

Proposed Local and Regional Voice Principles

These proposed principles would guide Local and Regional Voices, government arrangements, and the partnership interface arrangements. An overview and detailed description of each of the nine principles follows.



Principle of Empowerment

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have greater control and voice in their own affairs: a self-determination approach. Governments shift to an enabling role.

- *Empowerment* is the foundation for the framework and all local and regional voice arrangements.
- *Empowerment* recognises better public policy, program and service decisions are made when the people most affected have a say.
- *Empowerment* recognises the strengths and unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to take control of their own futures, drive progress and sustain outcomes for their communities.

What would the principle of Empowerment look like?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are enabled to develop ways to meet their aspirations through solutions that work in their context.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have increased agency, autonomy and influence in public policy, program and service delivery decisions that affect their lives.
- Communities are supported to bring their aspirations, priorities and strategies to the 'partnership table' with governments and influence how funding and service delivery can respond to this.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have access to the tools and resources they need to have greater control over their futures and make better informed decisions for themselves and their communities.
- Partnership arrangements are built on mutual respect and are culturally safe for all participants.
- Governments' systems change to support community involvement in decision making; processes allow time for sharing information, genuine conversation and understanding.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are supported to forge partnerships that contribute to their wellbeing and prosperity, including with corporate and academic sectors, businesses, and other parties.



Principle of Inclusive Participation

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the opportunity to have a say. Local and regional voice arrangements are broad-based and support respectful engagement across a diversity of voices.

- *Inclusive Participation* provides opportunity for all people living in a community¹ to influence decisions that affect them and their families.
- *Inclusive Participation* recognises there are a range of views and perspectives in every community, and supports arrangements that reflect and embrace this diversity. As each community is unique, practical application will look different in each place.
- *Inclusive Participation* makes space for contributions of leaders from across the community who wish to work for public good.
- *Inclusive Participation* is to be considered alongside the principle of *Cultural Leadership*. The appropriate way of interaction between these two principles will be determined by each community.

What would the principle of Inclusive Participation look like?

- Local and regional voice structures are broad based, equitable and inclusive, reflecting the diversity in each community.
- All community members and family groups – historical residents as well as traditional owners – can participate or see themselves represented.
- There are ways for all communities in a region to be involved at the regional level and to make or inform decisions on their local issues.
- There is balanced representation of men and women, youth and elders when addressing citizen-based matters (such as priority setting, programs and services). This does not encroach on cultural leadership, practices and protocols.
- All community members can see themselves in a voice and there are ways for all to be involved or represented, including people living with a disability or those identifying as LGBTQI+.
- Local and regional voice arrangements support respectful engagement and decision making across a diversity of views.
- There are fair and transparent ways (such as mediation) to resolve any internal disputes.

¹ Includes all individuals, families, groups, organisations and traditional owners with ties to the local area.



Principle of Cultural Leadership

Local and regional voice arrangements strongly connect to those with responsibility for upholding and maintaining cultural law/lore and customs, in a way that is appropriate for each community and region.

- *Cultural Leadership* is essential to ensure Local and Regional Voices have legitimacy.
- *Cultural Leadership* accommodates each community and region's unique system of cultural leadership.
- *Cultural Leadership* is to be considered alongside the principle of *Inclusive Participation*. The appropriate way of interaction between these two principles will be determined by each community.

What would the principle of Cultural Leadership look like?

- Local and regional voice structures are endorsed by and/or connected with cultural leaders, in a way that respects how cultural leadership and authority operates in that region.
- Guidance from communities about how cultural leadership works in their location and how best to reflect it informs how the local and regional Voice structure operates.
- Systems and structures based in traditional law/lore and custom are drawn on or incorporated in the local and regional voice arrangements, as appropriate to each region.
- There are clear pathways for cultural leaders and traditional owners to be involved in the work of their Local and Regional Voice.
- The Voice arrangements do not encroach on the specific remit of cultural leaders over traditional law/lore, custom and cultural matters.
- Governments respect cultural leadership connected to Local and Regional Voices and their roles.



Principle of Community-led Design

Local and regional voice arrangements are determined by relevant communities, according to local context, history and culture. Communities determine implementation pace and governance structures. Governments support and enable this.

- *Community-led Design* is central to creating arrangements that meet local needs and aspirations.
- *Community-led Design* builds local ownership and gives authorisation and mandate to voice structures.
- *Community-led Design* will result in a diverse range of governance and operating arrangements for Local and Regional Voices.

What would the principle of Community-led Design look like?

- Communities across each region decide how best to organise themselves as a Local and Regional Voice, including ways to connect local communities with Voice structures at the regional level.
- Communities shape arrangements in line with their local context, history, culture and aspirations for the future. This includes adopting, building on or adapting existing arrangements, as appropriate.
- Communities, in consultation with governments, determine the detail of geographic areas to come together as regions (using the agreed parameters and processes).
- Priorities, agenda and pace of implementation is set by each Local and Regional Voice.
- Governments support and enable communities to establish their arrangements and progress their priorities and aspirations.



Principle of Non-duplication and Links with Existing Bodies

Local and regional voice structures build on and leverage existing approaches wherever possible, with some adaptation and evolution as needed to improve the arrangements. Local and Regional Voices link to other existing bodies, do not duplicate or undermine their roles.

- *Non-duplication and Links* recognises a broad range of existing arrangements, bodies and structures working to build positive futures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.
- *Non-duplication and Links* represents the flexibility of the framework to accommodate, build on and enhance – rather than displace or duplicate – existing structures and work already underway.

What would the principle of Non-duplication and Links with Existing Bodies look like?

- Existing structures with similar purpose and functions are used as the basis for a Local and Regional Voice, evolving as needed to align with the principles.
- Local and Regional Voice brings together and enhances voices of a broad range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, including Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, land councils and other bodies and groups.
- Local and Regional Voice does not encroach on, or undermine, the mandate of existing bodies with statutory roles or specific functions, but provides appropriate links for their involvement in the Voice.
- Existing local and regional decision making structures covering smaller geographical areas will need to 'feed in' to broader Local and Regional Voice structures.



Principle of Respectful Long-term Partnerships

Governments and Local and Regional Voices commit to mutually respectful and enduring partnerships, supported by structured interface. Governments are responsive and proactive. Governments support building capacity and expertise of voice structures and implement system changes.

- *Respectful Long-term Partnerships* recognises the need for clear commitments from governments and communities.
- *Respectful Long-term Partnerships* recognises the need for improved coordination between and within levels of government, including government system changes, to shift to a partnership approach.
- *Respectful Long-term Partnerships* supports establishing interface arrangements in each region, tailored to specific community context in each place.
- *Respectful Long-term Partnerships* recognises that relationships and underpinning structures evolve and mature over time as the partnership strengthens.

What would the principle of Respectful Long-term Partnerships look like?

- Defined, structured mechanisms and processes are in place for partnership between each Local and Regional Voice and all levels of government (such as a 'partnership table').
- Roles, responsibilities and expectations for all partners are clear and documented.
- Relationships are based on mutual respect, good faith, trust and transparency.
- Communication and engagement between partners is responsive, regular and consistent.
- Governments work together across levels and across portfolios to engage proactively and responsively with the Voices.
- Governments support communities to build capacity and expertise and draw on community expertise to support 'two way learning'. Both sides share their different capabilities, skills and experiences to build and enhance effective partnership.
- Regular 'health checks' of the state of partnership assist to identify and address any issues or concerns in a proactive way.
- Mutually agreed mediation and dispute resolution processes assist partners to work through and resolve any disputes or conflicts.



Principle of Transparency and Accountability

Governments and local and regional voice structures adhere to clear protocols and share responsibility and accountability, including downwards to communities.

- *Transparency and Accountability* is critical to success of partnerships between Local and Regional Voices and governments.
- *Transparency and Accountability* recognises responsibility for partnership and associated outcomes is shared by all partners.

What would the principle of Transparency and Accountability look like?

- All parties agree and adhere to clear protocols to support transparency and accountability (e.g. public reporting, monitoring and evaluation).
- Local and Regional Voices are supported to implement best practice governance including: documented codes of conduct and protocols for managing conflicts of interest; 'fit and proper' persons checks, and mechanisms for removing members in the event of misconduct or loss of community confidence.
- Local and Regional Voices develop, agree, document and are transparent about decision making processes (e.g. consultations, consensus, majority etc.) and follow up actions.
- Activities of partnership interface are transparent, with timely information flows and follow up by all parties.
- Arrangements support shared accountability and responsibility between governments and Local and Regional Voices, including downward to the community level.
- Data and information sharing protocols are agreed by all parties.
- Administrative arrangements are regularly reviewed to ensure they are practical and proportionate.



Principle of Capability Driven

Local and regional voice arrangements match the unique capabilities and strengths of each community and region. Governments support leadership and capability building.

- *Capability Driven* acknowledges that communities will be at various stages of 'Voice readiness' and capability.
- *Capability Driven* recognises Local and Regional Voices will need capability support from governments.

What would the principle of Capability Driven look like?

- Local and regional voice structures are fit for purpose and underpinned by practices that promote good governance.
- Local and regional voice structures evolve the scope of their functions and activities according to their strengths, capability and preferences.
- Communities have ongoing opportunities and support to develop and enhance local leadership and build their capability to engage in effective partnership.
- Governments develop their capability to engage in partnership arrangements and allow space and authority for communities to perform voice functions.
- Local and Regional Voices are supported to share good practice and relevant expertise with each other.



Principle of Data and Evidence-based Decision Making

Data is shared between governments and communities to enable evidence based advice and shared decision making. Communities are supported to collect and manage their own data.

- *Data and Evidence-based Decision Making* recognises effective decision making requires access to meaningful data and evidence.
- *Data and Evidence-based Decision Making* provides for local and regional decision making to be informed by relevant data, research and best practice evidence from Australia and internationally.

What would the principle of Data and Evidence-based Decision Making look like?

- Local and Regional Voices have access to data evidence they need to provide informed advice and make informed decisions.
- Governments and communities collaborate and share data collection and analysis expertise. Communities are supported to build their data capability.
- Regional planning activities include robust data, monitoring and evaluation strategies co-designed by communities and governments.
- Government systems support data and information sharing with Local and Regional Voices.
- Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data collection activities are informed by local and regional priorities. Data is meaningful to communities and shared in user friendly, flexible formats.
- Local and regional voice structures are supported to undertake and manage their own data collection and analysis activities.
- Strategies to enable 'real time' learning and adaptation are built into Local and Regional Voice and partnership interface activities.



Do the proposed Local and Regional Voice principles seem right to you?



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