



# APPLYING FOR FUNDING

## FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES



A guide to best-practice partnerships between  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and  
non-Indigenous organisations



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# PURPOSE

**This resource is designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations to consider and adopt partnership-centred approaches when applying for funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family support services.**

The content of this resource is based on the views and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and self-determination is critical to effective service delivery and improved outcomes.

The resource identifies the value and importance of the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and provides practical guidance on how to ensure an effective partnership in applying for funding for child and family support services.



PREFERRED APPROACH:

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED SERVICES

**An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation should be the preferred provider of child and family support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Given their unique role as community-controlled organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are the best placed to provide quality, trusted, culturally competent and safe services and supports that are responsive to community needs and priorities.**

In the event that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation is not currently able to provide a service or program on its own, a non-Indigenous organisation can play a valuable role in partnering with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation. This resource outlines key questions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisation to ask when considering applying for funding to deliver child and family support services dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

It is important to note that not every Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person will prefer to access an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations will not necessarily be able to deliver every service needed for their community. In this regard, non-Indigenous services play a valuable role in providing choice for families about which child and family service they access. However, it is also important to recognise that due to the limited development, resourcing and coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in many parts of Australia, families are more often deprived of the choice of accessing a community-controlled service where only non-Indigenous services are available. Non-Indigenous services that have long held the majority of funding for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have a significant role to play to support and enable the growth and development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled child and family services sector.



# VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

**Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are confronted with significant barriers in accessing child and family support services, particularly due to the historical context of colonisation, dispossession and exclusion. These barriers are often compounded by various challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. The nature of government funding – which is often short-term and subject to shifting policy priorities over time – can limit the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, that are often smaller and more locally-based compared to non-Indigenous organisations, to build organisational capabilities over time and deliver effective services on a consistent basis.**

The development of strong, long-term partnerships between non-Indigenous organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is an important way to overcome many of these barriers through the provision of quality, culturally appropriate supports and services that respond effectively to community needs and priorities. Genuine and respectful partnerships have the ability to deliver a broad range of important benefits, including:

- increased access to services and supports by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through programs that are culturally safe and appropriate and respond to identified needs
- the delivery of quality, tailored and accessible child and family support services
- building governance and service delivery capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

- improved cultural competence and safety development for non-Indigenous service providers
- the development of individual and community capacity and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, such as workforce development and enhanced community leadership.

Combined, these benefits deliver improved long-term social, health and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

It is therefore imperative that funding application processes for the delivery of child and family support services provide the opportunity to build and strengthen effective partnerships between non-Indigenous organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.



# PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

SNAICC has identified eight inter-related principles that form the building blocks of successful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and non-Indigenous service providers.<sup>1</sup> These principles are:

Principle	This requires...
Commitment to long-term sustainable relationships based on trust	Significant time is spent building relationships between staff, organisations and community. Partners commit to ongoing relationship, not only an activity or project.
Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history	Commitment to build cultural understanding, to consult and listen to the local community, and to value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and professionalism.
Commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to lead response to child and family needs. Building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, organisation and workforce capacity.
Aim to improve long-term well-being for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities	Identifying and sharing respective strengths in supporting children and families. Partnership resources viewed as community resources and shared for the benefit of children and families.
Shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives and activities	Negotiated and shared vision is developed. Partners jointly develop indicators of success and work together to monitor and evaluate progress.
Valuing process elements as integral to support and enable partnership	Agreements clarify commitments, roles and accountability. Time and resources are allocated to joint planning, review, and partnership development.
Redressing unequal or discriminatory relationships, structures and outcomes	Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage reflects historical and continuing discrimination, and working to correct resulting power and resource imbalances.
Working differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families	Developing cultural competence and safety in service delivery. Recognising non-Indigenous approaches are often not the best way to engage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

The principles that underpin genuine and successful partnerships are particularly relevant to the approach that should be used when considering and developing an application for funding in partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations.

<sup>1</sup> See SNAICC's Partnership Training Manual: Creating change through partnerships (2014), available at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/partnership-training-manual-creating-change-through-partnerships-2014-snaicc-resource/>.





# HOW TO APPLY THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

**This section outlines key considerations for how to apply the above partnership principles when engaging in a funding application process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family support services.**

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORGANISATIONS BEFORE PARTNERING ON A FUNDING APPLICATION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations need to consider the value of a potential partnership for meeting the needs of children and families in their community and for advancing their own service development aspirations. It is important that you undertake due diligence to ensure that any potential partnership will benefit you and your community.

Some key questions for consideration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations prior to engaging in any partnership funding application include:

**Do we have the skills and capability necessary to lead the delivery of the relevant services for children and families in our community, and if not, is a partnership the best way to support our delivery and capacity development?**

In many cases Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations already have significant skills and capability in child and family services, or adaptable capacity from experience in related sectors. In these circumstances, you may be best placed to provide the services on your own, or to take on the role of lead partner, inviting non-Indigenous organisations to provide specialised

services in fields where your organisation has expertise gaps. It is important to consider whether your prospective partner has the right skills and expertise to address gap areas for your organisation or to support your capacity development. For example, it may be service provision expertise that is required, or it may be expertise in organisational governance, administration or business development. A partnership is not always the best or only option to support capacity development, and in some cases direct access to available professional and business development supports may be more appropriate for you.

**Are prospective partners committed to working respectfully in ways that are culturally safe for our organisations, and for our community?**

Cultural competence forms the basis of an organisation's readiness to engage respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. In considering whether to partner with a non-Indigenous organisation it is important to question and assess whether they are committed to the development of genuine and respectful relationships that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, values and self-determination. If non-Indigenous partners will have a direct service role, it will also be important to consider whether they have the capability to deliver culturally safe and acceptable services for the community. It may also be worthwhile to consider whether there is another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with strong cultural capability that you could partner with rather than a non-Indigenous provider.



### **Do prospective partners share our commitment to building capacity, skills and leadership in the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations have reported negative experiences of partnership in circumstances where non-Indigenous providers have sought their support for funding applications, and have subsequently proceeded to pursue the growth of their own business and expansion of their service footprint rather than to support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community capacity. It is important to be clear at the outset about what your goals are for building the role and capacity of your organisation and your community and confirm whether these goals are shared and supported by your prospective partner. If you are not the lead partner, but want your role and capacity to increase over time, it is important to establish from the beginning whether and how a partner organisation will support this, and over what period services will be transitioned to the management of your organisation.

## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR NON-INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS BEFORE CONSIDERING PARTNERING ON A FUNDING APPLICATION**

In deciding whether to apply for funding to deliver child and family services or programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or communities, non-Indigenous organisations should consider the following questions:

### **Would we be competing with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation?**

A threshold question for a non-Indigenous organisation in applying for funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family support services is whether there already is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that is fully capable of delivering the service. Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are willing and able to provide a quality service or program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in their community, non-Indigenous organisations should consider how they can support the role of those organisations or seek

a partnership in alignment with the principles described in this resource, rather than directly competing for funds.

While this consideration may be relatively straightforward for dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, or in discreet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, there are additional complexities in applying for funding for programs for diverse populations that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Consideration should be given to the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families likely to access the services, and the role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation can play to deliver services to those families, either independently or in partnership. Non-Indigenous organisations should thoroughly engage and consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations before engaging in any funding process for services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

### **Do we have an existing partnership or relationship with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation?**

Ideally, a strong mutual relationship of trust and confidence should already exist between the non-Indigenous organisation and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with whom the funding application will be submitted. There should be appropriate structures and processes in place to support the partnership, including governance arrangements and documented agreements, such as a Memorandum of Understanding<sup>2</sup> (MOU).

### **Are there clear expectations about the partnership?**

What an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation may want out of a partnership may be very different to what a non-Indigenous organisation is seeking. Honestly acknowledging and understanding each organisation's respective motivations is critical to establish a solid foundation for a trusting relationship. Within this dynamic, it is important that the inherent power imbalance that often exists between large non-Indigenous organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is recognised.

<sup>2</sup> An MOU is a flexible and plain language way of capturing the nature of the partnership, its objectives, and the commitments of the parties. See SNAICC's *Partnership Training Manual* for more information about the importance of MOU's and how to create one.





### **Is the partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation based on a long-term commitment to mutually agreed objectives or outcomes?**

The service or program that is the subject of the funding application should reflect what both organisations are seeking to achieve together. While different organisations may bring different expertise, experience and perspectives, the core objective for any partnership between an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and a non-Indigenous organisation should be to achieve positive and sustainable long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and their families and communities.

### **Does the program funding reflect the views and aspirations of the intended beneficiaries?**

Self-determination must be at the heart of any funding application process for child and family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is an essential pre-requisite that the service or program that is the subject of the funding reflects the views and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community/ies for whom the services are intended. To achieve this, the views of the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community/ies must have been sought either directly or through an appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation. How the views of the community are sought should be guided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisation.

### **Do we have the organisational capacity, expertise and cultural competence to deliver effective outcomes?**

Non-Indigenous organisations should objectively assess their own capacity (either in service delivery or development practice) to deliver effective outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes service delivery capacity and expertise, as well as strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence within its own organisation.<sup>3</sup>

## **PROCESS OF PREPARING A FUNDING APPLICATION**

In addition to the considerations outlined above, there are a number of essential features that should apply throughout the process of preparing the funding application documentation:

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and self-determination**

Consistent with the considerations outlined above, the development of the content of the funding application (that is, what the service or support is and how it will be delivered) must be led and determined by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community/ies that are intended to benefit from the services/activities. The non-Indigenous organisation should facilitate and support this to the maximum extent possible, such as by assisting with the drafting of the funding application documentation.

### **Respect and value cultural expertise and authority**

Non-Indigenous organisations should recognise and respect the cultural understanding and knowledge that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation brings to the partnership, including by ensuring that such cultural authority is appropriately remunerated where appropriate.

### **Sharing of knowledge and expertise**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and non-Indigenous organisations should seek to work together to share knowledge and expertise, and establish improved development practice and cultural competency standards both within their own organisations as well as in the delivery of services and programs. This is essential to enhance the cultural safety and quality of services available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

<sup>3</sup> There are various resources and tools to assist organisations to undertake this assessment. See, for example, the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services Aboriginal culturally informed resource tool, available at <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/human-services-standards-aboriginal-culturally-informed-resource-tool-word>.



### **Allow sufficient time**

It is important that an appropriate timeframe is factored into the process of preparing a funding application to ensure that all partners can participate effectively in its development. This includes allowing adequate time for the board or committee of management of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation to consider and approve the final funding application documentation. Planning well in advance for funding opportunities can prevent application processes being rushed, disrespecting or undermining the partnership and possibly creating tensions in the relationship.

## **ESSENTIAL CONTENT FOR A FUNDING APPLICATION**

It is essential that the funding application include details relating to the following components, which ideally should also be incorporated into the funding documentation (such as the funding contract or agreement) in the event that the application is successful:

### **Community engagement and participation**

As outlined above, the content of the funding application should reflect the principle of self-determination and support community level capacity building, governance and decision making. These aspects should be incorporated into each stage of the design, delivery and implementation of programs, services and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

### **Clear identification of roles and responsibilities**

It is essential that the roles and responsibilities of each partner organisation are clearly identified in the funding application documentation. Details should include what staff and other resources each organisation will contribute to the service or program, the decision-making processes and governance and operations structures. Ideally, these details should also be reflected in a Memorandum of Understanding or other partnership documentation. Consider also the relationship of each partner with the funding agency and how they are involved in contract negotiations and ongoing contract management. It may be counter to principles of self-determination in the partnership if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations partner in delivery but don't have direct influence in contract negotiations.

### **Accountability and evaluation**

A robust accountability framework and evaluation process should be included, which has been developed by the partnering organisations in collaboration with the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community/ies. As well as the substantive outcomes sought to be achieved by the programs or services, the accountability framework should also include an evaluation of the strength of the partnership between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and non-Indigenous organisation. The funding application documentation (and subsequent funding agreement) should identify clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to demonstrate the intended outcomes.

### **A clear exit strategy**

Where the desired short, medium or long-term outcome is for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver services or programs, non-Indigenous organisations should develop a mutually agreed, transparent exit strategy in consultation with their partners. Contracts with funders should incorporate a succession plan and long term planning for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver dedicated services.

### **Building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations**

The funding application should contain details about how the partnership will strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, working towards the goal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations delivering services and supports on their own.

### **Adequate resourcing of the partnership**

Finally, it is imperative that appropriate resourcing to support the partnership is considered as part of the funding application. This includes resourcing to support the governance and operations arrangements, community participation structures, capacity building for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and the monitoring and evaluation framework.



# ROLE OF FUNDERS IN SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE APPLICATION PROCESS

**As identified above, the nature of funding and contracting can have a significant impact on the effective delivery of child and family support services. It is therefore important that the funding application processes, program requirements and assessment methods are capable of supporting the partnership principles and key factors outlined throughout this document.**

Funders should provide clear guidance materials to support the application process that include clear indications of the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and partnerships to effective services delivery. In particular, funders should consider:

## ADEQUATE TIMEFRAMES

As identified above, it is important that sufficient time is provided for the development of the funding application. This includes appropriate time to allow for:

- consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community/ies, where required
- agreeing on roles and responsibilities between the non-Indigenous organisation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation
- decision-making processes, including approval of the final funding application documentation.

Adequate timeframes are particularly necessary for smaller Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that may lack the resources and capacity to engage effectively in funding application processes. Appropriate timeframes should therefore be factored into the application process to ensure that all partners can participate effectively.

## SUFFICIENT FLEXIBILITY IN PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Funding application processes should enable sufficient flexibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural authority and expertise and community-led responses to be incorporated into the design of the supports and services to be funded. While the intended outcomes for the funding of a particular service or program can be identified, it is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their representative organisations have the ability to determine how that service or program is to be delivered in a tailored, culturally appropriate and safe way.

## VALUING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL CAPABILITY

Funding application processes should include assessment criteria that value cultural knowledge, capability and safety in the provision of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Including these criteria can assist to ensure that the knowledge, skills and relationships that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation bring to the partnership is valued in the application and assessment process. It enables partners to focus on how the partnership will build capacity for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery as a component of the application.

While non-government organisations may not have control over funding application processes, it is important to be aware of and understand good practice principles for funding application



processes that can effectively support best-practice partnerships. Applying the partnership principles in practice may assist organisations in negotiating the relationship with funders and the way in which funders engage when supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

This resource has drawn significantly from:

- APO NT [NT Partnership Principles for Organisations working with Aboriginal organisations and communities in the NT](#)
- ACOSS [Principles for a Partnership-centred Approach](#)
- SNAICC's [Partnership Training Manual: Creating change through partnerships](#)
- VACCA resource: [Building Respectful Partnerships: The Commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competence in Child and Family Services](#)

