



**Coalition
of Peaks**

**Place-Based
Partnerships
under the National
Agreement on
Closing the Gap**

INDUCTION GUIDE



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Purpose

The purpose of this Place-Based Partnerships Induction Guide is to provide best practice methods and principles to establish, participate in, and operate place-based 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 place-based 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 more than 80 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 (now National Cabinet) 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 (ALGA).

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 9a:** By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88%.
- **Target 9b:** By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:
 - within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard
 - in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town (including if the household might be classified for other purposes as a part of a discrete settlement such as a “town camp” or “town based reserve”).
- **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).

Governance structure of Closing the Gap

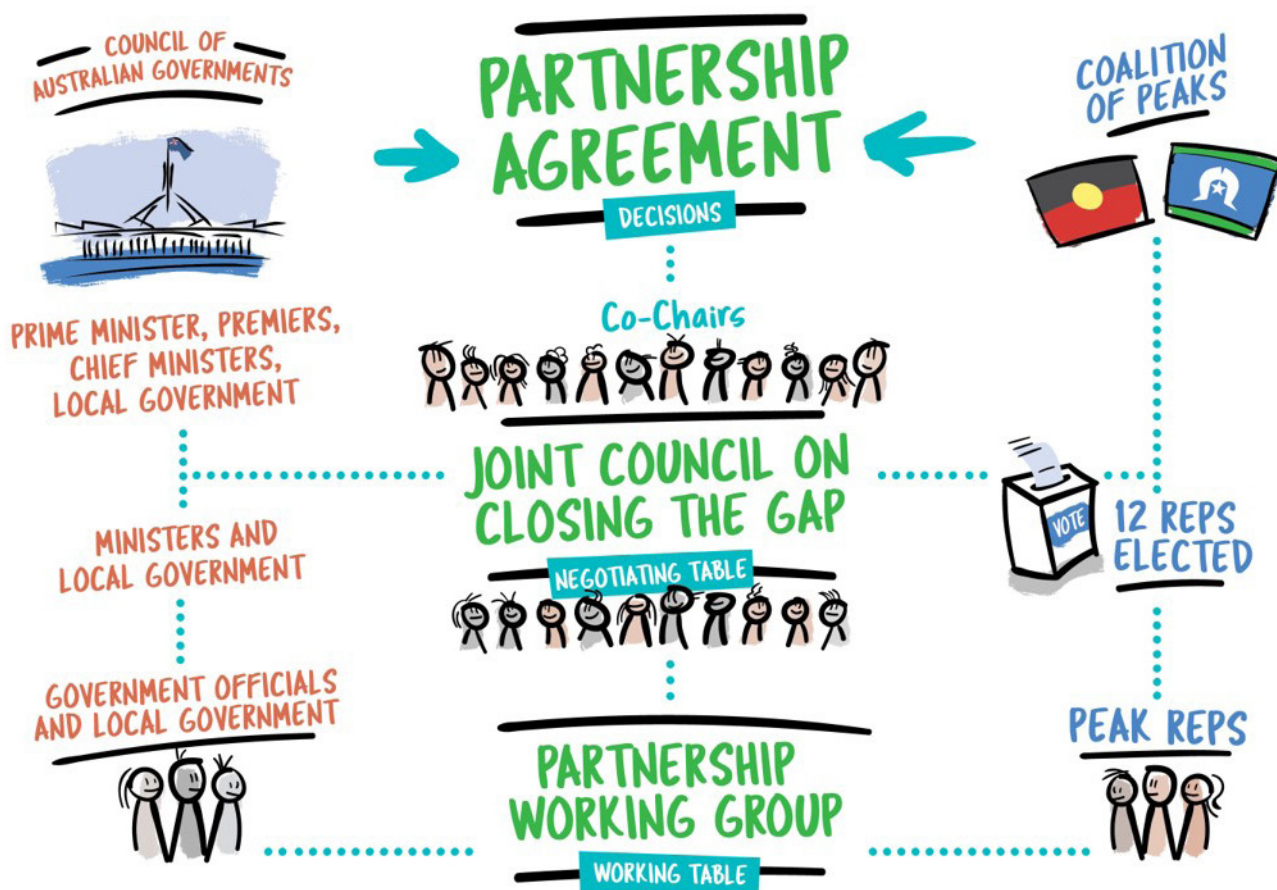
Joint Council

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:

- representatives of the Coalition of Peaks.
- Indigenous Affairs Ministers from the Commonwealth and each State and Territory.
- the President of the ALGA.

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

Figure 1: National Agreement and Partnership Agreement governance structures



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:

- representatives of the Coalition of Peaks.
- a nominated senior official from each Government Party to the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap (Commonwealth, states and territories, and the ALGA).

The PWG is co-chaired by the Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks and the Commonwealth, 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 bi-monthly, as required, to progress the Joint Council's priorities with the agreement of the co-chairs.

Place-based partnerships under the National Agreement

Priority Reform One of the National Agreement commits governments to building and strengthening structures that relinquish power to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 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 sector specific policy areas, such as education, health, or housing (not discussed in this document).
- **Place-based partnerships** are based on a specific region.

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

Place-based partnerships are “based on a specific region, between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, and others by agreement, from those specific areas” (Clause 30), and which “respond to local priorities” (Clause 35). By 2024 there must be at least six new place-based partnerships established across Australia.

Figure 2: Priority Reform One



Governments have a long history of doing place-based work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Examples include the COAG Trials in the early 2000s, remote service delivery sites under the original Closing the Gap framework, and Empowered Communities.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are also using place-based approaches to strengthen local governance, cultural authority, and self-determination. Examples include the Ngarrindjeri and Wiradjuri nation building initiatives. Place-based partnerships under the National Agreement will be a signed formal agreement between all the parties.

Place-based approaches are holistic strategies designed to address the needs and aspirations of the residents of a specific location. They are usually implemented to tackle a major crisis or where the data reveal inordinate levels of disadvantage. Our people also use them to strengthen and restore community governance and cultural authority, as the foundation for self-determined development.

Place-based approaches involve a partnership between the residents and other key stakeholders, aimed at:

- establishing an accurate picture of the state of the community – identifying issues, challenges, and opportunities.
- supporting the community to develop an agreed vision for the future.
- co-designing and co-producing the strategies and initiatives to achieve the vision.
- identifying and ensuring each party understands and plays its role in supporting the community to achieve its development goals.

Key principles of place-based approaches

- Community driven – community buy-in is critical to success.

- Focused on sustained development, community lead, and strengthening community governance / cultural authority.
- Culture and identity are at the centre.
- Aspirational.
- Long-term.
- Appropriately resourced.
- Supported by technical experts where required.
- Integration of inputs not just coordination.

How are place-based partnerships under the National Agreement different to previous place-based agreements?

Not all place-based work in the past has been successful, or positive for communities. What's different about the place-based partnerships under the National Agreement is:

- decision-making will be shared between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments.
- long-term community development will be the underlying principle of the partnerships, meaning they are holistic, responsive to community aspirations and local priorities, and sustainable.
- partnerships will track implementation of all aspects of Closing the Gap in the chosen locations, to demonstrate the practical impacts of the National Agreement on the ground.

A place-based partnership could be beneficial for communities because it can:

- develop and strengthen local governance.
- support them to define and pursue their priorities and aspirations.
- grow community-led initiatives.
- ensure governments are working in partnership with community towards their goals.

Communities have a choice whether they want to develop a place-based partnership with governments, and they need to consider whether the benefits of the partnership will be suitable for their community.

What is the purpose of place-based partnerships?

The purpose of the place-based partnerships is to implement the National Agreement in a specific location, taking a long-term community development approach.

Place-based partnerships should:

- demonstrate how implementation of the Priority Reforms at the local level is fundamentally changing the way governments do business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and organisations.
- support community development approaches that foster transformational and sustainable change and respond to community priorities under the National Agreement, rather than programmatic approaches which react to symptoms or temporary issues.
- support the community or communities in the location to determine their aspirations and priorities under the National Agreement through their own representative structures, including through the development of community development plans which elaborate those aspirations and priorities.
- track implementation of all aspects of Closing the Gap in the chosen locations, to demonstrate the practical impacts of the National Agreement on the ground.
- bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities together with governments to share decision-making, drive community-led outcomes and support community-led development initiatives under the National Agreement.

Topics in scope for place-based partnerships are based around implementation of the Priority Reforms and Closing the Gap initiatives, including:

- Strengthening partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments in the community
- Strengthening the community-controlled sector in the community
- Transforming how government organisations work with the community to improve outcomes
- Increasing access and control over locally-specific data and information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Developing and progressing community-led priorities and initiatives in line with the National Agreement for sustained community development
- Integrating the partnerships into relevant Jurisdictional Implementation Plans.

How do place-based partnerships work?

Place-based partnerships should suit the local needs of the community and should be community led. But there are some common elements for place-based partnerships under the National Agreement which aim to strengthen accountability of all parties – especially government parties – to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Key elements include:

- A formal agreement signed by all the parties
- Shared decision-making between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Adequate funding provided to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to be partners with governments.

Place-based partnerships are made up of:

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:** That means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives from the community/ies determined through a transparent process based on local structures. A representative of the jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak body in the state or territory

should also be a party to the Agreement. Representatives will be accountable to their own organisations and communities.

- **Governments:** That means representatives from local, state/ territory and commonwealth governments with the right level of authority to deliver on the partnership goals. The role of local government is critical and location selection needs to ensure that actions can be effectively implemented within or across local government areas. Early engagement

with the state or territory local government organisation will be important in site selection.

- **Other parties:** Place-based partnerships may also want other local stakeholders involved, including local businesses or community organisations. These other parties will have to be agreed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and governments.



Emma Robertson | Sunrise

Establishing a place-based partnership

The National Agreement sets out that at least six place-based partnerships should be established. Jurisdictions can put forward more than one nomination if they can identify more than one suitable location and are able to support resourcing those locations. Joint Council can consider more than six locations if justified.

Locations may be at a regional or a community scale, depending on how individual communities define 'place' and what makes sense for effective implementation of the National Agreement at a local level. Locations should be identified by States and Territories with jurisdictional partners and NIAA Regional Managers using the template for assessing locations against selection principles agreed by PWG in December 2020.

Nominations through these arrangements will then be put to Joint Council for endorsement (through PWG). No jurisdiction is obliged to nominate a location, if this is agreed through shared-decision making processes (for example, if it is agreed that a jurisdiction already operates in a place-based model due to its smaller size).

A formal agreement should be prepared, under the authority of the National Agreement. This formal agreement should outline:

- who the parties are and what their roles are.
- what the purpose and objectives of the partnership are.
- what is in scope of shared decision-making.
- what the reporting arrangements are and timeframes.
- monitoring, review, and dispute mechanisms.
- specific governance mechanisms for the partnership.

Where existing agreements are in place, the Parties may choose to build on these, rather than

enter new agreements, but existing agreements should be consistent with the National Agreement and the approach outlined in this document.

Place-based partnerships can be set for any length of time consistent with the National Agreement. Timeframes should be outlined in the formal agreement, noting that the purpose of place-based partnerships is to take a long-term community development approach.

In entering a place-based partnership with governments communities must be willing to work in a partnership model. That means advocating for communities and families by putting their aspirations clearly and firmly on the table, determining community priorities, then working with governments and others to give effect to them. It's about bringing governments and others along on the journey, with the development of the community or communities in the location as the guiding principle.

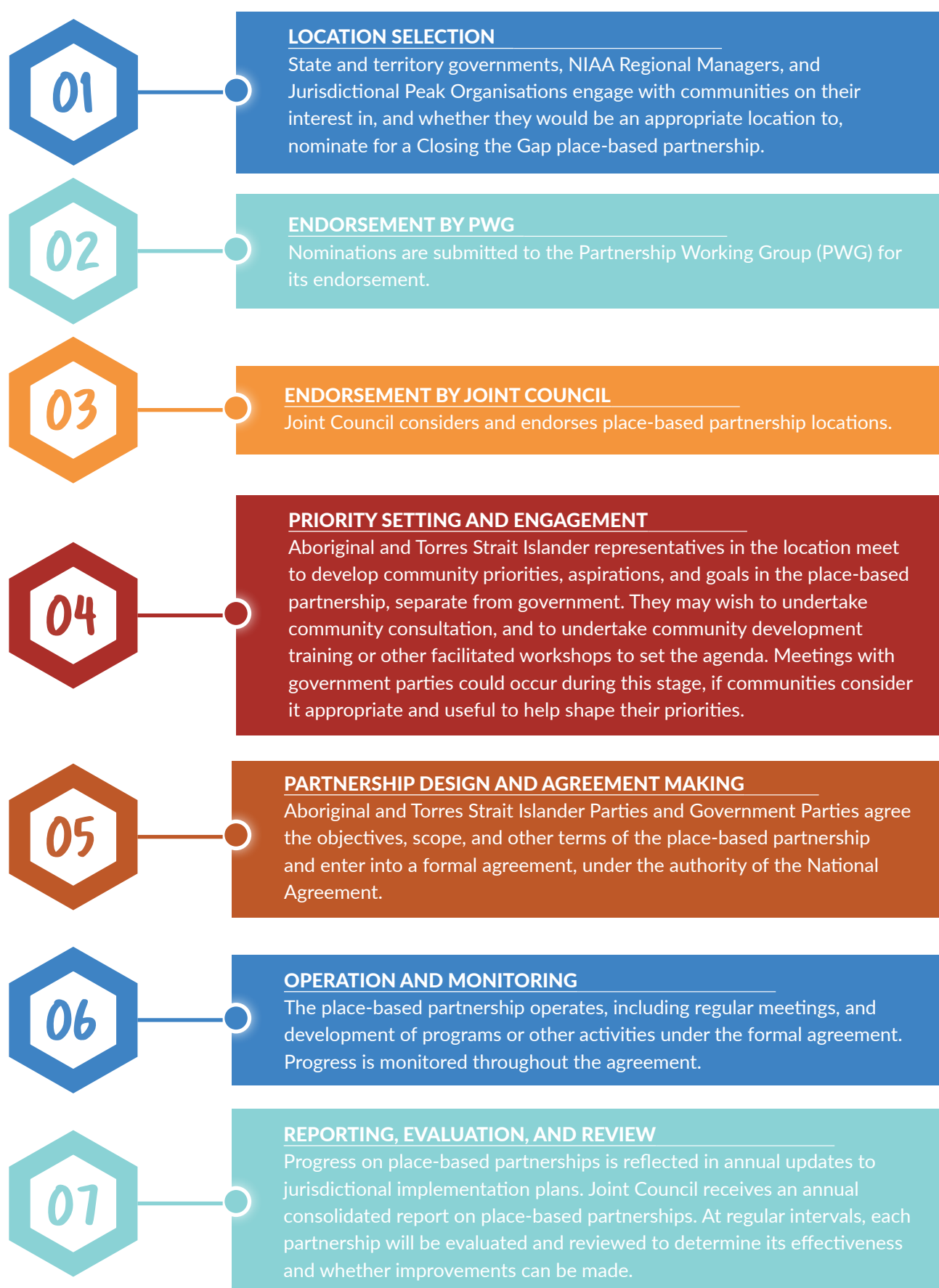
Resourcing model

Adequate resourcing for place-based partnerships is vital. In the development and implementation of place-based partnerships, Parties should be clear about the process for agreeing how the partnership will be resourced and how resourcing decisions will be made. Resourcing arrangements may involve reallocation of existing resources as well as commitment of additional resources.

All parties should make in-kind contributions such as time, venues, catering etc and the expectations for in-kind commitments should be agreed by Parties in their formal agreement.

As the purpose of place-based partnerships is to implement the National Agreement in a specific location, it is appropriate that States and Territories resource the establishment of place-based partnerships in their jurisdictions. Where locations for place-based partnerships may traverse multiple jurisdictions, for example, if NPY lands was nominated and endorsed by Joint Council, resourcing arrangements would be negotiated across those jurisdictions.

Figure 3: Process for establishing a place-based partnership



Establishment costs

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

The partnerships need to be able to:

- Engage independent policy advice.
- Meet independently of governments to determine 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 Owners, and Native Title Holders.

While States and Territories will be funding place-based partnerships in their jurisdictions, actions may be required that rely on Commonwealth levers and will need to be actioned through Commonwealth policy and budget processes, including Implementation plan updates. Research projects that may need to be funded as part of implementation are not considered to be part of establishment costs (as opposed to the research activities for establishment described previously).

These actions, arising from the work of the partnerships are not considered establishment costs, they are implementation costs. Jurisdictions will need to develop an approach to resourcing these actions separately, including through their Implementation Plan processes.

Meetings

Meeting costs may include flights, accommodation, venue hire, meals, and sitting fees. Sitting fees enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to participate in place-based partnerships. Coalition of the Peaks

Representatives can claim sitting fees if their time on the place-based partnership is not paid by their organisation.

Time commitment

Time commitment will vary according to each party and place-based partnership. Parties should account for two full days during to the establishment of the place-based 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.

Meeting operations

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

Before meetings

Agenda and papers

In the lead up to the meetings, the Lead Peak Secretariat and Jurisdiction 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 Jurisdiction 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 Jurisdiction Agency Secretariat is responsible for providing Talking Points to the Lead Commonwealth Agency Co-Chair.

Pre-briefings

Prior to each place-based 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 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 place-based 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 B).

During meetings

Quorum

Representatives of the place-based 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, 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 Formal Agreement. 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. Place-based partnerships may wish to develop a confidentiality protocol.

Making recommendations

Place-based 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.

- in relation to a specific location, 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 at each Joint Council meeting and report to Joint Council annually in writing. Jurisdictions should also report on their progress towards implementing the adopted place-based 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. Place-based partnerships may wish to keep a record of actions that outline the responsible member and timeframe for each action item.



Maree De Giambattista | Winjee Sam

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 place-based partnership will be unique. However, certain elements are inherent in strong, productive partnerships.

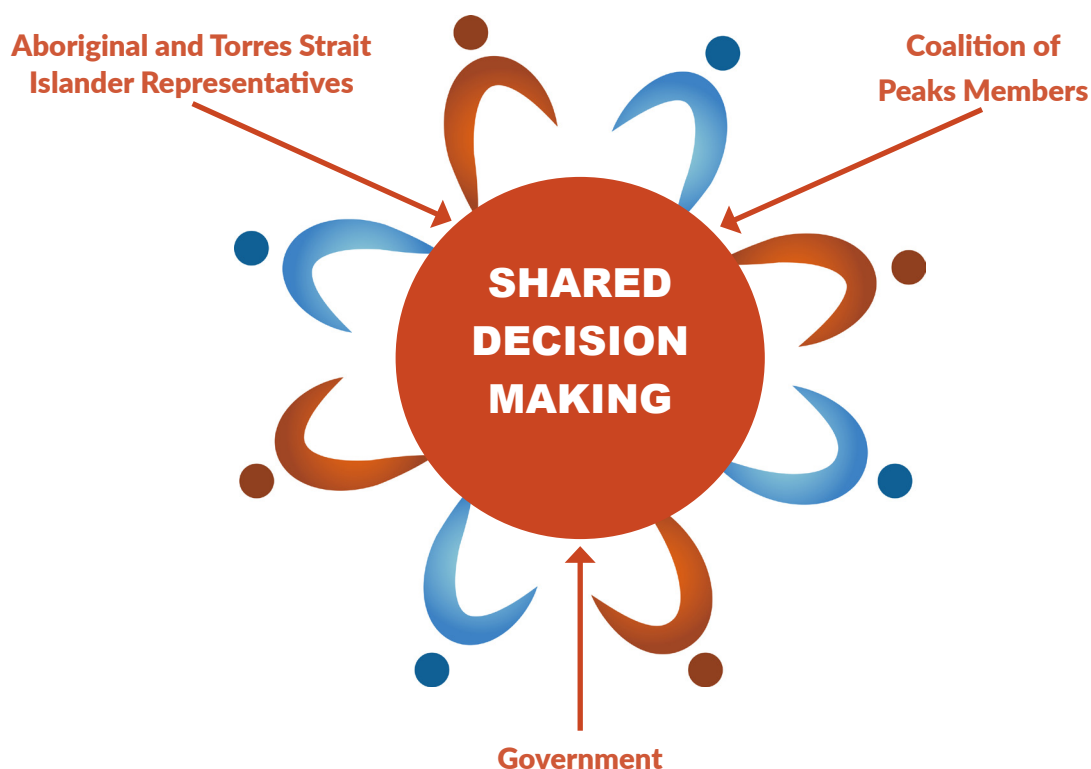
Strong partnerships under the National Agreement

The National Agreement and Partnership Agreement include several strong partnership elements and principles as per below:

- a. Partnerships are accountable and representative and are between (National Agreement Clause 32a):
 - 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 14d).
- c. A formal agreement in place, that is signed by all parties and (National Agreement Clause 32b)
 - 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 32c):
 - 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.

Figure 4: In the place-based partnerships, decision-making is shared by all Parties



- 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 Owners, and Native Title Holders.

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 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.

Ways to work in a partnership

The spectrum of engagement behaviours (see page 19) draws on some existing models including the IAP2 spectrum of public participation and Hart's ladder of engagement but has been developed specifically for the model of engagement expected under the National Agreement.

As per Figure 5, 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 5: 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.

Community engagement

Community engagement is critical to effective, transparent, and accountable governance in the public, community, and private sectors. It is a two-way process by which:

*the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery, and assessment...*³

Key principles of community engagement include:

- **Integrity:** when there is openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement.
- **Inclusion:** when there is an opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard.
- **Influence:** when people have input in designing how they participate. When policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.
- **Deliberation:** when there is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice, and decisions. Where there is space to weigh options, develop common understandings and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities.

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

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

³ UN International Conference on Engaging Communities, Brisbane 2005

Figure 6: Spectrum of engagement behaviours⁴

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	

⁴ IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, <https://iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum>



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Interactions with other Closing the Gap initiatives

Existing place-based arrangements

Place-based partnerships may build on existing place-based arrangements in jurisdictions, but must be consistent with the National Agreement and the approach outlined in this document. The focus of place-based partnerships under the National Agreement must be aligned with the purpose and aims outlined.

Jurisdictions should consider any evaluations of existing place-based approaches and what lessons can be learned from these in the development of place-based partnerships under the National Agreement.

Community Data Projects

The National Agreement also commits to the establishment of six community data projects. These projects will be established separately and on different timelines. However, Parties should consider the benefits of aligning a place-based partnership location with a community data project location.

Not all place-based locations will also be community data locations, as the benefits of the National Agreement must be shared among several regions and locations. Where locations do not align, data collection needs of those locations would need to be resourced separately, including through existing data sets.

Communications

The work of place-based 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 several 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 place-based partnership should also make materials publicly available on their agency's website, to ensure transparency and build ownership of the work of the place-based 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 place-based partnership.

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 Jurisdiction Agency, NIAA, and Peaks Secretariat Team that meet regularly to establish the place-based partnership.

Formal Agreement – the official document that sets out the scope and purpose of the place-based partnership, as well as roles and responsibilities of Representatives.

Government Representatives – all Australian Governments on the place-based partnership, consisting of the 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 Jurisdiction Agency – the State or Territory Government Agency responsible for the place-based partnership as Co-Chair, as appointed by Governments. The Lead Jurisdiction Agency has primary responsibility for the region of the place-based partnership.

Lead Peak – the Coalition of Peaks Member responsible for the place-based partnership as Co-Chair, as appointed from the Coalition of Peaks. The Lead Peak has primary responsibility for the region of the place-based 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 place-based partnership, and typically includes an action to develop a second work plan for longer term, strategic focus of the partnership.

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The Coalition of Peaks is a **representative** body of more than 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled peak bodies. Our **authority** is derived from our extensive membership base. Our representatives are **elected** to boards by their communities and represent our people using **generations of experience**.



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