

# Connecting with Country

## Framework Introduction



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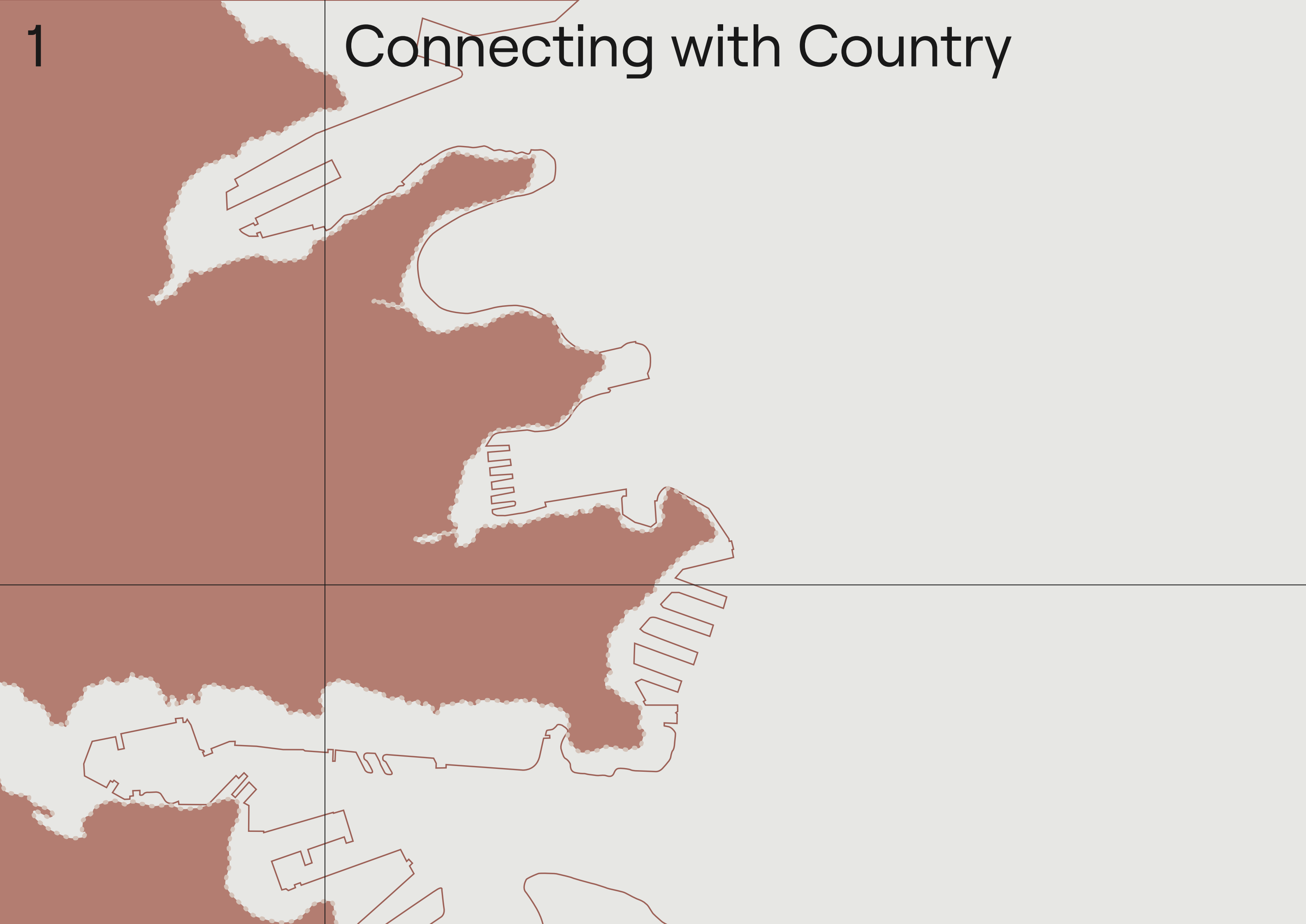
We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, practice, and visit, and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. We recognise the continuous engagement and caring of the lands, waters, and skies by First Nations peoples for time immemorial.

We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and accept its invitation to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a movement of the Australian people toward a better future.

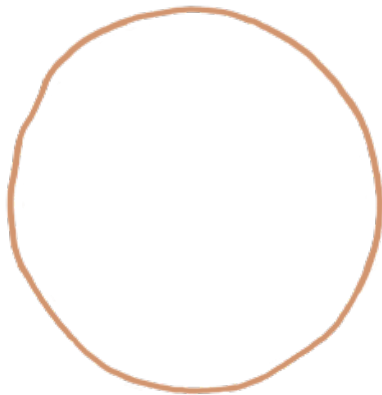
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# Connecting with Country



Caring for Country



Caring for Country is a rudimentary principle that can be adopted by anyone seeking to create a better future for the environment we create, and live.

As a minimum all projects can care for the health and wellbeing of Country, and therefore the many generations of family to come. This encompasses aligning principles with the values of First Nations culture and ways of being, through smart, innovative design and strategic solution from all parties.

It does not cost anything to Care for Country. We all have a role and obligation to improve the health and wellbeing of the planet. This can be achieved through cultural awareness, reduction of materiality, adoption of recycled and sustainable specifications, and on-going caring of Country through community opportunity, use and participation.

All parties involved in a project have a responsibility to Care for Country through their influence of the scheme.

Country-Centred Design



Engaging with First Nations design practitioners as a conduit between the design team and Country, SJB as the architectural / documentation to support.

Unlocking a deeper knowledge of place, specialists will bring their expertise to the design response for a more considered and meaningful application to Country-centred design, that will generate positive outcomes for Country and community.

In some instance First Nations design practitioners will be able to draw on their relationships and own interpretations and knowledge of Country, and its appropriate application to design; however it's important to acknowledge that community engagement is not the role of First Nations design practitioners unless specified otherwise.

Designing with Country (Community)



To truly Design with Country requires shared knowledge of Country, deep listening, and yarns with community, Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and young ones. Designing with Country can only be achieved through active, ongoing, consensual collaboration with community, including the many voices reflective of Country.

Designing with Country requires a generosity of spirit, time, intent, and commitment; to support intergenerational exchange, sharing and experience of culture; to develop a deeper understanding of Country and facilitate co-designing with community.

To develop a brief with community that is enriched in culture, understanding of place since time-immemorial, driven by values and lessons embedded in the songlines that are resources of rich knowledge systems that have been passed down through thousands of generations creates a framework that will ensure the project is integrated in to the broader cultural narrative of the built and natural environment.

There are specialist First Nations community engagement services available to facilitate Designing with Country.

Designing with Country (Embedded)

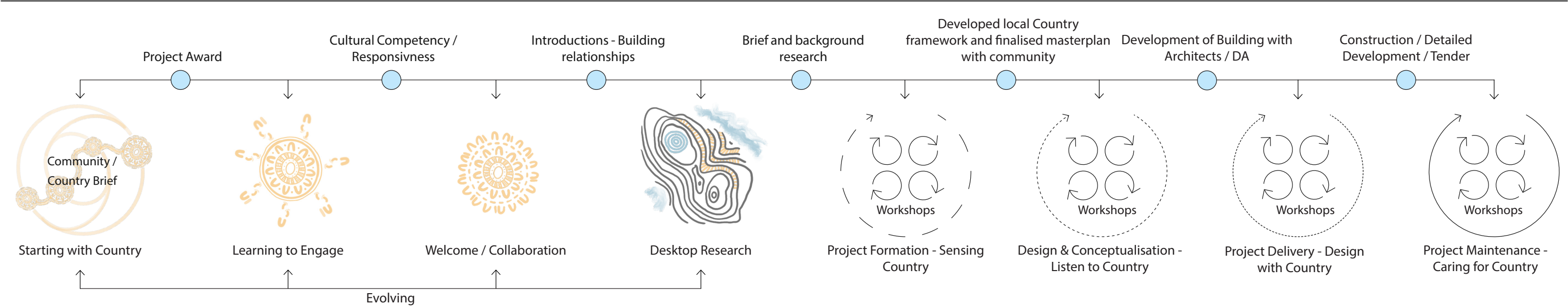


Designing with Country processes are prioritised at all stages of briefing, concept, design, construction, and project life cycle. Championed by community, First Nations design practitioners, culturally capable design teams, planning authorities, construction team, site maintenance team, and importantly, the client.

An embedded Designing with Country process will see positive outcomes for Country, the project, the broader community, and the health of the environment for generations to come. To realise this, all parties must have established, and upheld enduring relationships with Country, and community that practice listening and trust - always.

Designing with Country, embedded, covers the inclusion of the previous range of engagements, however is embedded through the trust and acknowledgement of First Nations leadership within the Principal Consultant team. Trust is instilled in the structure of the team by community and the First Nations design practioners as they're aware of the team's ability and obligation to ensure their remains a cultural lens over all aspets of the project. As the Principal Consultant, there is often a direct line of communication and influence with the broader project team.

Engagement



The diagram above illustrates a process of engaging with community, and Designing with Country. Often, there's a journey required to achieve a foundational level of trust for community to want to actively engage. This requires a genuine desire from the project team to build relationships, of reciprocity which will take time, personal investment, and commitment to co-design from the beginning through all phases of development.

Relationships between community, consultants and all parties involved is of utmost importance as it forms the cohesion to enable truthful, meaningful and valuable engagement, helping inform the future of the built environment with Country.

Community collaboration and co-design brings together a plethora of lived experiences, backgrounds, professional tools, initiatives and worldly views, to encourage an outcome where all voices are heard and opportunity for the multi-faceted experiences of life are considered in the project. This process also stimulates conversations that needs to be heard and expanded upon.

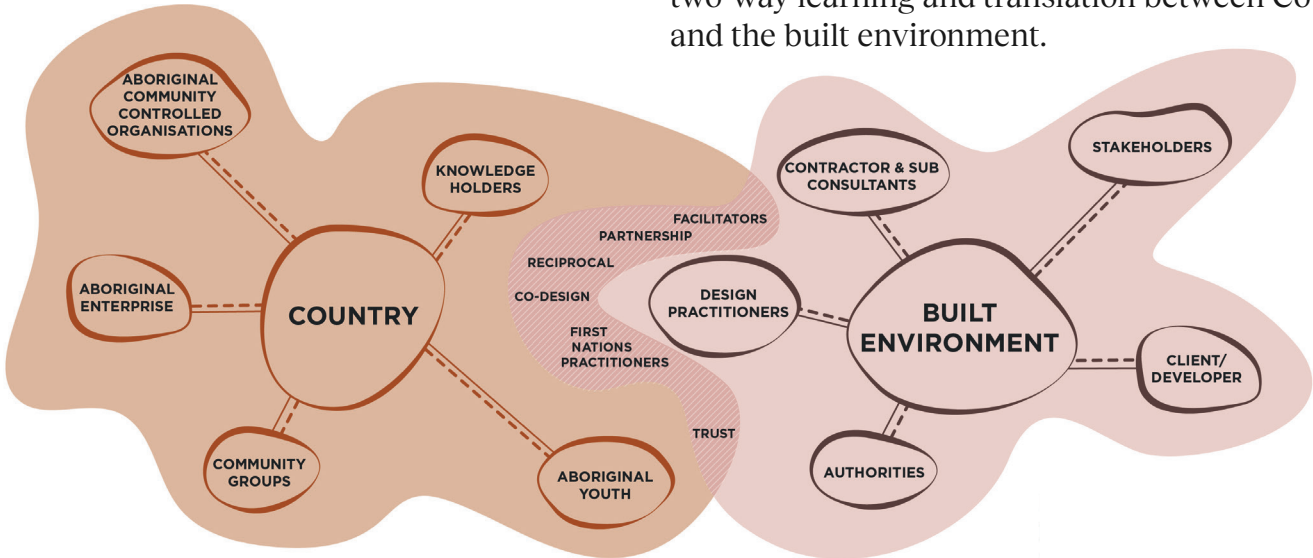
Implementation of the Connecting with Country Framework in accordance with our established methodologies, it is possible to enhance the relationship between First Nations communities, architects, and allied practitioners, facilitating the exchange of knowledge between the two realms, paving the way for a brighter future for generations to come.

Opportunities abound from the breaking of ground to acknowledge Aboriginal culture with not only the incorporation of unique design, but to include legacy creating social procurement, employment, and diversity and inclusion methodologies. These methodologies bring to life not only the narrative through design but will enable community ownership through inclusion to construction and beyond. Beyond, signifying consideration of meaningful and applied place making. Through the allocation of social space and to the built product will see the growth and development of continued use, fostering community pride and the development of cultural exchanges for visitors and residents of the region.

Enabling Designing with Country

The diagram below illustrates the intersection of cultural knowledge systems and the built environment, including various stakeholders involved in fostering cohesion in response to Connection with Country. There's a responsibility on all parties involved to collaborate towards a better future, to be open to conversation, be courageous, and co-design the future of our cities.

- Elements that make up the development of the urban fabric, the multitude of people contributing to the knowledge required to undertake built works.
- Connecting with Country specialists, a curator of this space mediating collaboration of valuable community parties, to share and determine representation of cultural knowledge.
- Intersection of the two realms. Existing in this space is collaboration of all parties through the safe exploration of pairing cultural knowledge, and community aspiration with technical expertise to inform the built and lived environment. First Nations design practitioners, another conduit for two-way learning and translation between Country and the built environment.



Introduction

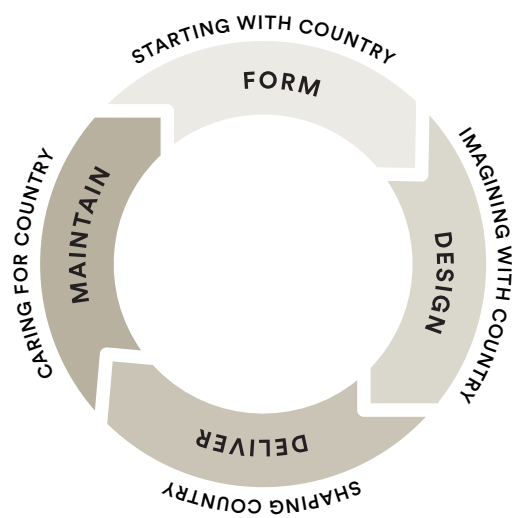
We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for time immemorial have a history of living in harmony with and caring for Country. Sitting at the heart of our approach to Country is ‘*collaboration and co-design*’. It is through deep listening, yarning, amplifying the voice of Traditional Custodians and working in unison that we learn and generate the diverse perspectives that inform a rich built environment and an even richer process. Sharing knowledge is critical to a successful well-placed project. The process of designing collectively, imbued with the knowledge of Country, led and informed by Community.

Our team is committed to adhering to the principles established by the NSW Government Architect’s Connecting with Country Framework, which recognises the value of First Nations knowledge in the intersection of architecture and Country. We strive to avoid one-off or transactional engagement and aim to establish enduring mutually beneficial partnerships that extend beyond the lifespan of the project. Early engagement and alignment of values with the project team are critical to the success of the project’s connection to Country.

Our view on the project life-cycle for the built environment adopts an Aboriginal perspective, commencing with **sensing** and **imagining** Country, leading to **shaping** and **caring for Country** which will be carried out for the life of the project. We accept the challenge of the seven statements of commitment (bottom of page) from the Framework, to assist project teams to fulfill their commitment to Country, to start conversation, and begin the process with these thoughts at the forefront.

We acknowledge that, due to the compressed timeframe of the EOI process and the uncertainty of project award, we have yet to engage with the local Aboriginal community. Should we be awarded the project, we commit to following established designing and connecting with Country protocols, walk Country with First Nations peoples, celebrate Darkinjung culture within the immediate context, and engage in a collaborative co-design process with the local community to recognise contemporary collective culture in the region.

Through close collaboration with local Knowledge Keepers, the urban fabric can integrate the wisdom and insights that have been passed down through generations via local stories and songlines.

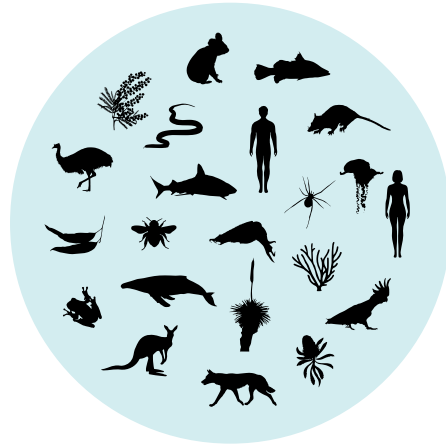
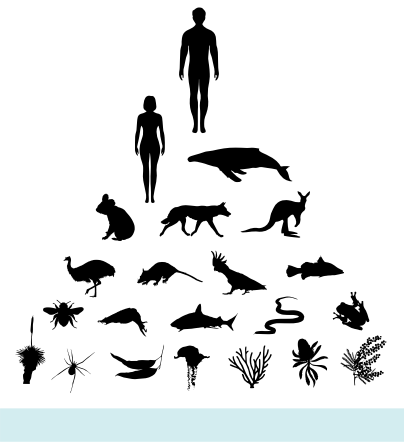


Images: Connecting with Country Framework - GANSW

*Gathay nyiirun yanyiy, gathay nyiirun ngarray, barrayga, nyiirun ngarrayn ngarralgu.*

*Together we all will walk, together we all will listen, on country, we all think toward knowledge (remember).*

Gathang: the language of the Birrbay, Guringay and Warrimay



The seven statements of commitment from the DRAFT framework (superseded) assist teams to fulfill their commitment to Country. These statements encourage important conversations at the beginning of engagement, they enable an approach to the project to consider the needs of Country, and ways of working with community to develop a response beneficial for all. Although these commitments have been superseded,

**1** We will respect the rights of Aboriginal peoples to Indigenous cultural intellectual property, & we will support the right of Country to be cared for.

**2** We will prioritise Aboriginal people's relationship to Country, & their cultural protocols, through education and enterprise by & for Aboriginal people.

**3** We will prioritise financial & economic benefits to the Country where we are working, & by extension to the Traditional Custodians of that Country

**4** We will share tangible & intangible benefits with the Country where we are working, & by extension the Traditional Custodians of that Country, including current & future generations.

**5** We will respect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, but we will prioritise the local, place specific cultural identity of the Country we're working on. Aboriginal people will determine the representation of their cultural materials, customs, & knowledge.

**6** We will prioritise recognition & responsibility of Aboriginal people, supporting capacity building across Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal communities, and across government project teams.

**7** We will support Aboriginal people to continue their practices of managing land, water, & air through their ongoing reciprocal relationships with Country. We will create opportunities for traditional first cultures to flourish.

Project Stages & Outcomes

### Sensing - Start with Country (Project Formation)

The Aboriginal practice of sensing and imagining Country is an ancient tradition that has been passed down through generations via storytelling, dance, art, and theatre.

To ‘sense’ Country is to seek the presence of Country, to visit the site and surroundings, and conduct a multi-sensory analysis that relies on more than just the tangible environment. This is a critical phase of Connecting with Country to build capability in the team to comprehend elements of Country, and build relationships.

This stage encompasses the following outcomes:

- Building cultural competency within the project team
- Walking, listening and learning on Country, and establishing a multi-sensory understanding and connection beyond just listening
- Spending time on Country is critical for supporting the community, building trust and partnerships, and promoting reciprocity while giving back
- Collaborating with the community to develop a brief and framework including overarching principles for the precinct
- Conducting workshops/design days with community
- Exploring opportunities for traditional first cultures to thrive
- Consider where the community fits in the picture and identify opportunities for cultural obligations and caring for Country; understand community needs

Imagining - Listen to Country  
(Project Design & Conceptualisation)

The framework underscores the significance of engaging with Aboriginal communities and knowledge-holders to envision Country. It can be challenging to design with Country in regard to inflexible development processes, however we are to discover opportunities and encourage responses to the community voice with the project team.

We must pose thought-provoking inquiries that evoke the essence of Country, such as uncovering the site’s story, identifying indicators of success, exploring its history, understanding its needs, and determining its purpose.

- This stage encompasses the following outcomes:
- Rendering the brief tangible, with continued engagement to successfully address the community developed framework
  - Continuing workshops/design days with community
  - Designing with, and informed by Country in the landscape, architectural design, interiors, and urban strategy
  - Designing for materials that reflect Country
  - Empowering Aboriginal people to determine the representation of their cultural materials, customs, and knowledge
  - Learn from the stories and songlines of place to identify embedded values and develop a proposal that responds to them

Shaping - Design with Country  
(Project Delivery)

Delivering on Aboriginal conceptualisation as part of our design excellence strategy will establish a strong foundation for future enrichment in the proposal.

In addition to this, there are other ways to connect a project with Country, including but not limited to procurement methods, the use of materials that reflect Country, engagement of local trades and various Aboriginal-owned businesses, consideration of the landscape, alignment of values, and artistic interpretations.

- This stage encompasses the following outcomes:
- Identifying procurement opportunities with First Nations businesses, supporting financial and economic benefits to the Country where we are working
  - Supporting capacity building across Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and project teams
  - Returning significant findings discovered during construction to the community while respecting protocols and enabling culture and heritage investigations
  - Utilising materials that reflect Country
  - Incorporation of sustainable practices and principles to preserve and care for Country

Caring for Country  
(Project Maintenance)

A project’s capacity to connect with Country extends beyond the construction and into the life of the site, once built it becomes an extension of Country, providing an opportunity for a symbiotic relationship between the built and natural environment that is beneficial for all beings.

Country encompasses much more than the tangible, it’s relationship of all elements, such as the sky, water, land, and spiritual understandings, this needs to be continued.

This stage encompasses the following outcomes:

- Acknowledging that once built, projects belong to Country, which develops a reciprocal relationship if guided by local Knowledge Keepers and community
- Exploring opportunity for Aboriginal communities to care for Country through ongoing connection
- Prioritise Aboriginal people’s relationship to Country, and their cultural protocols through education and enterprise by and for Aboriginal people
- Support Aboriginal people to continue their practices of managing land, water, and air through their ongoing reciprocal relationships with Country
- Exploring preference leasing agreements in retail and commercial spaces to support First Nations businesses and opportunity for maintenance contracts
- Providing a priority proportion of dwellings for Aboriginal housing as part of affordable allocations policy.

Key  
..... Current Stage    Text    Commenced

SJB is passionate about the possibilities of architecture, interiors, urban design and planning. Let's collaborate.



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