INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS
DESIGN CHARTER

Protocols for sharing Indigenous knowledge in professional design practice.
INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS DESIGN CHARTER

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Preface

The International Indigenous Design Charter (the Charter) was co-authored by Dr Russell Kennedy, Dr Meghan Kelly from Deakin University, School of Communication and Creative Arts and Jefa Greenaway from Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV), Greenaway Architects, and Melbourne University. In consultation with Australian and international community representatives (for a full list please see appendix 4.2) the Charter has been created to serve as a living document for ongoing consideration for the best practice protocols when working with Indigenous knowledge in commercial design practice. The International Indigenous Design Charter extends on the Australian Indigenous Design Charter – Communication Design which was co-authored by Dr Russell Kennedy and Dr Meghan Kelly from Deakin University and developed in collaboration with the Deakin University, Institute of Koorie Education (IKE), Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV) and the Management and Executive Board of the Design Institute of Australia (DIA). The International Indigenous Design Charter takes into consideration the needs of the diverse design communities and cultures globally.
Part 1: International Indigenous Design Charter

When working on projects involving the representation of Indigenous culture, design practitioners and buyers of design (non-Indigenous and Indigenous) are expected to adhere to the following ten points:

1) **Indigenous led**  
   Ensure Indigenous stakeholders oversee the creative development and design process.

2) **Self-determined**  
   Respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine the application of traditional knowledge and representation of their culture in design practice.

3) **Community specific**  
   Ensure respect for the diversity of Indigenous culture by acknowledging and following regional cultural understandings.

4) **Deep listening**  
   Ensure respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviors for effective communication and courteous interaction is practiced. Make sure to be inclusive to ensure recognized custodians are actively involved and consulted.

5) **Indigenous knowledge**  
   Acknowledge and respect the rich cultural history of Indigenous knowledge including, designs, stories, sustainability and land management with the understanding that ownership of knowledge must remain with the Indigenous custodians.

6) **Shared knowledge (collaboration, co-creation, procurement)**  
   Cultivate a respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviors for effective communication. This involves courteous interaction to encourage the transmission of shared knowledge by developing a cultural competency framework to remain aware of Indigenous cultural realities.

7) **Shared benefits**  
   Ensure Indigenous people share in the benefits from the use of their cultural knowledge, especially where it is being commercially applied.

8) **Impact of design**  
   Consider the reception and implication of all designs so that they protect the environment, are sustainable, and remain respectful of Indigenous cultures over deep time; past, present and future.

9) **Legal and moral**  
   Demonstrate respect and honour cultural ownership and intellectual property rights, including moral rights, by obtaining appropriate permissions where required.

10) **Charter implementation**  
    Ask the questions if there is an aspect to the project, in relation to any design brief, that may be improved with Indigenous knowledge. Ensure the implementation of the Charter to safeguard Indigenous design integrity. Use the Charter to help build the cultural awareness of your clients and associated stakeholders.
2. Introduction

2.1 Context

Despite the existence of protocols for the creation, distribution and ownership of Indigenous visual and media arts, architecture and the built environment has been developed in many countries, there remains a lack of information, guidance and professional leadership regarding the appropriate creation and commercial multidisciplinary expressions and use of Indigenous knowledge in design practice. The International Indigenous Design Charter responds directly to the identified need to address these concerns at an international level across all design disciplines.

Professional Design Associations

The International Indigenous Design Charter has the support of the International Council of Design (ico-D). The cultural protocols included in this Charter recognise the diverse cultures and traditions of international Indigenous communities worldwide and suggests that appropriate representation of Indigenous peoples is best achieved when effective and respectful partnerships are established between relevant stakeholders. Ico-D is a peak body of design associations around the world including the Design Institute of Australia (DIA).

2.2 Role of the Charter (AIDC:CD)

The International Indigenous Design Charter can be used to help facilitate accurate and respectful representation of Indigenous knowledge in all disciplines of design and associated media. The role of the Charter is to assist design practitioners, design clients and the buyers of design including governments, corporations, businesses and not-for-profit organisations with guidelines to encourage best practice processes. The positioning of designers and the buyers of design within the context of the charter discussion is important as all stakeholders (client, designer, cultural custodian) need to be clear on the sensibilities and processes involved in respectful cultural design practice.

The Charter reinforces the rights of Indigenous peoples to cultural self-determination as recognised by the United Nations in their Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN declaration describes the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions of their cultures, including designs (United Nations, 2006). The Charter is a cultural innovation tool to be used by designers to explain the benefits of authentic cultural representation to their clients and to help them to understand the process required when engaging Indigenous knowledges and cultures in commercial design practice.
This document takes the position that all design stakeholders need to understand that co-creation and the sharing of Indigenous peoples’ knowledge must be undertaken responsibly. It understands Indigenous participants are not simply to be referenced. Instead, projects must be Indigenous led where Indigenous stakeholders are active participants in the design process. The sensibilities and sensitivities associated with sharing Indigenous knowledge requires community engagement with cultural custodians/knowledge keepers. Respectful exchange, open thinking, deep listening and a genuine commitment to learning must be based on the premise of relationality. Building relationality ensures respectful and ethical practices are established and maintained through trust and interconnectedness.

The International Indigenous Design Charter recommends that designers involve their clients and the buyers of design in the discussion of Indigenous knowledge and how it relates to their organisation. It provides the guidance for designers to show leadership in promoting cultural innovation to their clients by encouraging them to commission design work that involves Indigenous-related content. Designers and their clients are encouraged to use preferred suppliers who also follow professional Indigenous design best practice standards as outlined in the Charter. This document serves as a guide for the design professions and associated disciplines including communication design/graphic design, digital design, environmental design, architecture and the built environment, landscape design, fashion design, advertising and strategic design practice.

The Charter recommends the document be used as a tool to explain the issues to the buyers of design and to encourage them to consider the following supplier/designer combinations when commissioning Indigenous-themed design:

- Indigenous-owned and operated design companies who pledge to comply with professional practice standards for Indigenous design engagement as outlined in the International Indigenous Design Charter.
- Indigenous design companies or consultants who subcontract creative work to other design companies (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) and comply with professional practice standards for engagement as outlined in the International Indigenous Design Charter.
- Non-Indigenous designer/company who pledge to comply with professional practice standards for engagement as outlined in the International Indigenous Design Charter but also procure Indigenous expertise or engage Indigenous consultants and suppliers when applicable.

2.3 Legal Context

The International Indigenous Design Charter is a self-regulated, professional best practice guide. It supports existing policies, procedures and protocols that ensure the rights of Indigenous
stakeholders, including their intellectual property rights, and emphasises the crucial right of fair and informed negotiation and remuneration.

The document does not claim to be the definitive answer to appropriate representation of Indigenous culture in commercial design practice. Instead it aims to encourage a climate of learning through active practice to guide designers to produce informed, authentic and respectful outcomes in the future. It should not be viewed as a ‘how-to’ guide for creating Indigenous designs but instead a guide to develop open, and respectful cross-cultural engagement and exchange.

The International Indigenous Design Charter is an open document, it will be reviewed on a regular basis and modified as required. Feedback and case study testimonials are welcome and will be acknowledged where appropriate and desired: iidc.feedback@deakin.edu.au. Where there is conflict or inconsistency between the principles contained in the International Indigenous Design Charter and any territorial law then the law shall prevail to the extent of the conflict or inconsistency.

**2.4 Inclusive Practice Exemplar**

The International Indigenous Design Charter has been conceived and written for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous designers, fostering cultural innovation through inclusiveness. This inclusive practice exemplar aims to encourage awareness through respectful and ethical knowledge sharing and increased visibility. It promotes the best practice, moral principles and engagement methods (collaboration, co-creation, permissions, procurement) required by designers to represent Indigenous culture authentically in their practice. The Charter calls on designers to develop applied research methods and principles that incorporate effective communication and permissions but also include associated collaboration, co-creation processes (co-authorship/co-beneficiary).

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) provides guidance in the area of cultural innovation and representation however it cautions designers to be vigilant when sharing Indigenous knowledge. “The protection of traditional knowledge should contribute toward the promotion of innovation, and to the transfer and dissemination of knowledge to the mutual advantage of holders and users of traditional knowledge, and in a manner conducive to social and economic welfare and to a balance of rights and obligations” (WIPO 2014).
Part 3: AIDC:CD Points Expanded

This section expands on each Charter point by setting out the protocols, explaining the context and then proposing actions.

1) Indigenous led. Ensure Indigenous stakeholders have the opportunity to oversee the creative development and design process.

The International Indigenous Design Charter clearly states Indigenous peoples’ have the right to oversee the creative development and design process of design work that seeks to engage with Indigenous knowledge. The International Indigenous Design Charter asks designers to:

• engage with local Indigenous designers who are connected with the relevant communities and provide opportunities for them to oversee the creative development and design process.

• employ Indigenous staff or consultants where possible.

2) Self-determined. Respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine the application of traditional knowledge and representation of their culture in design practice.


3) Community specific. Ensure respect for the diversity of Indigenous culture by acknowledging and following regional cultural understandings.

Designers need to develop a cultural awareness to recognize the sensibilities and diversities of each Indigenous culture; acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous cultures as represented in urban, rural and remote communities and understanding that in some cases they would only be given information/knowledge when they are deemed ready and trust has been established.

4) Deep listening. Ensure respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviours for effective communication and courteous interaction can be practiced. Develop respectful sense of belonging to ensure recognized custodians are actively involved and consulted.

It is recommended designers start a conversation as if they are there to learn and not to teach and demonstrate the practice to being courteous, patient and listening deeply. Designers and
their clients need to develop dedicated research practice method for Indigenous-themed projects and be aware of the budgetary impact associated with such time related considerations.

5) **Indigenous knowledge.** Acknowledge and respect the rich cultural history of Indigenous knowledge including, designs, stories, sustainability and land management understanding ownership of knowledge must remain with the Indigenous custodians.

The rich cultural history of Indigenous knowledge is a living entity that continues to evolve. By developing a cultural competency framework, those engaging with Indigenous knowledge must remain aware of the complex cultural reality that regenerates, advances and grows.

6) **Shared knowledge (collaboration, co-creation, procurement).** Cultivate a respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviors for effective communication. This involves courteous interaction to encourage the transmission of shared knowledge by developing a cultural competency framework to remain aware of Indigenous cultural reality.

The International Indigenous Design Charter recommends designers:

- have patience to cultivate respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement, without undue pressure.
- ensure the appropriate cultural custodians/knowledge keepers are present when consulting or co-creating.
- demonstrate open, transparent and inclusive consultation processes.
- ensure all stakeholders understand that consultation may require an extended period of time to enable consideration of and consultation with community members.
- understand it is important to collaborate from the outset of the design process rather than seek approval at the end.
- share and disseminate information and any findings with the relevant Indigenous stakeholders.
- provide copies of design works (where possible) to the people involved.

7) **Shared benefits.** Ensure Indigenous people share in the benefits from the use of their cultural knowledge, especially where it is being commercially applied.

The International Indigenous Design Charter encourages designers to ask: is there is an Indigenous story in this project (Point 10)? Asking this question promotes awareness and provides an opportunity for innovative outcomes, however brings with it a responsibility to share the benefits of the commercial outcomes with the traditional owners of the cultural knowledge.
8) Impact of design. Consider the reception and implication of all designs so that they protect the environment, are sustainable, and remain respectful of Indigenous cultures over deep time; past, present and future.

The International Indigenous Design Charter asks designers to ensure the representation of Indigenous cultures:

- reflect their cultural values and respect their customary laws.
- protect and respect the environment and honour the values of Indigenous cultures.
- are an authentically reflection of Indigenous knowledge.
- empower Indigenous peoples; past, present and future.
- positively impact Indigenous peoples who are both the subject and producers of the story; past, present and future.

9) Legal and moral. Demonstrate respect and honour, cultural ownership and intellectual property rights, including moral rights, by obtaining appropriate permissions where required.

Designers must be aware of their professional and moral responsibilities and the need to understand the power they have to influence opinions. For this reason, the International Indigenous Design Charter emphasises the importance of respecting copyright, moral rights, and cultural rights. It emphasizes the need to understand the importance of appropriate acknowledgements and credits as per the legal requirements of the country in which the cultural knowledge reside.

Designers need to be aware that some aspects of Indigenous representation may be unsuitable for public scrutiny. Secret and sacred material is often restricted under customary law and therefore unsuitable for publication. Privacy and confidentiality must be respected.

10) Charter implementation. Ask the questions if there is an aspect to the project, in relation to any design brief, that may be improved with Indigenous knowledge. Ensure the implementation of the Charter to safeguard Indigenous design integrity. Use the Charter to help build the cultural awareness of your clients and associated stakeholders.
Part 4: Appendix

4.1 Definitions

The terms *Indigenous/Indigenous peoples* have both been used in this Charter. International Indigenous Design Charter acknowledges that the word Indigenous can be a contentious term but for efficiency and the lack of a more appropriate single word alternative the International Indigenous Design Charter has opted to comply with the judgment of the United Nations (2013) Forum on Indigenous Issues which states:

Considering the diversity of Indigenous peoples, an official definition of ‘Indigenous’ has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:

- self-identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- distinct social, economic or political systems
- distinct language, culture and beliefs
- form non-dominant groups of society
- resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (United Nations, 2013, p.1).

**Indigenous Grouping Terminology**

**INDIGENOUS** – a term used to describe people who identify as having a set of specific rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory, and their cultural or historical distinctiveness from other populations that are often politically dominant. Also identified as first nations, aboriginal and custodians of traditional knowledge.

**INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE** – a term used to describe ways of knowing, seeing, and thinking that are passed down orally and visually from generation to generation of Indigenous peoples.
Design Practice Terminology

**DESIGN** – In this document the term used has been to describe a profession of associated disciplines. The term ‘design’ encompasses communication design/graphic design, digital design, environmental design, architecture and the built environment, landscape design, fashion design, visual language, advertising and design strategy.

**COMMUNICATION DESIGN** - the term used to describe the profession, which encompasses the disciplines of both graphic and digital/interactive design. This definition reflects the global shift from focusing on design as the production of an artefact to design as a strategic process. Following are the official International Council of Design (Ico-D) definitions of both communication design and communication designer as ratified by the Ico-D General Assembly 22, La Habana, Cuba, 26 October 2007:

**GRAPHIC DESIGN** – the term for a profession, which is now more commonly referred to as ‘communication design’ or ‘visual communication design’ because of the trending shift from print media to digital/interactive design applications that engage with both visual and non-visual senses (see communication design).

**RELATIONAL** – concerning the way in which two or more people or things are connected.

**RELATIONALITY** – the state or condition of being relational.

**STAKEHOLDER** – a person, group, organisation, escrow agent or custodian with a legitimate interest in a given situation, action or enterprise.

**COLLABORATION** – The action of working with someone to produce something.

**CO-CREATION** – A business strategy focusing on customer experience and interactive relationships.

**PROCUREMENT** – The action of obtaining or procuring something. The act of obtaining or buying goods and services.

**PERMISSIONS** – The action of officially allowing someone to do a particular thing; consent or authorization:

**CO-BENEFICIARIES** – more than one person who gain a combined advantage and/or profit from something

**CO-AUTHORSHIP** – more than one person collaborating as joint author.
4.2 Contributors

The International Indigenous Design Charter was developed from the Australian Indigenous Design Charter: Communication Design which was created by coauthors Dr Russell Kennedy and Dr Meghan Kelly in collaboration with Dr Brian Martin (Muruwari, Bundjalung, Kamilaroi), Deakin University, Institute of Koorie Education (IKE), Jefa Greenaway (Wailwan/Gamillaraay), Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV) and the Management and Executive Board of the Design Institute of Australia (DIA).

Tailored specifically for the communication design profession, the Australian Indigenous Design Charter expands on the research findings of Dr Russell Kennedy’s PhD thesis titled: Designing with Indigenous Knowledge: Policy and protocols for respectful and authentic cross-cultural representation in communication design practice. As acknowledged in the references, the Charter also builds on foundations set by existing protocol documents and writings with an aligned purpose such as Oxfam’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols document (2007) and the work of intellectual property lawyer Terri Janke (1999, 2002, 2007, 2007). The Australian Indigenous Design Charter – Communication Design was referenced create the International Indigenous Design Charter in conjunction with global discussion involving regional workshops around the world.

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4.3 References


