

# Reconciliation Action Plan

November, 2022 – November, 2024





### **'Connected Communities'**

This piece speaks about ACTCOSS and its role in the community. The colour theme connects with the ACTCOSS Brand.

The Centre Circle represents ACTCOSS, surrounded by its members. The two large shapes in the corners represent ACTCOSSs values, purpose and work and is underpinned by self determination. The red and blue circles are the many different communities and organisations ACTCOSS seeks to advocate for and represent, they are all connected. At the core, and running through everything ACTCOSS does, is always recognising justice and equality for First Nations people must come first.

### **By Rachelle Kelly-Church**

Rachelle is a Barkindji woman with family ties to Wilcannia, Far West NSW. Rachelle is a wife and mother and stepmum of six, studies part time, and also Heads up the Gulanga Program at ACTCOSS. Rachelle has been living and working on Ngunnawal Country most of her life. Rachelle enjoys painting to connect to culture and as a form of healing.

## Our vision for reconciliation

The ACT Council of Social Service's (ACTCOSS) vision is for Canberra to be a just, safe and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services. ACTCOSS believes that true equity and social justice cannot be achieved until Australia acknowledges and addresses its history of invasion, colonisation, and dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands. For this purpose, we will continue to place the achievement of sovereignty, justice and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at the forefront of our advocacy.

This Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) will help ACTCOSS to realising our vision through:

- Cultivating an appreciation and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to staff, members, and other stakeholders;
- Growing representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in ACTCOSS membership and positions of influence; and
- Providing additional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community sector workers to engage in ACTCOSS programs and advocacy.

## Our business

ACTCOSS advocates for social justice and represents not-for-profit community organisations in the Australian Capital Territory.

We are a not-for-profit peak body working collaboratively with community organisations and interested individuals who support our vision and goals for positive social change.

We advocate to government on social policy, encourage individuals and groups to act, and provide capacity building services and resources to community organisations. We do all this with support and input from our membership, of which we currently have over 150 ACT Community organisations and individuals.

ACTCOSS employs 17 people, including two Aboriginal staff members in the Gulanga Program. ACTCOSS often supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied organisations and other First Nations stakeholders' advocacy towards the achievement of equity and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT.



## Our RAP

ACTCOSS's primary purpose is the advancement of social justice. This includes speaking out against systemic racism, and linking our policy and capability work to Closing the Gap outcomes. To realise the vision of Canberra as a just, safe, and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services, we must first achieve reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ACTCOSS has long supported reconciliation to overcome the causes of division and inequality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians. This has included:

- the development of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
- through our advocacy and policy work challenging systemic racism and injustice in government, economic and social structures; and
- through our Gulanga Program supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community sector workers and working with non-Indigenous organisations to improve service provision to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

The ACTCOSS RAP and the five dimensions of reconciliation provide key guidance and oversight to ensure that justice and reconciliation is at the forefront of the organisation's work. Beyond developing ACTCOSS's own culture and behaviours, we are also focused on taking actions that will positively influence our members, stakeholders, and the people of the ACT to drive reconciliation outcomes.

The RAP outlines the actions necessary to equip ACTCOSS for its work towards the improvement of opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These actions must include the continual development of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and experiences among the individuals that work in and govern the organisation and across our membership.

Given the central importance of reconciliation to ACTCOSS's mission, the RAP is championed and led by the CEO. The RAP is developed with input from all the ACTCOSS team members and forms part of the guiding documents for induction, organisational culture, individual behaviours and work plans. The ACTCOSS Board endorses the RAP, participates in RAP activities and monitors its implementation. The RAP has been developed using input from all ACTCOSS staff, with oversight by the RAP Working Group (RWG). The RWG is chaired by the CEO and includes the Head of Capability, Head of Policy, Gulanga Program Manager, Operations Manager and one local Aboriginal Community leader. At the time of endorsement our RWG has two First Nations members.

This is ACTCOSS's third RAP. Since Reconciliation Australia endorsed our Innovate RAP in 2015, we have embedded more positive behaviours. We host a quarterly Reconciliation Network meetings for the community sector; we have developed and implemented a Welcome to Country policy including key contacts and policy to ensure respectful partnerships; and included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives on an increased number of interview panels when recruiting.

ACTCOSS has worked hard to ensure that reconciliation and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is at the forefront of all our advocacy. This has included the presence of ACTCOSS staff throughout three days of ATSIEB Hearings; sponsorship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events including Sorry Day; improved remuneration and recognition for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in ACTCOSS consultations and engagements; and increased procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

Driven by ACTCOSS's second RAP, which highlights the importance of engaging with Aboriginal-controlled businesses and experts, ACTCOSS has developed a key relationship with an Aboriginal consultant and advocate, Jeff Amatto, who works tirelessly for 'more cultural rehabs and less jails'. Building on long-standing advocacy by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the ACT, ACTCOSS partnered with Jeff to highlight to key ACT Government ministers and bureaucrats, the importance of culturally appropriate drug and alcohol rehabilitation services to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT's justice system. In the 2021-22 ACT Budget, the ACT Government announced funding to commence design work for a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation facility. Further, as ACTCOSS also covers Jeff's travel costs, while he visits Canberra, Jeff is also able to work with smaller not-for-profit organisations who otherwise would not be able to afford the full cost of his services.





# Relationships

ACTCOSS's pursuit of social justice can only be authentic if it is done in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the organisations that support and represent them. Good organisational and individual relationships enable the trust and knowledge sharing required to inform our advocacy, policy and capability work. ACTCOSS looks forward to continuing the strengthening of relations with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations, the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB), local Elders and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the ACT.



1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources pack awarded as prizes for the National Reconciliation Week Prize draw
2. Cross-Sector information forum bringing together community sector workers to learn about both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and mainstream services

<b>Focus area:</b> <i>Building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals</i>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	
Establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement.	May 2023	Head of Policy Gulanga Program Manager	
	Develop and implement an engagement plan to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations, including a policy on remuneration for engagements.	Oct 2023	Head of Policy Gulanga Program Manager	
Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.	May 2023, 2024	Comms and Events Officer	
	RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.	27 May- 3 June, 2023, 2024	RWG Chair RWG	
	Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	27 May- 3 June, 2023, 2024	CEO	
	Organise at least one internal NRW event each year.	27 May- 3 June, 2023, 2024	Operations Manager	
	Register all our NRW events on Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.	May 2023, 2024	Comms and Events Officer	
	Host the annual NRW prize draw, whereby ACTCOSS members share achievements made towards reconciliation in the workplace.	26 April – 27 May, 2023, 2024	Operations Manager	

**Focus area:** *Building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals*

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	Develop and implement a staff engagement strategy to raise awareness of reconciliation across our workforce.	June 2023	Operations Manager
	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation publicly.	March 2023	CEO
	Explore opportunities to positively influence our external stakeholders to drive reconciliation outcomes.	June 2023	CEO
	Collaborate with RAP organisations and other like-minded organisations to develop innovative approaches to advance reconciliation, in particular through the ACTCOSS facilitated peer networks.	Dec 2023	Head of Capability
	Continue to host quarterly Reconciliation Peer Network meetings for the community sector employees.	Review Jan 2023, 2024	Head of Capability
Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.	Aug 2023	Operations Manager
	Develop, implement, and communicate an anti-discrimination policy for our organisation.	Nov 2023	Operations Manager
	Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy.	Nov 2023	Operations Manager
	Educate senior leaders on the effects of racism.	March 2024	CEO Operations Manager





# Respect

Australia cannot be a proud nation until there is respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples demonstrated through reconciliation, justice and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Reconciliation is only possible if it is built on recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this land and their right to autonomy and sovereignty.

Similarly, without demonstrating respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in ACTCOSS's behaviours, relationships and actions, ACTCOSS cannot claim to be an authentic advocate for social justice. ACTCOSS must show respect by augmenting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait organisational and individual voices while ensuring that it does not speak for or over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



1. Smoking ceremony at the ACT Community Sector NAIDOC Week community event  
2. ACTCOSS staff coming together to promote and celebrate NAIDOC week



**Focus area:** *Taking action to positively influence our members, stakeholders and the people of the ACT in the demonstration of respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	April 2023	Operations Manager
	Consult local Traditional Owners and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to inform our cultural learning strategy and review available training with our Gulanga staff team.	July 2023	Operations Manager Gulanga Program Manager
	Develop, implement, and communicate a cultural learning strategy document for our staff.	Oct 2023	CEO Operations Manager
	Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group members, HR managers and other key leadership staff to participate in formal and structured cultural learning.	Dec 2023	Operations Manager
	Ensure that participation in Cultural Awareness Training is included in ACTCOSS Governance and Induction policy documents.	March 2023	CEO Operations Manager
Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	Continue to innovate new ways to increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols, including organising training for staff who wish to learn how to deliver Acknowledgement of Country in Ngunnawal language	June 2023	Head of Policy
	Develop, implement and communicate (to both staff and members) a cultural protocol document, including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, with reference to OATSIA recommendations.	March 2024	Head of Policy
	Continue to invite a local Traditional Owners or Custodians to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year and follow internal policy to ensure Welcome to Country is organised appropriately.	June 2023, Dec 2023, June 2024 Nov 2024	CEO
	Continue to include an Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of important meetings, ensuring all staff who chair meetings are comfortable and equipped to deliver.	June 2023, Dec 2023, June 2024 Nov 2024	CEO
	Develop an ACTCOSS Acknowledgement of Country that reflects our advocacy and policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty.	November 2023	CEO

**Focus area:** *Taking action to positively influence our members, stakeholders and the people of the ACT in the demonstration of respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.	First week in July, 2023 and 2024	RWG Chair RWG
	Review HR policies and procedures to remove barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.	June 2023	Operations Manager
	Promote and encourage participation in external NAIDOC events to all staff.	First week in July, 2023 and 2024	CEO
	Provide support for at least one external Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-organised NAIDOC Week event.	First week in July 2023 and 2024	RWG Chair RWG
	Sponsor the Community Sector Worker Award at the annual NAIDOC Week awards and purchase table at the ACT NAIDOC Ball and invite award winners and First Nations community members.	First week in July 2023 and 2024	CEO
	Contact our local NAIDOC Week Committee to discover events in our community and share and promote with staff and members	June 2023, June 2024	Comms and Events Officer
	Support the planning and implementation of, and participation of staff in the ACT Community Sector NAIDOC Week community event.	April 2023, April 2024	Head of Capability
Cultivate an appreciation and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to our staff, members and other stakeholders.	Promote the Reconciliation Australia's Share Our Pride online tool to all staff, members, and stakeholders.	June 2023	Operations Manager
	Display photos, posters, and artworks of notable Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the office and meeting rooms.	Nov 2023	CEO
	Ensure tools, information and resources relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories are a central focus of the ACTCOSS website revamp.	Jan 2023	CEO ICT Officer
	Redevelop the Annual Calendar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates of significance and use our Communications Tools to recognise and promote these dates to staff, members, and other stakeholders.	Nov 2023	Gulanga Program Manager Comms and Events Officer





# Opportunities

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people experience indirect and direct discrimination in recruitment and frequently experience unsafe workplaces and barriers to progression.

Evidence shows that diverse organisations positively correlate with improved organisational outcomes. This is because diverse organisations adapt, innovate and make decisions more effectively and they can better identify consumer need. Diverse organisations attract a larger, more varied and qualified pool of potential employees and provide a happier, more harmonious workplace.

Removing barriers and creating more opportunities for employment and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and businesses across the community sector and ACT Government is part of ACTCOSS's missions of advocating for social justice and building a more culturally capable ACT community services sector.



*1. ACTCOSS engages local Aboriginal Organisation, Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, to run On Country tours for community sector workers*

**Focus area:** *Taking action to positively influence our members stakeholders and the people of the ACT by creating a workplace that is inclusive of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.*

*ACTCOSS as a conduit to support community sector organisations and other stakeholders to increase opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people through employment and partnerships*

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	June 2023	CEO
	Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to consult on ACTCOSS recruitment, retention and professional development strategy.	Dec 2023	CEO
	Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development strategy including use of the ACTCOSS Recruitment and Retention Toolkit internally and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to identify future employment goals and career pathways.	April 2024	CEO
	Advertise job vacancies to effectively reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	April 2023	Operations Manager
	Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in our workplace. Induction policy documents.	Dec 2023	Operations Manager
	Undertake annual review of ACTCOSS employment practices and internal policies using the Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Toolkit (CASAT) to assess cultural safety and cultural capability of ACTCOSS.	Sept 2023	CEO Head of Capability

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Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement strategy.	March 2024	Operations Manager
	Investigate Supply Nation membership.	March 2023	Operations Manager
	Review and update procurement practices to remove barriers to procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and ensure procurement practices are translated into written policies and procedures.	Sept 2023	Operations Manager Gulanga Program Manager
	Develop and communicate opportunities for procurement of goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to staff.	Dec 2023	Operations Manager
	Develop commercial relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses.	June 2024	CEO Gulanga Program Manager
	Aim to increase total amount of expenditure with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander suppliers year on year.	June 2023, June 2024	CEO
	Maintain current commercial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and develop at least one new and ongoing commercial relationship with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned business each year.	Nov 2023 Nov 2024	CEO



**Focus area:** *Taking action to positively influence our members stakeholders and the people of the ACT by creating a workplace that is inclusive of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.*

*ACTCOSS as a conduit to support community sector organisations and other stakeholders to increase opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people through employment and partnerships*

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community sector workers to engage in ACTCOSS programs and advocacy.	Provide free of charge membership for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations or individuals who wish to join ACTCOSS	June 2023	CEO Operations Manager
	Commit \$5,000 per annum to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector workers attend training and professional development courses run by ACTCOSS or other organisations.	June 2023, June 2024	CEO Gulanga Program Manager
Grow representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in ACTCOSS membership and positions of influence.	Develop intentional and targeted approach to grow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership as part of Membership Strategy	Sept 2023	CEO
	Work with the ACTCOSS Board to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the Board through Board recruitment practices and nomination of a dedicated Board position for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members.	Dec 2024	CEO





# Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement.	Feb 2023/24 May 2023/24 Aug 2023/24 Nov 2023/24	Operations Manager
	Establish and apply a Terms of Reference for the RWG	Feb 2023	RWG Chair RWG
	Meet at least four times per year to drive and monitor RAP implementation.	Feb 2023/24 May 2023/24 Aug 2023/24 Nov 2023/24	Operations Manager

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	Define resource needs for RAP implementation.	Feb 2023	CEO Operations Manager
	Continue to engage our senior leaders, Board members and other staff in the delivery of RAP commitments.	Dec 2022	CEO
	Define and maintain appropriate systems to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	Dec 2022	Operations Manager
	Maintain an internal RAP Champion from senior management.	Dec 2022	RWG Chair RWG



Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence.	June annually	Operations Manager
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire.	1 August annually	Operations Manager
	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	30 September, annually	Operations Manager
	Report RAP progress to all staff and senior leaders quarterly.	Feb 2023/24	RWG Chair
		May 2023/24	RWG
		Aug 2023/24	
		Nov 2023/24	
Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings, annually.	May 2023	CEO	
	May 2024		
Investigate participating in Reconciliation Australia's biennial Workplace RAP Barometer.	May 2023	CEO	
Submit a traffic light report to Reconciliation Australia at the conclusion of this RAP.	Nov 2024	Operations Manager	
Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	May 2023	CEO



**Contact:**

*Emma Campbell  
Chief Executive Officer*

*Phone: 02 62027 200*

*Email: [actcoss@actcoss.org.au](mailto:actcoss@actcoss.org.au)*



