



OUR STORY OF IMPACT:
INFLUENCING PEOPLE AND CULTURE THROUGH
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF COUNTRY

The Acknowledge This! workshop started as a conversation between friends and has grown organically over three years. This conversation has been shared with almost 25,000 people and 200 organisations from all sectors including government, health, technology, infrastructure, arts and academia, just to name a few.

At the three year mark we want to pause and look back. Our curiosity led us to ask

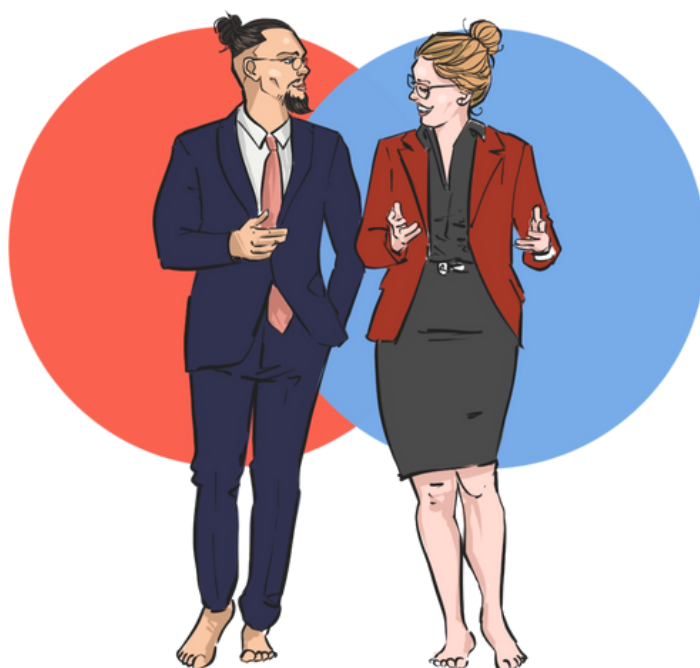
What are the stories of change?

How has the Acknowledge This! workshop impacted people and organisations?

To explore these questions we asked a number of clients whom we've worked with in an ongoing capacity over the last few years. We conducted interviews via Zoom or over email with eight organisations from various sectors. Their stories of impact have been themed and reflected throughout this report.

Through these conversations we identified common threads connecting business outcomes and personal impact. Overwhelmingly, we were told that Acknowledgements of Country are profound and provide a space for greater connection.

Many organisations discovered Acknowledge This as part of their Reconciliation Action Plan journey, recognising that Acknowledgments of Country are a great first step to introduce the concept of reconciliation and the part we all play. As part of a wider conversation, the Acknowledge This! workshop proved to be instrumental in developing capacity within individuals and organisations.



IMPROVED CONNECTION

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

“How do you connect with Country?” is quite a self reflective prompt. It encourages you to go within and identify what you find valuable, what brings you joy. By first recognising that you do have a connection to Country, you can then reflect, explore and discover your personal connection to the spirit of this place. From there you can more authentically acknowledge Country.

When asked about connection to Country our participants had, they noted that “people are starting to do Acknowledgments of Country that have been customised and personally written” and “it is very often a reflection on individuals' experience of connection to Country, community or to Elders.” One participant noted that “my confidence and ability to connect the Acknowledgement to my journey and what I love about this Country, has been made easier to do by going through this session.”

This feedback demonstrates that participants who have completed the Acknowledge This! workshop have the ability to understand what an Acknowledgement is and have the confidence to personalise it, resulting in a greater connection to Country. A greater connection to Country can inspire a curiosity about our shared history and intentions going forward. Staff are more likely to take personal responsibility for learning more, like researching TED Talks, investing in Indigenous language classes or even becoming a RAP champion within your organisation.

CONNECTION TO EACH OTHER

Building connections to each other is so important, especially in the workplace where collaboration and communication improves our work. In the daily hustle and bustle of to-do lists and meetings, we forget to make time to connect with each other as people. Acknowledgements of Country are a great container to bring more personality and build greater relationships through sharing stories and conversations.

Through the process of personalising an Acknowledgment of Country, participants noted that “we have begun to learn more about each other” by sharing “reflective Acknowledgements that connect staff to the here and now – providing an opportunity for thought and conversation”. An additional outcome was “they feel so much more confident to talk to their team and have this conversation with their team.”

Increasing capacity for connection not only positively impacts the individual but the organisation as a whole through better relationships, shared experiences and appreciating our differences.

IMPROVED CONFIDENCE

What we've heard from 25,000 conversations is that the most common barrier to participation is fear. We address this fear head on in our workshop and give people permission to give it a go. As Rhys says "don't let the fear of offence get in the way of your good intentions". Once the fear has dissolved, people move forward with courage and try new things. We've heard that the workshop "sparked positive conversations around fears and how to overcome them"; "we've noticed the team is so much more comfortable delivering them"; and they're "not restricted to a script". Having this confidence radiates into other areas of work including one participant who said they "felt much more comfortable after that training to now be the voice for the business".

An increase in confidence directly impacts your personal capability to navigate challenging situations. Starting a conversation around the fear of offence can create a safe place for people to explore their innermost thoughts and feelings, increasing their emotional and psychological awareness. Our experience shows that an increase in these areas directly impacts the cultural capability of an organisation, which in turn can create a safe space for all staff (both Indigenous and non-indigenous).

IMPROVED FREQUENCY

Acknowledgements don't have to be reserved for major events such as NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week or large team meetings. Choosing to do Acknowledgements when we feel called to do so make them more authentic. Creating space for an authentic Acknowledgement can dispel fears, prompt larger conversations around our shared culture and encourage curiosity. One organisation stated that Acknowledgements "provided an opportunity for thought and conversation regarding seasons, political landscape, national days and history", while another remarked that "staff are taking the time to identify who the Traditional Owners are on the Country they are meeting on".

When we move beyond the script into our heart space, we feel more inspired and excited to share. We love that this practice can be led by people who want to participate, not because it is a mandatory policy. Since the training, participants "have been volunteering to do them in meetings or gatherings" and there has been an "increase in the number of employees asking to complete Acknowledgements". An increase in frequency naturally leads to Acknowledgements being embedded in an organisation's culture. As one organisation noted "We've got it in all our training programs now".

IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

There are many models of culture change. We find organisations implement Acknowledge This! workshops from two directions: from the top down, the bottom up, or a combination of both.

TOP DOWN CHANGE

Top down implementation is where the leadership team, executives, board, or managers go through the workshop first. As the people who deliver Acknowledgements most often, this workshop gives them the tools and confidence to model more courageous participation. By modelling this participation, leaders demonstrate what is possible and expected in your culture.

A fantastic story from one of our interviewed organisations highlights the benefits of this approach:

“Last year we launched our internal mentoring program and had a big launch event. The General Executive was approached to do an Acknowledgement of Country and the response was “heck no, not comfortable, you do it”.

Just last week we had another mentoring launch and I was in the briefing session with the General Executive (who had just completed Acknowledge This!). When asked about conducting an Acknowledgement of Country, he said, “oh, don't worry, I'll do the Acknowledgement of Country this year.”

Even in that sense, it's a massive change.”

BOTTOM UP CHANGE

Bottom up change is where there is an invitation for anyone in the organisation to attend. With this approach you get a room full of people who care - the champions of reconciliation who are personally interested in participating authentically. We love this because it also breaks down silos. In a breakout room conversation you might have people from finance, comms and frontline delivery, all sharing a conversation. These are new conversations.

Bottom up is a viral strategy where each attendee brings the learnings and conversations back to their team or department. It then grows in unique and unexpected ways, travelling throughout the organisation in an organic way.

One organisation who utilised the bottom up approach noted:

"The way that they do the Acknowledgement has changed.

They (the team) provide opportunities by asking
'who feels called to give this Acknowledgement today?'

And normally it would be silence and then the Chair would have to do it and they would probably read a scripted acknowledgement.

But, this time people were jumping up and saying,
"yeah, actually, I do want to do it."

Many organisations leverage a mix of both models, whereby a leaders/executive session is held to give in-depth training and a subsequent workshop is held for the remaining staff. We have found that the more people within an organisation who receive the training, the more people know what's going on and why. This creates a safer environment for leaders to try something new because everyone has a shared context.

Each approach has its advantages, and it's important to recognise there is no 'right way'. We can adapt to any situation and work with what will be most effective for your organisation.

IT'S ALL ABOUT CONVERSATION

We are all about conversation.

We love sharing and facilitating conversations. Something we often say is that we're in service to the conversation you need to have. The Acknowledge This! workshop has a similar shape every time we facilitate it, but the conversation is always different. Depending on the people in the session, or the industry, or the cultural environment we are always in service to help the conversation go where participants need it to go.

In addition to the skill of an Acknowledgement, participants gain greater courage, curiosity and sense of personal responsibility. Embedding these principles in your team at the beginning of your reconciliation journey has long term impacts because any additional activities or learnings are deeply connected to the individual why. Asking "why does this matter to me?" shifts our heart and changes our behaviour.

We often get feedback about the experience of our workshop, and these interviews were no different. Here's what people said about the experience of our workshops and what makes them different to other trainings they have attended:

- Acknowledge This! is a very good example of adapting well to an online platform to facilitate training, which not all training providers have done well.
- Convenient ongoing public workshops accommodate continued learning
- This session instilled in me a profound appreciation for their role (Acknowledgements) in fostering connections to the land, culture and one another.
- Everything that they said was super practical to implement day to day.

We love starting conversations. We come into your space and crack open a conversation about our connection to culture. By modelling how to navigate these topics and providing common language, your people have the tools to continue having this conversation. The Acknowledge This! workshop leaves a lasting impact that resonates well beyond the workshop itself.

LET'S CHAT!

We'd love chat with you about how we can support your reconciliation journey or we'd love to hear about your organisation's reconciliation change journey so far!

[Click here to book in a call](#)