



**Coalition
of Peaks**

**Policy partnerships
under the National
Agreement on
Closing the Gap**

INDUCTION GUIDE





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Purpose

The purpose of this Policy Partnerships Induction Guide is to provide best practice methods and principles to establish, participate in and operate a policy partnerships in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. While this guide is largely for future and current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties on policy partnerships, Government Parties may also find the guide beneficial.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The [Coalition of Peaks](#) was established in 2018 and represents over 70 national and state and territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak bodies.

In 2019, the Coalition of Peaks entered a historic [Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) (Partnership Agreement) with the Council of Australian Governments to chart a new way of working between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people based on partnership and shared decision-making.

In 2020, the Coalition entered into the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) (National Agreement) with all Australian governments and the Australian Local Government Association.

Priority Reforms

The National Agreement centres around four Priority Reforms:



Priority Reform One: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Priority Reform Two: Building and strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector.



Priority Reform Three: Systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Priority Reform Four: Shared access to data and information at a regional level.

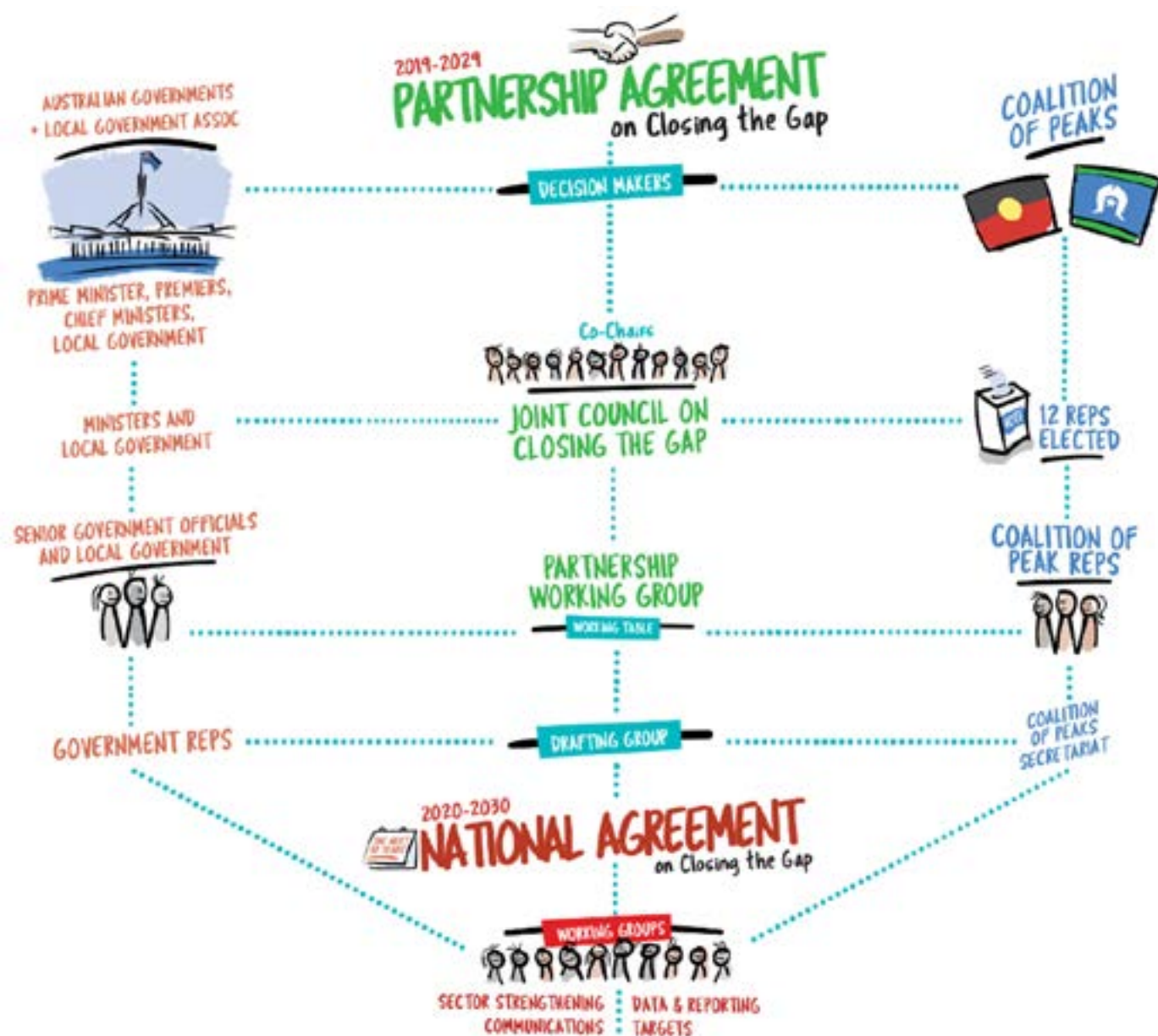
Socio-economic targets

The National Agreement also contains [17 socio-economic targets](#) that governments are committed to achieving, to measure how the outcomes are tracking against the goals of the National Agreement. The socio-economic targets are focused on areas including education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. They will be reported on annually by governments.

- **Target 1:** Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation by 2031.
- **Target 2:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birth weight to 91%.
- **Target 3:** By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95%.
- **Target 4:** By 2031 increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55%.
- **Target 5:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96%.
- **Target 6:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70%.
- **Target 7:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67%.
- **Target 8:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62%.
- **Target 9:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88%.
- **Target 10:** By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15%.
- **Target 11:** By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30%.
- **Target 12:** By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45%.
- **Target 13:** By 2031, a significant and sustained reduction in violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children towards zero.
- **Target 14:** Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.
- **Target 15a:** By 2030, a 15% increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests.
- **Target 15b:** By 2030, a 15% increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples legal rights or interests in the sea.
- **Target 16:** By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.
- **Target 17:** By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.

The success of the National Agreement relies on the full implementation of all commitments by all Parties. There is provision for new or updated targets that are developed in partnership and agreed by the Parties to the National Agreement (see Clause 85-87 of the National Agreement).

Figure 1: National Agreement and Partnership Agreement governance structures



The success of the National Agreement relies on the full implementation of all commitments by all Parties.



Governance structure of Closing the Gap Joint Council

The [Joint Council on Closing the Gap](#) is the senior decision-making body for the Partnership and National Agreements. The Joint Council is made up of:

- Indigenous Affairs Ministers from the Commonwealth and each State and Territory.
- the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).
- representatives of the Coalition of Peaks.

The Joint Council is co-chaired by the Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Australians and the Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks. The Joint Council will meet twice yearly.

Partnership Working Group

The Partnership Working Group (PWG) was established by the Joint Council to drive implementation of the Partnership and National Agreements and support the work plan of the Joint Council. PWG is made up of members from the:

- senior representatives of the Coalition of Peaks.
- nominated deputy officials from the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments.
- nominated officials from ALGA.

The PWG is co-chaired by the Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks and the Commonwealth as represented by National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). The role of PWG is to review matters before they are considered by the Joint Council and to progress work at an officials' level. All papers presented to Joint Council must be considered and agreed by PWG beforehand.

The PWG will meet monthly, as required, in order to progress the Joint Council's priorities with the agreement of the co-chairs.

Drafting Group

The role of the Drafting Group is to facilitate the preparation of agendas and papers to enable the PWG and Joint Council to make well-informed decisions based on the range of perspectives in the partnership and to conduct its business effectively and efficiently. Drafting Group meetings are held on a weekly basis.

Membership is drawn from:

- Coalition of Peaks Secretariat.

- Commonwealth officials, represented by NIAA.
- State/Territory government officials from two jurisdictions.

In 2022, the State/Territory government officials on Drafting Group are from New South Wales and Western Australia. At the conclusion of 2022 or commencement of 2023, States/Territories will nominate and select two Drafting Group representatives through the Deputy Senior Officials Working Group (DSOWG), which comprises the PWG members from all jurisdictions. The PWG co-chairs then announce the representatives at the next available PWG meeting.

What are policy partnerships under the National Agreement?

Priority Reform One of the National Agreement commits governments to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority

with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap. Under Priority Reform One, the National Agreement commits governments to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap.

There are two forms of partnerships:

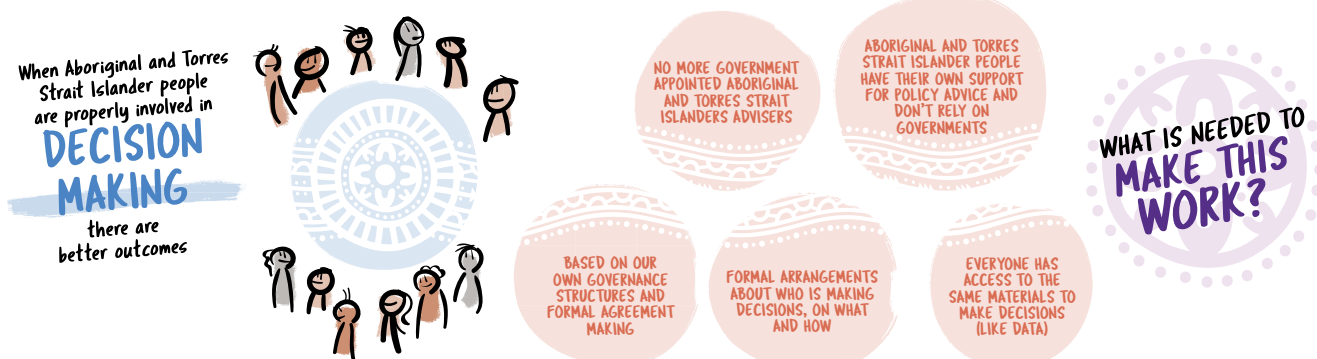
- **Policy partnerships** are created for the purpose of working on discrete policy areas, such as education, health, or housing.
- **Place-based partnerships** are based on a specific region (not discussed in this document).

This Induction Guide sets out the foundations for policy partnerships under the National Agreement, noting that not all partnerships will be the same, and will be designed to meet the needs of each policy area/sector.

Figure 2: Priority Reform One

PRIORITY REFORM ONE

{ Formal partnerships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on closing the gap }



The National Agreement states that by 2022, policy partnerships will be established in the following five areas:

- Justice (established mid-2021).
- Social and emotional wellbeing.
- Early Childhood Care and Development, including out of home care.
- Housing.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

Other policy partnerships may be established in addition to these five priority areas.

How are policy partnerships different to previous agreements in this space?

Previous attempts to address the policy areas which have been identified as priorities under the National Agreement have been varied. In some jurisdictions there are existing agreements in place, such as the Aboriginal Justice Agreements.

The policy partnerships under the National Agreement differ, as they bring all jurisdictions together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to share decision-making. They are not roundtables or advisory groups, they are an opportunity to work in partnership to achieve the outcomes outlined in the National Agreement.

Shared-decision making is a cornerstone in the National Agreement under Priority Reform One. Decision-making in this way, by consensus and where the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are equal to governments, has not been attempted previously. This new way of working ensures parties can regularly and directly meet with senior government officials to make decisions together, and governments will need to report on progress. Working in a partnership requires governments to relinquish some power and offers an opportunity for innovative policy development and improved outcomes.

Strong partnerships include the following elements:

- Partnerships are accountable and representative.
- A formal agreement in place, that is signed by all parties.
- Decision-making is shared between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Commonwealth Government has committed to funding each policy partnership to support this work. This funding can be used in many ways, including supporting participation of Representatives in this process and to commission research to be discussed at policy partnership meetings. Refer to Appendix E for information on resourcing policy partnerships.

What is the purpose of policy partnerships?

To identify opportunities to work more effectively across governments, reduce gaps and duplication, and improve outcomes under Closing the Gap. Specifically, the policy partnerships seek to:

- a. Drive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led outcomes on Closing the Gap.
- b. Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, communities, and organisations to negotiate and implement agreements with governments to implement all Priority Reforms and policy specific strategies to support Closing the Gap.
- c. Support additional community-led development initiatives.
- d. Bring together all government parties, together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations, and communities to the collective task of Closing the Gap.

Who are the Parties?

Policy partnerships have no more than 20 signatories and at least equal representation of Coalition of Peaks/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties to Government Parties.

The Parties of the policy partnership typically include:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties

- **Lead Peak/Co-Chair** – one senior official

appointed from the Coalition of Peaks Representatives).

- **Coalition of Peaks Representatives** – five representatives of the Coalition of Peaks Members, including the Lead Peak.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representatives** – five representatives selected through an open and transparent Expression of Interest process by the Coalition of Peaks Representatives (also known as 'Independent Representatives').

Government Parties

- **Lead Commonwealth Agency/Co-Chair** – one senior official nominated from the Commonwealth Government at the Deputy Secretary level.
- **Government Representatives** – eight senior officials from each state and territory nominated by their jurisdiction.

How do the policy partnerships work?

Policy partnerships report to the Joint Council on the recommendations made, implementation, and their progress as a partnership overall. As such, policy partnerships meet at least four times per year, where Parties will deliberate, and progress agreed actions.

All Parties are jointly responsible for:

- a. developing a joined-up approach to the policy area including:
 - identifying opportunities to work more effectively across governments.
 - reducing gaps and duplication.
 - improving outcomes.
- b. agreeing the priorities and work plan for the partnership.
- c. conducting and commissioning research and studies, analysing data and information, preparing reports.
- d. developing recommendations for action.
- e. tracking and reporting on progress.

Policy partnerships should also develop linkages across other partnerships to share insights, particularly if there is overlap in the policy areas.

Roles and responsibilities of Parties

Each policy partnership is co-chaired by a senior representative of the Lead Peak (CEO or Chairperson) and a Deputy Secretary from the Commonwealth Agency with lead policy responsibility.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties Lead Peak

The Lead Peak will usually have primary policy responsibility for the area which is the focus of the policy partnership. The Lead Peak has a leadership role by co-chairing the partnership, meaning they will, jointly with the other Co-Chair:

- a. set the strategic direction.
- b. support the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representatives by ensuring they are prepared for meetings (including booking travel and accommodation if required and payment of sitting fees).
- c. conduct and commission research and studies, analyse data and information, and prepare reports.
- d. report back on the partnership to the Coalition of Peaks.
- e. identify experts, including people with lived experience, to present at policy partnership meetings.

This leadership role should be recognised through adequate funding to the Lead Peak in the establishment and maintenance phase of the partnership (refer to [Appendix E](#)).

Coalition of Peaks Representatives

Coalition of Peaks Representatives, including the Lead Peak, will:

- a. represent the Coalition of Peaks and their members, reporting back to the Coalition of Peaks on policy partnership matters.
- b. identify opportunities to work more effectively across governments.
- c. agree the priorities and work plan.
- d. conduct and commission research and studies, analyse data and information, and prepare reports.
- e. develop recommendations for action through



the implementation approaches of the National Agreement.

- f. identify experts, including people with lived experience, to present at policy partnership meetings.
- g. send a proxy with appropriate delegation to keep an authorising environment if unable to attend.

If the Lead Peak representative is unable to attend and Co-Chair an official meeting, they will nominate a Coalition of Peaks Representative to Co-Chair the meeting in their absence.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representatives

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representatives will:

- a. identify opportunities to work more effectively across governments.
- b. agree the priorities and work plan.
- c. conduct and commission research and studies, analyse data and information, and prepare reports.
- d. develop recommendations for action through the implementation approaches of the National Agreement.
- e. identify experts, including people with lived experience, to present at policy partnership meetings.
- f. not be able to send a proxy if unable to attend.

Government Parties

The Government Parties are senior officials with sufficient authority to bring whole-of-government positions to meetings. The Lead Government Agency will Co-Chair the policy partnership alongside the Lead Peak, and will:

- a. liaise with other agencies in their jurisdiction to develop cross-agency perspectives.
- b. engage with other organisations to seek expert advice.
- c. engage with relevant Ministers and seek Ministerial clearance of key actions.
- d. consider how recommendations of the partnership can be implemented in their jurisdiction.
- e. communicate the work of the partnership to other agencies in their jurisdiction.
- f. conduct and commission research and studies, analyse data and information, and prepare reports.
- g. share data with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representatives, where government is the owner of that data and privacy or other requirements allow, to inform shared decision-making.
- h. send a proxy with appropriate delegation to keep an authorising environment if unable to attend.

Who do the policy partnerships report to?

The policy partnerships report to the Joint Council (refer to [Governance Structure](#)). A standing verbal update is provided at each Joint Council meeting from the policy partnership Co-Chairs, as well as an annual written report outlining the recommendations made, actions taken, and other progress of the partnership. The annual report must be tabled with PWG, which may develop its own materials in response to the report before being presented to the Joint Council. However, the policy partnership is accountable to Joint Council and not PWG.

Establishing a policy partnership

A significant amount of establishment activities must take place prior to the first official meeting of the policy partnership. It is recommended that these activities commence at least 5-6 months prior to the first official meeting.

The Lead Peak and Lead Commonwealth Agency are responsible for majority of the establishment work, as supported by the Peaks Secretariat and NIAA.

The Lead Commonwealth Agency is responsible for jointly determining the resourcing arrangements with the Lead Peak. The Commonwealth and Lead Peak will need to agree resourcing needs during the establishment work of the policy partnership.

Policy Partnership Secretariat Groups

The Lead Commonwealth Agency will resource the establishment of policy partnership secretariat function. There are two groups of secretariat functions that provide support to the policy partnership, and they work together closely:

- Lead Commonwealth Agency Secretariat.
- Lead Peak Secretariat.

The secretariat groups will need to be in-place and functioning prior to the first official meeting of the policy partnership with sufficient time for the Peak to scale up their activities. It is likely that both the Lead Peak Secretariat and the Commonwealth Agency Secretariat for the partnership will need policy, engagement, research, and administration officers to undertake this work.

The Secretariat groups support the Co-Chairs and all Parties. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties typically engage with the Lead Peak Secretariat, however the Commonwealth Secretariat is a resource to the entire partnership.

The Peaks Secretariat and NIAA can assist all Parties with high-level guidance and support but will not provide any regular secretariat functions to the policy partnerships.

Figure 3: Groups involved in the establishment and functioning of a policy partnership



Core Group / Core Working Group

The Core Group/Core Working Group typically consists of officials from the Lead Peak, Lead Commonwealth Agency, Peaks Secretariat and NIAA. This group is overseen by the Co-Chairs, and supported by the Secretariat Groups.

Establishment activities

The below provides a high-level outline of the establishment activities required in the lead up to the first official meeting of the policy partnership.

Timeframe	Action	Responsible
Month 1	Coalition of Peaks members endorse the Lead Peak at the regular Peaks Teleconference	Peaks Secretariat
	EOI for Peaks Members to join policy partnership	Peaks Secretariat
	Government endorse Lead Commonwealth Agency	NIAA
Months 1-2	Determine resourcing arrangements	Lead Peak and Lead Commonwealth Agency
	Lead Peak to meet with Lead Commonwealth Agency and begin Core Working Group	Lead Peak, Lead Commonwealth Agency, Peaks Secretariat and NIAA
	EOI for Independent Representatives to join policy partnership	Peaks Secretariat
	Seek Government Parties	Lead Commonwealth Agency and NIAA
Months 2-3	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties have induction session and workshop to meet and set priorities	Lead Peak and Peaks Secretariat
	Core Working Group drafts key documents	Lead Peak, Lead Commonwealth Agency, Peaks Secretariat and NIAA
Months 3-4	Partnership Working Group approves key documents of the policy partnership	Lead Peak, Lead Commonwealth Agency, Peaks Secretariat and NIAA
Months 4-5	Joint Council approves key documents of the policy partnership	Lead Peak, Lead Commonwealth Agency, Peaks Secretariat and NIAA
Months 5-6	First official meeting of the policy partnership	Lead Peak and Lead Commonwealth Agency

Core Working Group

Prior to the first official meeting of the policy partnership, it is expected that the Core Working Group meet regularly to draft the establishment of the policy partnership. This includes developing and finalising a set of documents for Joint Council consideration as agreed by the Co-Chairs.

Establishment documents include the:

- Agreement to Implement – official document that sets out the scope and purpose of the partnership, as well as roles and responsibilities of members.
- Work plan – first year plan at a high-level, one of the actions is develop a second work plan for longer term, strategic focus.
- First official meeting agenda – outline of the first meeting, largely covers introductions and a focus on establishing priorities.

Agreement to Implement

Policy partnerships are formalised in a written document which covers the scope and purpose of the policy partnership (Agreement to Implement). The Agreement to Implement is drafted by the Core Working Group, considered by Co-Chairs, and endorsed by Joint Council through PWG. See Appendix B for the Agreement to Implement template.

Work plan

The work plan sets out the high-level actions that the policy partnership will achieve in the first year. The Core Working Group is responsible for developing most of the draft work plan. At the first official meeting, all Parties contribute to and agree on the work plan. For example, the work plan is likely to include:

- Making recommendations to Joint Council.
- Considering Jurisdictional Implementation Plans.
- Developing an annual report on the actions of the policy partnership.

After the first official meeting, Representatives on the policy partnerships may develop a detailed work plan which has a more strategic, longer term focus. See Appendix C for a work plan template.

Draft agenda

The agenda for the first official meeting must be drafted by the Core Working Group prior to the first official meeting. This agenda should focus on expectations and priorities for the policy partnership.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties Induction and Workshop

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties will undertake a group induction session and planning workshop prior to the first official meeting of the policy partnership.

The induction provides an opportunity for the group to meet in-person, build relationships and strengthen the understanding of the National Agreement. The workshop follows the induction session and is an

opportunity to determine strategic priorities and the approach to official meetings. It will be organised by the Peaks Secretariat.

Please refer to Appendix F for the Induction Session and Workshop Agenda template.

Resourcing model

Government Parties are required to provide sufficient resourcing to enable equal participation in policy partnerships. The Lead Peak should work with the Lead Commonwealth Agency to determine the resourcing model needed to support the work of the policy partnership.

This should include support to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to be partners with governments (National Agreement clause 33), which means they can:

- engage independent policy advice.
- meet independently of governments to determine their own policy positions.
- support strengthened governance between and across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and parties.
- engage with and seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all relevant groups within affected communities, including but not limited to Elders, Traditional Custodians, and Native Title Holders.

See Appendix E for a template to calculate required resources for the Lead Peak.

Establishment costs

Across all policy partnerships there will be some common functions that are required for establishment and ongoing governance. Parties in the policy partnerships will provide some in-kind resources such as their time or venues for meetings.

The partnerships need to be able to:

- Meet regularly.
- Commission research.

- Engage with experts and communities.
- Develop policies, recommendations, and action plans.
- Develop and analyse data.
- Develop funding proposals.
- Produce reports.
- Undertake reviews and evaluations.

Meetings

Meeting costs will include flights, accommodation, venue hire, meals and sitting fees. Sitting fees are to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to participate in policy partnerships. Coalition of the Peaks Representatives can claim sitting fees if their time on the policy partnership is not paid by their organisation.

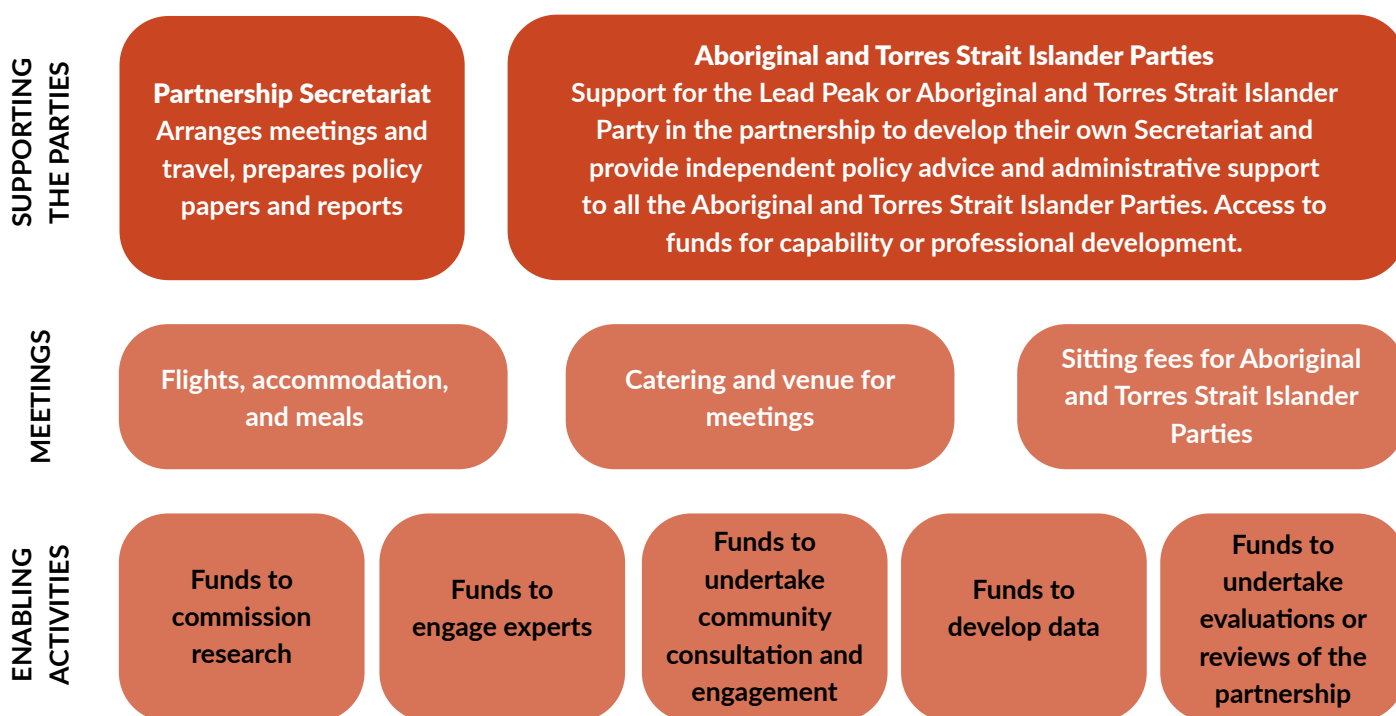
Non-establishment costs

The policy partnership may wish to undertake additional actions with resource implications (for instance implementation of a recommendation or commissioning of research). Resourcing for these should sit with the relevant jurisdiction or party, or a co-contribution or other funding model may be negotiated.

Time commitment

Time commitment will vary according to each party, and policy partnership. Parties should account for two full days during to the establishment of the policy partnership and one full day to attend each meeting (minimum four days per year), plus approximately half a day of preparation time to review all the relevant documents. Parties will also need to account for travel time for face-to-face meetings.

Figure 4: Resourcing model for establishing the policy partnerships



Meeting operations

The Lead Peak Secretariat and Commonwealth Agency Secretariat, along with the Co-Chairs, are responsible for the operations of the policy partnership and the official meetings.

Before meetings

Agenda and Papers

In the lead up to the meetings, the Lead Peak Secretariat and Commonwealth Agency Secretariat jointly develop the draft agenda and meeting papers. The meeting minutes, including action items, and current work plans should be included as part of this pack. Where Parties would like to include an item on the agenda, they should first email the Co-Chairs.

The Co-Chairs are responsible for clearing the final agenda and meeting papers. Once cleared and at least one week prior to the meeting, the Commonwealth Agency Secretariat circulates the final agenda and meeting papers to all Parties. Once the agenda meeting papers have been circulated, Parties familiarise themselves with the documents in full.

The Lead Peak Secretariat provides talking points to the Lead Peak Co-Chair and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties, where required. The Commonwealth Agency Secretariat is responsible for providing Talking Points to the Lead Commonwealth Agency Co-Chair.

Pre-briefings

Prior to each policy partnership meeting, the Lead Peak Co-Chair and Lead Peak Secretariat delivers a pre-brief to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties. The Lead Peak Secretariat is to determine when the relevant parties are available and should ensure adequate notice is given to maximise attendance.

This pre-brief can be undertaken when the agenda and papers are still in draft. The pre-brief aims to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties are briefed on the meeting, discuss papers and position and where possible ensure a united position can be brought

forward at the meeting and that the talking points reflect the Parties positions. This pre-brief also allows Parties to raise any questions or concerns. The Lead Peak Co-Chair should also ensure that all parties are given a chance to speak at the pre-briefing so that an agreement can be reached.

The Government Representatives must liaise with the relevant departments and portfolios ahead of the meeting, so that they can bring a whole of government approach and an authorising environment to the meeting. They should also consider how the partnership may be leveraged to achieve consideration and consensus on issues identified by policy partnership members.

Co-Chairs will also meet ahead of the official meeting to discuss their approach to the agenda and alert each other of key matters which may have emerged at the separate pre-briefings.

Commissioning research

Research can be commissioned to guide policy decisions made at the meeting (see Appendix G).

During meetings

Quorum

Representatives of the policy partnership are expected to attend all meetings. A meeting quorum is determined by the Co-Chairs and should be outlined in the Agreement to Implement. It is recommended that quorum consists of at least three of both Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties (Peaks and Independent Representatives).

Meeting format

The meeting will be conducted according to the agenda by the Co-Chairs. The partnership meets at least four times per calendar year, face-to-face with the locations negotiated by the Co-Chairs. Videoconferencing facilities will also be available at each meeting to support any parties who are unable to travel. Time will be allocated for each specific update, and all members will be given an opportunity to raise any concerns or share their thoughts in relation to that item.

Throughout the meeting, parties will commit to taking certain actions before the next meeting ('action items'). The action items will be noted in the minutes of the meeting and progress discussed at the next meeting.

Shared decision-making and active participation by all parties

The Co-Chairs should ensure that all Parties are given opportunity to speak at the meeting. This can be done by asking an individual representative for their view on a particular matter. Shared-decision making is described in the National Agreement (clause 32c) as:

- by **consensus** (see below), where the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties hold as much weight as the governments.
- **transparent**, where matters for decision are in terms that are easily understood by all parties and where there is enough information and time to understand the implications of the decision.
- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives can speak **without fear** of reprisals or repercussions.
- where a **wide variety of groups** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including women, young people, elders, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability can have their voice heard.
- where **self-determination is supported**, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **lived experience** is understood and respected.
- where relevant **funding for programs and services aligns with jointly agreed community priorities**, noting governments retain responsibility for funding decisions.
- where partnership parties have access to the **same data and information**, in an easily accessible format, on which any decisions are made.

Protocols for consensus decision-making will be addressed in the Agreement to Implement. If agreement cannot be reached, the matter can be referred to Joint Council for resolution.

Confidentiality

As default, meeting papers can be shared among the broader Coalition of Peaks membership and government portfolios as well as other relevant stakeholders. If a document is confidential, it should be clearly marked as confidential on the front page. Policy partnerships may wish to develop a confidentiality protocol.

Making recommendations

Policy partnerships may make recommendations and provide those recommendations to the Joint Council. Recommendations are:

- made by consensus.
- non-binding.
- only made public with the express agreement of Joint Council.
- national or in relation to a specific member or other party.
- tailored to existing structures and not duplicating efforts in a particular jurisdiction.

After meetings

Reporting

The outcome of the meeting and the work plan should be communicated to the Coalition of Peaks by the Lead Peak. This can be done via an email to members or an update at the regular Peaks Teleconference. The Peaks Secretariat can upload relevant materials to the members portal. In some cases, a media release or other social media promotion may be appropriate.

The Co-Chairs will also be required to provide a verbal update to the Joint Council at each Joint Council meeting and report to Joint Council annually in writing. Jurisdictions should also report on their progress towards implementing the adopted policy partnership recommendations in their annual reports and implementation plans.

Actioning meeting items

Draft minutes will be provided to parties within five business days after each meeting. Each party must ensure that the actions that they have committed to

at each meeting and in the work plan are noted and progressed. Policy partnerships may wish to keep a record of actions that outline the responsible member and timeframe for each action item.

Building and maintaining strong partnerships

Partnership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Prior to the Partnership Agreement and National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Government engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on policy frequently fell short of partnership. Though there has been a rise in commitments to co-design and meaningful engagement, communities have often been consulted as stakeholders in the development of policies that affect them and had no real decision-making power.

In 2019, the former Council of Australian Governments (now National Cabinet) committed to a genuine, formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives for the next decade. The detailed nature and operation of that formal partnership are elaborated in the National Agreement.

Each policy partnership will be unique. However, certain elements are inherent in strong, productive partnerships.

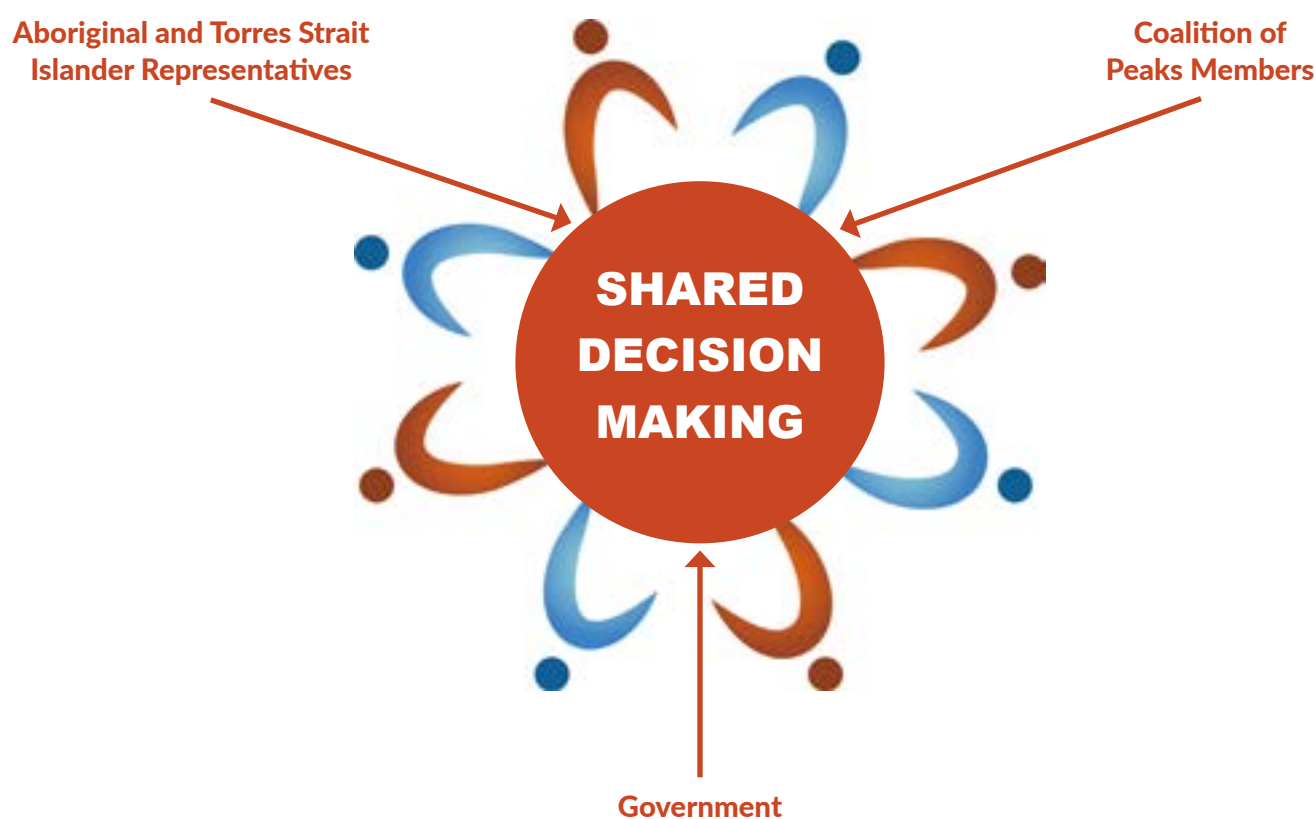
Strong partnerships under the National Agreement

The National Agreement and Partnership Agreement include a number of strong partnership elements and principles as per below:

- a. Partnerships are accountable and representative and are between (National Agreement clause 32.a):
 - i. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, where participation in decision-making is done by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people appointed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a transparent way, based on their own structures and where they are accountable to their own organisations and communities.
- ii. up to three levels of government, where government representatives have negotiating and decision-making authority relevant to the partnership context.
- iii. other parties as agreed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and governments.
- b. Parties commit to open and transparent negotiation and shared decision making on matters relating to the design and implementation of the Closing the Gap framework (Partnership Agreement clause 14.d).
- c. A formal agreement in place, that is signed by all parties and (National Agreement clause 32.b)
 - i. defines who the parties are, what their roles are, what the purpose and objectives of the partnership are, what is in scope of shared decision-making, and what are the reporting arrangements, timeframes, and monitoring, review, and dispute mechanisms.
 - ii. is structured in a way that allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to agree the agenda for the discussions that lead to any decisions.
 - iii. is made public and easily accessible.
 - iv. is protected in state, territory, and national legislation where appropriate.
- d. Decision-making is shared between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Shared decision-making is (National Agreement clause 32.c):
 - i. by consensus, where the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties hold as much weight as the governments.
 - ii. transparent, where matters for decision are in terms that are easily understood by all parties and where there is enough information and time to understand the implications of the decision.
 - iii. where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives can speak without fear of reprisals or repercussions.

- iv. where a wide variety of groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including women, young people, elders, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability can have their voice heard.
 - v. where self-determination is supported, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experience is understood and respected.
 - vi. where relevant funding for programs and services align with jointly agreed community priorities, noting governments retain responsibility for funding decisions.
 - vii. where partnership parties have access to the same data and information, in an easily accessible format, on which any decisions are made.
- e. Parties recognise that adequate funding is needed
- to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to be partners with governments in formal partnerships. This includes agreed funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to (National Agreement clause 33):
 - i. engage independent policy advice.
 - ii. meet independently of governments to determine their own policy positions.
 - iii. support strengthened governance between and across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and parties.
 - iv. engage with and seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all relevant groups within affected communities, including but not limited to Elders, Traditional Custodians, and Native Title Holders.

Figure 5: In the policy partnerships, decision-making is shared by all Parties



Difference between partnership, consultation, funding arrangements and advocacy

Partnership is a new way of working: it sets the standard in effective negotiation and shared decision-making. Traditionally, Peak Organisations have had to advocate for the policy changes they needed. Similarly, Governments did not share in decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and at best they consulted them as stakeholders, at worst they forced policies and programs on us.

Partnership is different to both advocacy and consultation because it involves shared decision-making and accountability. This means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties are equal partners with governments under the National Agreement.

Working in partnership is about working together, compromise, and negotiation to reach consensus among all parties.

Figure 6: Comparison of best practice compared to poor practice of partnerships

Best practice	Poor practice
Sufficient time is allowed for thorough discussion and consultation with members. All parties participate in all discussions. Decisions are made by consensus, meaning that all parties must agree before a decision is taken. ¹	One or more parties dominates discussions or uses their influence to rush decisions through. Parties are pressured to agree so that proposals can be passed. Meetings take place without all parties being present.
All parties share information and data to enable good decision making and transparent and open discussion. Data is provided with sufficient time and support to digest and understand.	Information is withheld or provided in a piecemeal fashion, and some parties lack all the information when participating in discussions. ²
Parties are open to feedback. Grievances or challenges can be communicated openly and respectfully. Parties commit to developing cultural competency and better understanding one another.	Parties become resentful over grievances, and struggle to communicate openly with one another. Cultural differences are misunderstood or misinterpreted, leading to offence.
Parties recognise additional work and the history of inequity. Parties commit to a plan to support capacity building to achieve equal partnership and ensure all Parties can participate to their full potential.	Parties are outnumbered and have unequal resourcing. This results in slow progress where parties are overwhelmed and challenged by additional work. They are not able to participate fully in the partnership.

¹ Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap Health Check 2020, p. 12.

² Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap Health Check 2020, p. 12.

In the policy partnerships, decision-making is shared by all Parties.

Ways to work in a partnership

The spectrum of engagement behaviours on the previous slide draws on some existing models including the IAP2 spectrum of public participation³ and Hart's ladder of engagement but has been developed specifically for the model of engagement expected under the National Agreement.

As per Figure 8, this spectrum outlines the range of behaviours / approaches governments can take to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and organisations. Power shifts hands towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as you move further along the spectrum. Trust in government should also increase as you move along the spectrum, depending on how well consolidated

this way of working is, and historical factors which might result in loss of trust.

Governments should not be abusing, ignoring, or tokenising communities. Many Governments are currently working in the consult or involve sections of the spectrum and will need to continue to build their relationships with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and organisations to move to collaboration or partnership.

Even within a partnership, some partnerships will be stronger than others. Coming back to the strong partnership elements in the National Agreement, will help you to assess the strength of your partnership.

Figure 7: Spectrum of engagement behaviours

Less power				More power			
Abuse	Ignore	Tokenise	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Partner	Relinquish
Communities are actively harmed by government, or government manipulates community to do certain things	Communities are not involved at all by government who makes decisions on their own, but without direct or intentional harm to the community	Communities are used in a limited way and are usually procured for a service (i.e. Welcome to Country), or asked to contribute for free but are not actively involved	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are asked for their views and some of these views may be incorporated into the final product, but they do not have a say in the design of the process or the outcome	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more actively involved throughout the process and advice taken on board to iterate the project. There may be formal structures like an advisory in place. Remuneration for time may also be present	There is more exchange of knowledge and ideas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties share some decision-making and say over process and outcomes. Power is still not equal, but there may be some transfer of resources	Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people come together as equal parties to share decision-making through all stages. Even within partnering approaches there will be weaker and stronger forms of partnership	Governments relinquish their power and hand over full decision-making to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The community may decide if they want to collaborate, partner, or involve government in their decision-making processes, but they are fully self-determined
Harmful practice – should not be engaging in this way			Good beginnings for a more productive relationship of engagement			Best practice engagement	

³ IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, <https://iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum>

Communications

The work of policy partnerships needs to be communicated to members and the public in a consistent and accessible way, and the National Agreement makes provision for accessible communications and engagement:

- **Clause 97:** The Parties agree that it is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to know that the new way of working is being implemented through the life of the Agreement and can monitor its progress. Accordingly, the Government Parties agree that when future actions are taken to implement the outcomes of this Agreement, the Agreement is acknowledged, including in public communications.
- **Clause 133:** The Parties are committed to ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:
 - to build awareness and ownership of the Agreement to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to talk to governments on how to apply the commitments under the Agreement to communities and organisations across the country.
- **Clause 136:** All communications under the Agreement should be widely accessible and help to preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
- **Clause 146:** The Parties will develop plain English, accessible materials and materials in language that can be accessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia in support of this Agreement. These will be updated to reflect any changes to this Agreement.

Joint Communications Strategy

Joint Council has endorsed the [Joint Communications Strategy](#). This Strategy sets out that:

- Parties should proactively deliver clear, timely, relevant, and accessible information about the Agreement in ways that meet local, place-based needs and interests.

- Communication in every form must be easy to use, accessible, clear, and understood by all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other Australians.
- Communication must be inclusive, purposeful, and timely.
- Place-based approaches and consideration for culturally appropriate communications will be prioritised.
- Communications activities and decisions will be underpinned by the understanding that demonstrating early action that makes a tangible difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is critical to ownership of the Agreement and its accountability.
- All parties acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people understanding and taking ownership of the National Agreement is critical to its success.

Government accessibility requirements

Commonwealth Departments and agencies are required by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) to ensure that all content, information, and services are accessible by people with disabilities.

The Commonwealth Government's [Digital Transformation Strategy 2018-2025](#) includes specific commitments of government to Accessibility and Inclusion. There is a dedicated website page called [Style Manual](#) for everyone who writes, edits or approves Australian Government content. People can experience ongoing, temporary, or situational barriers to access information they need. These guides allow parties to design accessible and inclusive content for them.

To meet these commitments, further work and guidance should be developed to assist all parties (the Coalition of Peaks and Governments) to develop accessible communications, and resources must be provided for this.

What is best practice in accessibility?

The Style Manual sets out a number of helpful tips when creating accessible and inclusive content:

- Have clear plain language and writing style: use everyday, inclusive words.
- Findable content: write and design content that is easy for the user to find with a search engine.
- Use headings, paragraphs and lists.

Parties who are drafting communications should also consider having that information translated so that it is accessible in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Consideration should also be given to accessibility for other people who do not speak English as a first language.

Other ways to improve accessibility include the use of translators, Auslan interpreters, and the development of easy-read guides.

The time required to make a communication accessible will vary depending on the size of the communication.

If a third-party organisation is required, such as an interpreter, they should be contacted well in advance.

A review for accessibility can be conducted internally. However, involving a third-party organisation will attract a cost. Costs for interpreters are likely to be more significant. For example, fees for the Northern Territory Government Aboriginal Interpreter Service are \$140 for one hour (on-site) or \$70 (telephone).

Reporting

Annual reporting requirements are detailed elsewhere in this Guide. The Secretariat for the policy partnership should also make materials publicly available on their agency's website, to ensure transparency and build ownership of the work of the policy partnership. This might include the Agreement to Implement, and meeting summaries agreed by all parties.

Closing the Gap Style Guide

Communications should use the shared Closing the Gap logo and should follow the [Closing the Gap Style Guide](#).



Appendix A: Definitions

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parties – the Lead Peak/Co-Chair, Coalition of Peaks representatives and Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representatives (Independent Representatives) on the policy partnership.

Agreement to Implement – the official document that sets out the scope and purpose of the policy partnership, as well as roles and responsibilities of Representatives.

ALGA – Australian Local Government Association

Coalition of Peaks – Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations. The Coalition of Peaks is a representative body consisting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National and State/Territory community-controlled peak organisations who work to improve life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Core Group/Core Working Group – the Lead Peak, Lead Commonwealth Agency, NIAA, and Peaks Secretariat Team that meet regularly to establish the policy partnership.

Government Representatives – all Australian Governments on the policy partnership, consisting of the Commonwealth, states, and territories.

Implementation Plan – Publicly available plan developed by each Party detailing how the Party will implement the Agreement.

Joint Council – Joint Council on Closing the Gap. Ministerial Council on Closing the Gap, with representation from Government Parties and the Coalition of Peaks. Further details on the Joint Council can be found in the [Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap 2019-2029](#).

Jurisdictions – The Commonwealth, states, and territory Governments.

Lead Commonwealth Agency – the Government Agency responsible for the Policy partnership as Co-Chair, as appointed by Governments. The Lead Commonwealth Agency has primary policy responsibility for the area of the policy partnership.

Lead Peak – the Coalition of Peaks Member responsible for the Policy partnership as Co-Chair, as appointed from the Coalition of Peaks. The Lead Peak has primary policy responsibility for the area of the policy partnership.

NIAA/National Indigenous Australians Agency – the Australian Government agency responsible for whole-of-government coordination of policy development, program design, and service delivery for Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander people, who are grouped under the term Indigenous Australians.

Peaks Secretariat – The Peaks Secretariat is the policy and secretariat team of the Coalition of Peaks. They are a small team auspiced by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

Partnership Working Group – Working Group established by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap, comprising representatives of each Government Party and the Coalition of Peaks, with the role of developing and progressing issues for upcoming Joint Council meetings.

Work plan – the work plan covers the first-year plan of the policy partnership, and typically includes an action to develop a second work plan for longer term, strategic focus of the partnership.