



Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

Our reconciliation journey





Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation ('The Foundation') respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the First People, Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which our office is located and of its waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all First Nations people.

We acknowledge the deep and enduring connection to Country that exists now and has existed for more than 60,000 years.

We are particularly grateful for the time and care Traditional Owners and/or Elders have shown in helping the Foundation to understand the culture, history, needs and aspirations of First Nations communities.

Our reconciliation journey begins

Our vision for reconciliation is supporting a just and inclusive society, which respects and celebrates First Nations cultures and communities and is truthful about our country's history.

In 2018, an Aboriginal Gambling Harm Reference Group gave advice to the Foundation board on developing our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and First Nations community engagement strategy. The reference group community leaders were:

- Belinda Duarte, Wotjobaluk (Chair) – Deputy Chair, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation; CEO, Culture is Life
- Andrew Jackomos, Yorta Yorta and Gunditjmara – Special Adviser for Aboriginal Self-Determination, Aboriginal Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Daphne Yarram, Noongar – Executive Officer, Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service

- Ian Hamm, Yorta Yorta – CEO, Victorian Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation (VACCHO)
- Chantelle McGuinness, Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta and Wiradjuri – Financial Counsellor, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
- Geraldine Atkinson – Bangerang Elder and advocate for addressing gambling harm
- Laura Thompson, Gunditjmara – Managing Director, Spark Health.

'Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.'

CEO Karen Mundine, Reconciliation Australia



Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Financial Counsellor Chantelle McGuinness.

First Nations Gambling Awareness Program (FNGAP)

FNGAP is a collaboration of five Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and the Foundation.

FNGAP partners have provided great insight, encouragement, guidance, and a great deal of laughter and friendly banter during our shared RAP journey. We are humbled by the goodwill and humour of these organisation and warmly thank them:

- Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative (GEGAC)
- Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS)
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative
- Strong Brother Strong Sister
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS).

FNGAP partners know best how to deal with gambling harm in their communities.

Since the Foundation began working with a RAP, we have made sure that our programs and activities that affect First Nations people also have First Nations leadership. The Foundation's role is to provide funding and support to the First Nations organisations that deliver FNGAP.

Our aim has been to give them what they need to get the job done, then get out of their way.

FNGAP provides counselling and yarning circles as well as community activities – anything from money information sessions to comedy nights and fishing competitions.

These events are a chance for First Nations people to get together, strengthen culture and have fun away from gambling.



From left, Jasmine Versteeg, Dea Morgain and Peter Clark.



Staff members from FNGAP organisations. From left, back row, Esther Gregory, Jasmine Versteeg, Chantelle McGuinness. Middle row, Shannon Beecher, Shae White, Ruby Evans, Jorja Lewis Jackson, Steven Morrison. Front row, Peter Clarke

Self-determination means that community knows best.

FNGAP is for community, delivered by community, and committed to self-determination.

It tests and reviews different approaches to find the right fit, which means being true to the history and culture of the local community, and meeting their dreams for the future. Some approaches succeed, some fail, and there's been a lot of learning along the way, but FNGAP is making a real difference.

The Foundation also thanks:

- **Belinda Duarte** led the development of our Innovate RAP 2019–2021 while holding the role of deputy chair of the Foundation board. We are very grateful for her leadership in getting our reconciliation journey started.

- **The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Council**, and the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Cooperative for reviewing our RAPs.

- **Reconciliation Australia CEO Karen Mundine**, a proud Bundjalung woman, has been an inspiration. She leads an organisation that has been tough in its review of our RAPs, while also cheering us on.

- **Professor Kerry Arabena**, a descendant of the Meriam people of the Torres Strait, took a good hard look at FNGAP's rules and reporting tools. She focussed on connection to Country, cultural healing for community members, and less stress on ACCO staff.



- **The First Nations Foundation** developed the *Financial literacy and gambling behaviour in Victorian First Nations communities* guide for, and by, First Nations health and community service organisations.

- During the tough times of COVID-19 lockdowns, **Marsha Uppill** of Arranyinha Pty Ltd coordinated a successful co-design project with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, Elders and community leaders, which created the Djilang Gambling Awareness Program.

- **Ashley Gordon**, a proud descendent of the Gamilaroi and Barkindji people from the community of Brewarrina, is the manager of the New South Wales Aboriginal Safe Gambling Services. He has generously shared his expert knowledge.



Jasmine Versteeg and the Foundation's First Nations Expert Advisor Ashley Gordon at the Lowitja Institute's 3rd International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference

The Foundation joined Supply Nation to help us connect with more First Nations businesses. This included the one-off hiring of guest speakers and performers for events.

First Nations businesses that have contributed to the Foundation's RAPs and our broader reconciliation journey include Supply Nation, Marcus Lee Design, Arranyinha Pty Ltd, film maker Wayne Quilliam, Artisan Indigenous Media, Dixon Patten, Koori Heritage Trust, comedian Sean Choolburra, musician Kutcha Edwards, Mission Songs Project, Dr Anita Heiss, photographer James Henry, creative agency Little Rocket, and the rapper Philly.



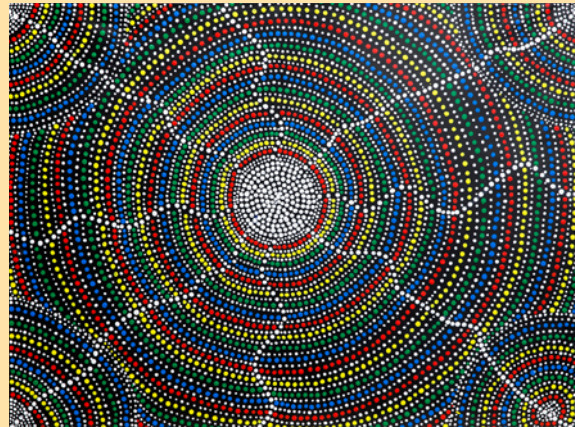
Rapper and hip-hop artist Philly.

We celebrate our achievements

Collaboration informed our RAP

In 2018, Rumbalara Community and Therapeutic Engagement Officer Fallon Harris presented the Foundation with a painting. It shows a story of collaboration that reflects the development of our RAP.

She described the storyline of her painting: 'The colours around the middle circle reaching to the communities is representing how the Foundation is currently doing their RAP, and slowly bridging the gap of understanding and respect between the Foundation and the communities you fund.'



Rod Jackson

Rod Jackson, the Foundation's expert RAP adviser, is a proud Palawa and Cherbourg man. He is an Elder Respected Person on the County and Magistrates Courts, chairperson of Barpa Pty Ltd, interim chairperson of Federation Enterprises – a wholly owned subsidiary of Victorian Federation of Traditional Owners Corporation – and Tract RAP working group advisor. He also currently serves as a board member on many boards including the Emotional Well-being Institute Geneva, AFL SportsReady and GWM Water Board, and signatory to the Yuma Yirramboi employment and economic strategy.

He believes in working with community to develop the solutions that work for them.

Rod's enthusiastic contribution to many actions within our RAP has been invaluable. Along with his warmth and good humour, we thank him for his willingness to share his own insights and offer wise counsel at every step of our RAP journey.



From left, Foundation board member Lee Crockford, Rod Jackson, staff member Sharin Milner, and First Nations Foundation CEO Phil Usher

Our first RAP

In 2019, the Foundation launched its first RAP to 2021. The RAP working group was led by members of our executive leadership team with other group members drawn from across the organisation.

Through our RAPs, the Foundation has been able to:

- **strengthen** opportunities for existing Foundation staff to build relationships with First Nations communities and people
- **create** prosperity in communities by purchasing their goods and services
- **share** positive stories of First Nations people and communities
- **build** the Foundation's respect for, and understanding of, cultural and community protocols across Victoria.

Successes during our first RAP included:

- **working** with Traditional Owner groups and First Nations stakeholders to develop our cultural protocols
- **profiling** First Nations people and communities in our publications
- **appointing** Foundation board director Lee Crockford as our board RAP champion
- **engaging** First Nations graduate Monique Blaszcak (a proud Wakka Wakka, Bidjara and Wathaurong community member) through the Victorian public sector TAFE and Vocational Education and Training graduate program
- **hosting** online National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC events in collaboration with Traditional Owner groups
- **reviewing** all People & Culture policies and developing our anti-discrimination policy.



Foundation staff celebrate NAIDOC Week.

Reconciliation library and reflection club

In 2020, our Reconciliation Library was launched by Dr Anita Heiss. It contains books, podcasts, films and a list of Traditional Custodians. In the first month after launch it was the most visited section on our intranet.

The Foundation also opened a Reconciliation Reflection Club for all staff keen to discuss films, music, and books by First Nations creators.

Malinda Rutter, an internationally award-winning writer, director and producer, is a proud Bunjalung, Galibal and Gidhabal woman. She guided discussions, with the group talking about racism; equity; identity, and the complex history of Australia.

An understanding of First Nations histories, cultures and protocols is an important skill for all staff, board members and the organisations we fund.

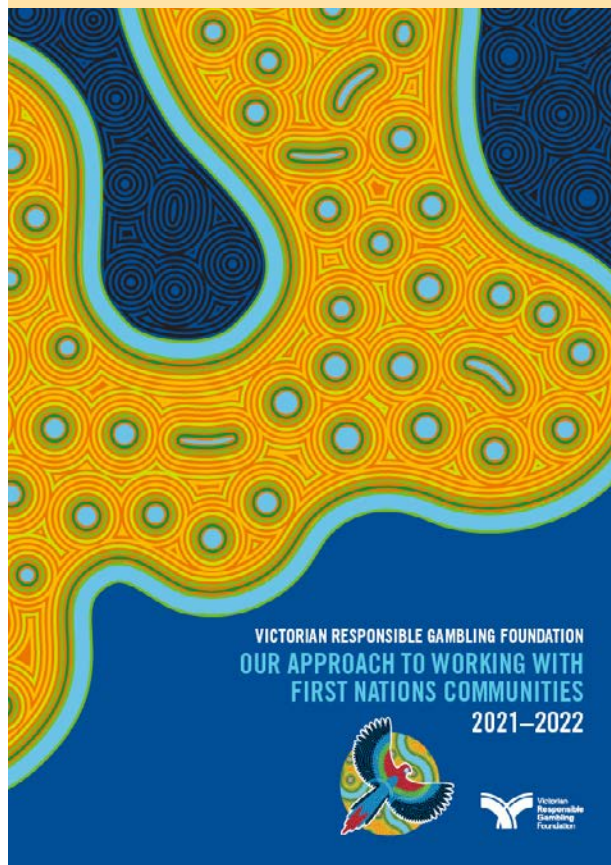
In 2021, cultural protocols were developed as a guide to support staff when working with First Nations people, communities and organisations. They cover topics such as the Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, and guidance on how to respect cultural material, photos, artwork and knowledge.

We received exceptional guidance from the Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owner groups, while Andrew Atkinson helped us understand and value historical perspectives.

Our approach to working with First Nations communities 2021–2022

In 2021, we released this document setting out the four core principles of our approach: cultural respect; self-determination; social justice, and community inclusion.

We gratefully acknowledge the excellent work of consultants Melissa Bickford and Debby Lovett.



Also in 2021, FNGAP and other First Nations stakeholders including Traditional Owners initiated an updating of our language guide. We were grateful to learn that the terms 'First Nations/First Peoples' rather than 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' better represent the experiences and aspirations of First Nations people.

How did we do?

At the end of our first RAP, we asked First Nations organisations we work with how we were doing. People noted positive changes including Foundation staff learning about First Nations communities, culture and history.

While many saw the Foundation working hard to become a culturally safe organisation that actively supports First Nations self-determination, we were told we could do better by:

- actively supporting Treaty
- getting out into First Nations communities more
- using our sports program and marketing to support First Nations people.

Our second RAP

The Foundation released its second Innovate RAP November 2021–November 2023. It followed the Victorian Government plan that ensures everything *about* First Nations people *is led* by First Nations people. It supports actions that tackle trauma, help with healing, and call out and fight back against racism.

This RAP had a stronger focus on engaging staff and stakeholders in reconciliation, and taking practical steps to build respectful relationships, and create opportunities for First Nations people.

Cultural safety and learning

In 2022, the Foundation released its Cultural Safety Framework.

We thank staff from ACCOs for initiating the process and sharing their cultural knowledge in its creation.

In 2023, the Foundation released its Cultural Learning Strategy to build confidence in knowledge and awareness of reconciliation matters.

In that same year, the Foundation developed its First Nations recruitment, retention and professional development strategy. With hindsight, we can see the mistakes in our approach. The process was rushed and we ran out of time to undertake consultation which we acknowledge is a vital step. We also found it a challenge to find and allocate the resources to complete and apply it.

The difference our RAPs made

On the difference our RAPs have made, staff report that it has mostly or strongly improved:

- their **awareness** of the effect of unconscious racism and prejudice on First Nations people
- their **understanding** of cultural protocols
- their **confidence** to work with First Nations people in a respectful way.

In 2023, the Foundation took part in Reconciliation Australia's Workplace Barometer. It found that:

- **91 per cent** of Foundation staff surveyed think the relationship between First Nations people and other Australians is very important
- **83 per cent** believe the Foundation has a genuine and strong commitment to reconciliation (69 per cent average in other organisations).



The challenges we faced

While we were very proud of the work completed in our first RAP, we struggled to make some RAP actions as much of a priority as other important organisational work.

This was even more apparent when many RAP working group members were focussed on our response to COVID-19 lockdowns.

The pandemic had an impact on our ability to put into action some work laid out in our first RAP. A total of 87 per cent of actions were delivered. Three actions were rolled over to our next RAP as they could not be completed in time. Four actions were cancelled.

We were very grateful for any time given to our first RAP by First Nations organisations. Consultation was limited as they and their communities rightly prioritised the health and safety of their communities.

Our focus was on how best to deliver our RAP while honouring their immediate needs to respond to COVID-19.

Foundation Board Chair Tass Mousaferiadis

'The challenge to learn and expand our work, delivering on ambitious RAP targets in the midst of business as usual and a pandemic, was taken up as a whole-of-organisation commitment.'

'The board, executive and individual staff members are very grateful for the exceptional grace and faith shown by the First Nations organisations we have worked with. They have guided us – and told us when we got it wrong – over the six years of our reconciliation journey.'

'We have travelled a great distance on our journey. It has been enlightening and inspiring, and it is not over. While the Foundation is closing, staff members will carry their knowledge of reconciliation, self-determination and treaty forward into their new roles in new agencies, with pride and commitment.'



The Foundation celebrating National Reconciliation Week 2023 and its theme 'Be a voice for generations'.





For more information, please contact Dea Morgain

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