as effectively as other Western Australians, all three governance elements need to be strong and integrated. Cultural Governance does not replace clinical or corporate governance, it is integrated into both. It will only occur if there is recognition across the organisation as essential and non-negotiable.

7. Whilst this document is about cultural governance from an Aboriginal perspective it could serve as a guide for other marginalised, and/or culturally and linguistically diverse groups and individuals.

Figure 3: Current view of Governance



Figure 4: Incorporating Cultural Governance



This includes, extra work demands that non- Indigenous colleagues do not have, expectations to educate non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their experiences of racism, and expectations to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Organisations and projects need to understand cultural load, and recognise and reward First Nations staff or members time and effort.

Cultural Governance requires culturally safe ways of working.

Cultural safety requires self-reflexivity and life-long learning, meaning everyone non-Aboriginal people as well have reflected on their own cultural identity, socialisation and lived experience. Understanding some areas of each person's identity may result in bias, emotional triggers or change in body language. This means all decision makers have attained appropriate levels of knowledge regarding their own cultural self, and are able to maintain professional cultural safety in different contexts. As well as 'cultural awareness' and respect for First Nations communities' cultures, languages, history, stories of resilience, knowledge, local ACCHO's and Traditional Owner Groups. Creating culturally safe ways of working also requires the redressing of unequal or racist/discriminatory relationships, structures, documents, assessments, processes and outcomes. This will require ongoing training and /or cultural mentoring for all employees, including executive, casual and agency employees. It also means cultural supervision is provided to First Nations staff.

Cultural Governance aims to improve long-term wellbeing for First Nations people & communities.

Through the pursuit of cultural safety the organisation or project will be mindful of and enact processes to address the wellbeing of First Nations people. With the knowledge that First Nations people experience stress, angst and often feel conflicted because organisations operate through processes very different to their own way of being. Priorities and desired outcomes of organisations are often at odds with First Nations protocols, aspirations and perspectives. First Nations people may experience identity strain and stress, in a difficult moment they need to talk up, even though they are aware what they need to communicate may create an uncomfortable moment. Cultural governance is a way to prioritise First Nations worldviews, perspectives, processes and aspirations so First Nations people experience improved outcomes and self determination.

References

- Arnstein, S .R. (1969) A Ladder Of Citizen Participation, Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35:4, 216-224, DOI: 10.1080/01944366908977225
- Diversity Council Australia/Jumbunna (2020) Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): Centring the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians
- SNAICC (2020) Creating Change Through Partnerships: An introductory guide to partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in child and family services.
- WA Country Health Service (2021) Cultural Governance Framework: Embedding authority and accountability across WA Country Health Service.

Special thanks to Shirley Godwin who co-authored this document.