Caring for Country Aboriginal Relationships Framework and Toolkit - summary

The Caring for Country Aboriginal Relationships Framework and Toolkit have been developed to support the building of effective and respectful relationships with Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal communities across the Cumberland Plain. They provide a practical, action-oriented and evidence-based model for working effectively in culturally safe, community-led ways.

The Framework and Toolkit are designed for use across the teams delivering the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy under the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP) in the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), as well as by partners who are implementing or influencing Caring for Country work on the Cumberland Plain.

Intention for the Framework and Toolkit

- Shift from short-term "engagement" to enduring **relationships**.
- Build **trust** and **cultural safety** across planning, delivery and evaluation stages.
- Support non-Aboriginal staff to **understand, reflect** and **improve** how they connect with Aboriginal peoples and knowledge holders.
- Provide **guidance, tools, and protocols** that can be tailored to project needs while maintaining consistency, effectiveness and respect.

What's in the Framework

- **Core Principles** for working with Aboriginal people on Country (respect, reciprocity, cultural safety, shared decision-making).
- **A five-step Relationship Process**: *Think, Plan, Prepare, Connect, Evaluate* - with "Listen" embedded across all steps.
- **Guidance on how to walk together** with community - not just to seek input, but to collaborate, co-design, and empower.

- **Foundational information from legal, cultural, ethical and international perspectives**. This includes Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property, as well as broader NSW government policy commitments and obligations.

What's in the Toolkit

- **Detailed checklist** for project teams to embed cultural protocols and to plan and implement meaningful engagement through their work and projects.
- **Templates and planning tools to** support project planning, documentation and post engagement reflection.
- **Meeting Protocols:** Guidance for engaging respectfully with Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal peoples, businesses, and organisations.
- A **capability matrix** to self-assess and grow organisational relationship skills.
- **Guidance on key issues**: Insights on engagement fatigue, cultural competency, youth inclusion, and respectful payment for knowledge.

Why It Matters

Aboriginal communities across the Cumberland Plain have made it clear that one-off consultations are not enough. Relationships must be reciprocal, consistent, and grounded in mutual respect. The Framework and Toolkit were co-developed through more than 40 yarning sessions that took place over a 9-month period with Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal organisations, council partners, and internal Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure staff.

The Framework and Toolkit do not replace other policies, legal obligations or requirements for Aboriginal engagement. Instead, they offer a unifying foundation that honours Aboriginal cultural knowledge and supports mainstream staff and agencies to walk alongside - not ahead of - community.