

What are Protocols?

Protocols are essentially guidelines. These protocols aim to foster positive and mutually-beneficial working relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. While there are many common issues and sensitivities which are similar across language situations, these can also differ between communities.

Protocols, like languages and cultures, are dynamic. They change and develop over time in response to internal and external factors. It is important for consultants to be sensitive to, and accommodating of, such changes by building long term, ongoing relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander informants and collaborators in any language project.

For present and future generations, communities consider recording, documenting, and publishing of language materials to be vitally important. Communities have been involved in producing a wide range of resources, such as dictionaries, grammars, language learning and teaching materials for the classroom.

Further, communities are developing a broad range of experience in publishing various electronic as well as printed formats, including books, audio and video recordings, CD-ROMs and websites.

Communities are the owners and custodians of their languages and cultures. They have the right to the greatest possible access to the best available linguistic and educational supports and resources for the revitalisation of their languages. They have the right to develop as many skills as possible, in the course of any language project. They have the right to be consulted about all aspects of materials published in and about their languages

Community Consultation

Respect

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are the custodians of their cultural and linguistic heritage. The lived experience Indigenous people have of their languages should be valued and respected as highly as the technical knowledge which consultants bring to a project. Communities' custodianship of their languages must be considered to be as important as the knowledge and expertise of the consultant(s).

The nature of consultation

Consultation should be collaborative, ongoing and two-way, between communities and their consultants, involving the sharing of information. The community, the school, the linguist, the ICT specialist each need to state and negotiate their aims in a very open way. People need to be clear about their goals, agendas, plans and intentions when being involved in a language project and their expectations for the project outcomes.

One of the main purposes of consultation is to develop mutual respect and a healthy partnership that will help resolve possible contentious issues before work begins on a language project.

Often people may not speak up during a meeting. Consultants need to allow time for the word to spread, for people to answer in their own time, and for people to give honest feedback, in informal settings after the meetings.

Listening

Really good consultation is based on genuine listening, with genuine opportunities for community people to give feedback and to put forward their ideas, eg at regular, face-to-face meetings, both formal and informal.

For more information, contact VACL at vacl@vaclang.org.au or via the web at www.vaclang.org.au
Also contact FATSIL at www.fatsil.org.au