

STRATEGY FOR EMPOWERING FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES

2025 – 2028



ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Harbour Trust acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands, waters and sky of Sydney Harbour, and of the extraordinary places under our stewardship: the Borogegal, Birrabirragal, Cammeraygal, Gadigal, Gayamagal, Wallumedegal and Wangal peoples.

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ICIP notice

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TERMINOLOGY

Term	Definition
Country	Refers to the interconnected layers of land, sea and sky that hold First Nations cultural practices, people and sense of worth.
First Nations	The term 'First Nations' is intended to respectfully include reference to Australia's First Nations peoples, the First Australians and/or Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
FPIC	Refers to free, prior and informed consent, as recognised in the <i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i> .
Indigenous cultural and intellectual property or ICIP	Refers to the rights of Australian First Nations peoples to their cultural heritage, including traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expression as outlined in the <i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i> .
Indigenous data sovereignty or IDSov	Refers to the rights of First Nations peoples to exercise control over data about themselves, from themselves or about Country.
Intellectual property or IP	Refers to those Australian laws protecting creations of the mind, including copyright, trade mark, patents, design laws as well as plant breeders rights.
Communities of Country / Traditional Owners	The identified and recognised Traditional Owners and cultural authorities (including Elders, community members, families and groups) for particular places/locations.
Communities of interest	Further First Nations peoples connected, involved and/or relevant to a particular project or activity that are invited to be engaged.

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PART 1 – INTRODUCING THE STRATEGY

Foreword

The Harbour Trust has established this First Nations Strategy to set out our commitments and responsibilities when working with First Nations peoples, cultures and heritage, and Country.

The strategy aims to embed respectful and meaningful cultural values and principles in managing the harbour places. We aim to foster a deep and meaningful relationship with Country that honours the custodianship of First Nations communities, protects cultural heritage and supports the long-term sustainability of these significant places.

This strategy is a step towards reconciliation, ensuring that our practices are aligned with our commitments and responsibilities to, and the needs, interests and priorities of First Nations peoples.

Introduction

This is an organisation-wide document that directs the practices and upholds the vision of the Harbour Trust when working with First Nations peoples and their cultures.

The strategy details the Harbour Trust's overarching commitments and direct responsibilities regarding First Nations communities, cultures and the Harbour Trust's management of the harbour places – particularly upholding First Nations rights, connections, relationships and histories in line with the Harbour Trust's vision.

The Harbour Trust has also established a robust plan comprised of a set of key actions and goals to be delivered and monitored over the span of 3 years. The Harbour Trust will continually progress, monitor and evaluate the delivery of this strategy in line with Part 2 below.

As an appendix to this strategy document there is also a practical guide for Harbour Trust staff to uphold the commitments, responsibilities and practices of the Harbour Trust in their engagements and daily work. This appendix is an internal guiding document that provides a breakdown and foundation for key themes discussed in this strategy – including Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, free, prior and informed consent, Indigenous data and gaps in Australia's current legal system.

This strategy empowers the staff and stakeholders of the Harbour Trust to support, engage and connect with First Nations communities, histories and stories – setting the standard that the Harbour Trust and its stakeholders must uphold in its engagements, operations and activities.

PART 1 – INTRODUCING THE STRATEGY

Vision statement

The Harbour Trust manages a myriad of places around Sydney Harbour that have deep histories, including First Nations histories. We strive to strengthen relationships with First Nations communities to care for Country and share First Nations histories. We are working to update the narrative of the harbour lands from places of defence and colonial histories to places that reflect all Australians lived experiences, and explore and celebrate First Nations connections, cultures and stories.

This aligns with the Harbour Trust's key vision of creating and maintaining extraordinary places on Sydney Harbour that excite and inspire. We will create safe and welcoming spaces for all visitors and communities to connect, celebrate and respect the natural, cultural and historical significance of our places whilst fostering their ongoing renewal and care.

We will work with the appropriate First Nations peoples to care for the harbour places. This requires engaging with, building and strengthening long-term trusting relationships with:

- The identified and recognised Traditional Owners and cultural authorities (including Elders, community members, families and groups) for particular places/locations (**communities of Country**); and
- Further First Nations peoples connected, involved and/or relevant to a particular project or activity that are invited to be engaged (**communities of interest**).

The Harbour Trust also uplifts First Nations communities through place management and truth-telling. Truth-telling empowers First Nations communities and enriches all Australian people by creating safe spaces for First Nations peoples to connect with and share their culture and histories. The Harbour Trust seeks to bolster economic, cultural and educational opportunities for First Nations peoples and communities through fostering increased employment and involvement in design and management of the places and beyond. Procuring First Nations peoples and businesses also empowers these communities.

The Harbour Trust aspires to lead in empowering First Nations communities, protecting the rights of First Nations peoples and caring for and enriching Harbour Trust places as part of the broader cultural landscape.

This strategy ultimately guides us towards achieving our overarching vision, providing tangible goals to provide accountability and allow us to measure our progress.

The First Nations Advisory Group

The Harbour Trust has established the First Nations Advisory Group to seek First Nations guidance in engaging and empowering First Nations communities of Country and communities of interest. The group is comprised of First Nations Traditional Owners and representatives of local communities of interest.

The group provides valuable assistance in creating an environment where Traditional Owners can strengthen their connection with Country and members of First Nations and the broader Australian community feel safe, welcomed and informed about First Nations histories and ongoing connections to Harbour Trust places.

The group offers guidance to the Harbour Trust on matters concerning First Nations stories, histories, communities, peoples and places. Including identifying opportunities to partner with First Nations businesses, promoting economic development and fostering deeper ties with First Nations communities.

They provide support, guidance and recommendations whilst also ensuring that the Harbour Trust is held accountable for implementing the initiatives in this strategy.

The strategy will empower all staff to drive future processes in the empowerment and enrichment of First Nations communities and cultures. This responsibility lies with all Harbour Trust staff and volunteers – rather than adding to a colonial or cultural load often placed on First Nations employees and communities.

PART 2 – DELIVERING ON THE STRATEGY

Monitoring and evaluation

Being able to identify tangible progress throughout the monitoring of this strategy will ensure that the strategy is being implemented successfully, and that there is a level of accountability in its implementation. The Harbour Trust will monitor and report on the achievement of the goals and actions through the below mechanisms.

Internally;

- Set this strategy (including updates on actions and focus areas) as an agenda item for each First Nations Advisory Group meeting.
- The strategy (including updates on actions and focus areas) as an agenda item for each Board meeting.
- Quarterly performance reporting discussed with the internal staff working group.
- Staff performance plans updated to include a First Nations Strategy objective (linked to corporate plan).
- Key metrics included in staff surveys to understand progress of cultural competency.

Externally;

- Report on performance through the annual report.
- Key metrics included in visitor surveys to understand improvement of awareness and visitation by First Nations peoples.

The strategy will be reviewed by the First Nations Advisory Group and Members of the Trust annually to ensure that it aligns with the interests and priorities of the Harbour Trust and the relevant First Nations communities.

The Harbour Trust will also maintain open and continuous dialogue with First Nations communities to ensure their perspectives and experiences inform the evaluation process. Regular feedback will be sought to assess the effectiveness of the Harbour Trust's initiatives and to identify areas for improvement.

Achieving the vision

The strategy implementation and actions below have been broken down into **3 phases** – to enable the Harbour Trust to effectively strive towards achieving its vision and provide opportunities for monitoring and evaluation. Note that while this strategy suggests implementation over multiple years, it is possible and even likely that some actions will co-occur. The Harbour Trust will implement this flexibly, according to the capacities and priorities of those we work with.

The timeline column provides an indication around when these actions should be prioritised and ideally established – noting that many of these strategic actions are **ongoing**.

Phase 1 – Strengthening foundations

To effectively implement this strategy, the Harbour Trust must have the appropriate processes and/ policies in place and prioritise supporting and upskilling its staff and key stakeholders – including partner organisations, volunteers and suppliers. The Harbour Trust will prioritise creating a framework for economic and cultural opportunities particularly through concept development, design and procurement in this stage.

The key themes of this phase 1 are increasing cultural competency and awareness at the Harbour Trust and strengthening emphasis and processes around relationship-building.

FOCUS AREA	STRATEGIC ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Cultural competency matrixes and staff resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Understand cultural competency across all Harbour Trust staff, assess organisational strengths and weaknesses and track improvements in relation to cultural competency and awareness. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop a cultural competency matrix that includes clear guidelines in appropriate terminology, acknowledging Country, cultural safety, mourning protocols/sorry business, First Nations histories and truth-telling, authorised histories, engagements with First Nations peoples/First Nations stakeholder maps relevant to each of our places and education around ICIP, FPIC and IDSov. b. Through annual staff engagement surveys, review staff progress on cultural competency (and matrix) and adapt training accordingly ii. Introduce a cultural safety and/First Nations engagement-based objective for each staff members performance plan. iii. Work with the local First Nations communities and key stakeholders to develop internal guidelines on terminology, authorised histories and language relating to First Nations peoples (and upheld in reports, documents, correspondence and programs). 	2025 and ongoing
Staff and stakeholder training and upskilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Develop and implement annual cultural awareness learning and development training for all staff that incorporate the perspectives and experiences of various First Nations custodians, staff, peoples and communities of Country of interest – delivered by local First Nations groups and businesses. <u>This should occur throughout all phases of this strategy.</u> ii. Engage representatives of the various communities of Country on which Harbour Trust lands are situated to educate Harbour Trust staff on their individual histories, cultures, and connections to the Harbour Trust places. Engage First Nations storytellers to build staff awareness and education in the significance of place. iii. Continue to report on opportunities for training <u>throughout all phases.</u> 	2025 and ongoing

Empowering First Nations decision-making and co-design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Support and invest in the First Nations Advisory Group and ensure that group meetings are always chaired by a First Nations Trust member. ii. Commit and uphold the centrality of First Nations decision-making and the First Nations Advisory Group's guidance to planning and delivery at the Harbour Trust. iii. Consult with First Nations communities to determine their cultural, historical and environmental priorities for conservation and place management 	Ongoing
First Nations procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Review and update the Harbour Trust Indigenous Procurement Strategy applicable to the procurement of goods and services to reflect a procurement target of 3 to 5% of supply chain spend with First Nations suppliers. ii. Review the procurement strategy annually. iii. Utilise databases and hubs for First Nations businesses, such as Supply Nation or the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, to assist with identifying First Nations suppliers to participate in procurement opportunities. iv. Consider opportunities and prepare a plan to allocate some tenancies for specific First Nations owned business use. 	2025
Review and update policies and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Review all organisational policies to ensure that they align with this First Nations Strategy and the ICIP and IDSov commitments that are to be upheld. ii. Update policies, strategies and plans where necessary to align with First Nations priorities, direction and needs. 	2025 to 2026

Phase 2 – Increasing awareness and opportunities

The second phase of implementation for the strategy is centred upon creating opportunities to empower First Nations communities of Country, communities of interest and First Nations peoples within the broader cultural landscape generally. The Harbour Trust will utilise its platform to raise public awareness, continue to build relationships and education around the shared histories, connections and truth-telling associated with the places and landscape.

FOCUS AREA	STRATEGIC ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Relationship-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Maintain and strengthen existing partnerships with local First Nations organisations, businesses and communities. Ensure consistent communication and regular updates on relevant projects, activities and initiatives of the Harbour Trust. ii. Identify areas where the Harbour Trust excels in First Nations partnerships and identify areas where partnerships need to be expanded (these areas could be with regards to specific places, or specific to matters across a range of sites). iii. Prioritise and develop relationships with First Nations communities and organisations to co-design and co-deliver cultural immersion experiences at specific harbour places determined by the Harbour Trust and First Nations Advisory Group (including delivery of master plans for Cockatoo Island / Wareamah, Middle Head / Gubbuh Gubbuh and North Head Sanctuary). 	2026 and ongoing
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Work with and support First Nations community members and groups to develop and deliver truth-telling initiatives to visitors, students and the broader community as part of the new NSW curriculum change. ii. Co-design and facilitate engagements between school groups and First Nations rangers/knowledge-holders. iii. Develop and implement a broader First Nations education strategy relating to all places and the Harbour Trust's plan to meet its responsibility to educate the broader community. 	Late 2025 to 2026
Cultural tours and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Acknowledge and celebrate significant dates (for example, NAIDOC Week) including regular First Nations programming, aiming to increase over the 3-year period. ii. Aim for all tours, whether hosted by First Nations or non-Indigenous peoples, give proportionate weight to First Nations perspectives and histories. iii. Introduce an ongoing visitor tour hosted by First Nations partners and aim to increase numbers across the 3-year period. iv. Set an approach to measure and report on visitor satisfaction with the cultural tours, attractions and experiences, as part of ongoing performance measures included in the annual report. v. Engage community and cultural leaders to develop paid content that the Harbour Trust can use in marketing and audio guides for tours 	2025 to 2028

Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Engage community and cultural leaders to develop content that provides information on the First Nations histories of Harbour Trust places. ii. Work with First Nations peoples to develop content for interpretation (websites, promotional material, signage, visitor experiences and self-guided tours etc.). iii. Appropriately engage and licence First Nations artworks, stories and language for interpretative purposes. 	2026 to 2028
First Nations employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Consider new First Nations-identified roles within the Harbour Trust where relevant (roles can be dedicated to culturally informed work). Seek guidance of the First Nations Advisory Group on appropriate ways to introduce roles for culturally informed work. ii. Set annual targets for increasing First Nations employment/ internships/traineeships over a 3-year period. Consult on appropriate and feasible targets and increase First Nations employment by the end of 2027. iii. Work with community groups and local First Nations organisations to develop an internship program for First Nations youth to be on Country. iv. Collaborate with the First Nations Advisory Group and First Nations partner organisations, using their community networks to maximise promotion of First Nations employment. v. Contribute to Closing the Gap target 8 through strong economic participation and development of First Nations peoples and their communities. 	2026 to 2028

Phase 3 – Furthering commitments and connections

This phase 3 seeks to further the Harbour Trust's commitments, as set out under this strategy, through the processes and policies of the Harbour Trust. This phase 3 also aims to strengthen the connections of the Harbour Trust and communities of Country and position the Harbour Trust to enact best-practice moving forward.

FOCUS AREA	STRATEGIC ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Best practice and ICIP/ data protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ensure that the use of materials, or information about First Nations materials and cultural heritage, adheres to the principles of Indigenous data sovereignty and uphold ICIP rights. ii. Digitised First Nations materials are made accessible to First Nations people as governed by First Nations peoples and protocols. iii. Implement ICIP protocols by end of phase 3 – to be used by Harbour Trust staff to guide best practice engagement with First Nations peoples and their ICIP. iv. Implement IDSov protocols by end of phase 3 – to be used by Harbour Trust staff to guide best practice engagement with Indigenous data and uphold principles of IDSov. v. Include understanding ICIP and ID protocols in any staff onboarding/ inductions, commencing immediately from when the protocols are rolled out. 	Late 2026 to 2028
Welcoming spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Increase First Nations visitors and attendance across Harbour Trust places and associated events. This extends to advertising and monitoring the number of visitors at cultural tours, programming and experiences. ii. Continue to display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags at the organisation in prominent places, and ensure they are adjusted where necessary to reflect Sorry Business in community (for example, at half mast). vi. Establish feedback processes and mechanisms for First Nations visitors, staff and community. 	Late 2026 to 2028
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Continue to work with communities of Country and interest to host regular community events. Invite local Elders to open events and gatherings with a Welcome to Country. ii. Consult with communities on the kind of events they would like to see and participate in. iii. Acknowledge and respect other days or events of significance, including Sorry Business and days of mourning, that are specific to each community. Consult with relevant communities to ascertain what these days may be. iv. Across all Harbour Trust places, host a minimum of 5 First Nations events each year beyond phase 3. v. Engage First Nations suppliers, such as catering services for First Nations events. 	2027 to 2028

First Nations cultural obligations and practices

- i. Consult with First Nations communities to determine their cultural, historical and environmental priorities for conservation.
- ii. Work with ranger groups and First Nations knowledge holders to embed methods of conservation and care for Harbour Trust places.
- i. Knowledge holders to assist with conservation and caring for places.
- ii. Consider when cultural knowledge is written down in Harbour Trust documents, the ways this should be protected, via ICIP and ID-Sov consents and contracts.

2027 and ongoing

PART 3 – COMMITMENTS OF THE HARBOUR TRUST

In line with our [vision](#) statement above, the Harbour Trust has the following key commitments when working with and empowering First Nations peoples, connections and cultures.

- **Relationship-building:** recognising First Nations connections and practices through building and strengthening long-term, mutually beneficial and trusting relationships and partnerships with First Nations peoples, organisations and communities. Aim to support stronger connections to Country, respect First Nations' rights and contribute to the preservation and celebration of their rich cultural heritage.
- **Creating welcoming spaces:** creating welcoming spaces that celebrate First Nations cultures and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and shared histories in line with the site's cultural, natural and heritage values, as set forward by community and required within the broader cultural landscape.
- **Reawakening story and place:** ensure that cultural stories and places are integrated into management plans, practices and policies through self-determined and co-designed initiatives. This involves consulting with communities of Country and communities of interest to understand their cultural landscape and incorporating their perspectives in decision-making processes.
- **Respecting First Nations rights:** recognising and respecting the ICIP rights of First Nations peoples, including supporting First Nations self-determination and developing understandings and practices around FPIC and connection.
- **Truth-telling and authenticity:** ensuring a more respectful and holistic representation of the site's past and present, by transforming defence and colonial spaces in ways that reflect all Australians lived experiences and ensuring that the representations of the places and their shared histories are accurate and respectful. Ensure staff, stakeholders and the broader public are educated about the histories, connections and contributions of First Nations peoples to these places – including the impact of colonisation and restricted access and use of the places.
- **Increasing First Nations opportunities:** fostering increased employment, economic, cultural and educational opportunities for communities of Country and communities of interest.
- **Caring for Country:** caring for and healing Country in a manner that respects and upholds the deep, enduring relationships between First Nations peoples and Country, recognising that First Nations communities are stewards of the places and their stories – including through upholding industry best practice such as the [Connecting with Country Framework](#) developed by the NSW Government Architect.
- **Strategic guidance:** ensuring ongoing First Nations representation, guidance and empowerment in the strategic direction of the Harbour Trust, including always having at least one First Nations Board member.
- **Furthering our vision:** embedding the vision and incorporating the achievement of this Strategy within the strategic direction and corporate planning of the Harbour Trust.