

FINDING HER

Cultural Protocols Framework for Ethical Commemoration

Guidelines for councils, naming authorities and Her Place Women's Museum

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This framework provides practical guidance to ensure that commemorative place naming and biography creation are handled ethically and respectfully. It aligns with the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet's guidance on engaging Traditional Owners and draws on national best practices including the AIATSIS Code of Ethics and ANZSOG principles.

The goal is to honour deceased women — especially First Nations women — in a culturally safe manner that involves their families and communities at every step. This framework is designed for use by Victorian councils, naming authorities and Her Place Women's Museum staff.

Key objectives include:

- respectful engagement with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities from the outset;
- obtaining family permission before using a woman's name, story or image;
- ensuring culturally safe use of biographies and photographs;
- establishing a fair process for naming or updating commemorations; and
- providing a clear path to resolve disagreements using decolonial approaches.¹²

1 Engaging Traditional Owners and communities

Honouring a First Nations woman — or naming any place on Aboriginal land — requires early and meaningful engagement with the Traditional Owners of that Country. Councils and Her Place Women's Museum should take the following steps:³

- 1. Identify the appropriate group:** Determine the formally recognised Traditional Owner group(s) for the area. In Victoria, this will typically be the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the region. If there is no formal RAP for the area, seek advice from [Department of Premier and Cabinet](#).
- 2. Contact early:** Reach out at the earliest planning stage to invite Traditional Owner involvement. Explain the project and its purpose before any other public steps are taken.⁴

¹ firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au.

² unstats.un.org.

³ firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.aufirstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au

⁴ firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.aufirstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au

- 3. Observe protocols:** Ask how the Traditional Owners wish to be engaged — preferred communication methods, meeting formats, timeframes needed, and any fees for cultural consultancy. Respect their cultural governance by engaging through the group’s official channels, not just individuals.⁵
- 4. Collaborate on decisions:** Work with Traditional Owners on key aspects: the form of the name, the language and stories used in interpretive signage, and restrictions on content. For a commemorative naming, this may include using an Indigenous name or incorporating a Welcome to Country on the plaque.
- 5. Acknowledge and include:** Plan to acknowledge Traditional Owner contributions in all materials. Invite Traditional Owner representatives to any unveiling or dedication ceremonies to perform cultural protocols.
- 6. Allow time and respect:** Traditional Owner groups have many obligations; allow flexibility if they need more time to consult or respond. Show good faith and openness to adjusting plans based on their input.⁶
- 7. Legal obligations:** Ensure compliance with relevant legal requirements including the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic). Traditional Owner engagement is not a courtesy — it may be required by law and by GNV naming rules.⁷

◆ Finding Her tip

ANZSOG guidance confirms that incorporating Indigenous knowledge leads to better public outcomes. Partnership with Traditional Owners from the outset — not as a final sign-off step but as a genuine co-decision maker — sets a foundation of trust that is far harder to build retrospectively.⁸

Identify the relevant Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for any area at: justice.vic.gov.au/rap

2 Family permissions protocol

Before commemorating any deceased woman, consent from her family must be obtained. This is especially critical for First Nations women due to cultural sensitivities around names and representations of the deceased. The following step-by-step protocol prioritises the eldest living direct descendant when seeking permission.⁹

- 1. Identify next of kin:** Research and identify the woman’s closest living relatives. The eldest direct descendant is typically approached first — they are often regarded as the family elder who can speak for the family’s wishes.

⁵ firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au

⁶ firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au

⁷ firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au

⁸ anzsog.edu.au

⁹ stylemanual.gov.au

2. Initial approach: Make contact in a culturally appropriate way – ideally face-to-face or by personal phone call. Emphasise that no public use of her name or image will occur without the family's blessing.¹⁰

3. Informed consent: Provide full information: what material will be published, where it will appear, and who the audience is. Allow the family time to discuss internally. Free, prior and informed consent is the standard, consistent with AIATSIS Code of Ethics principles.

4. Written permission: Where possible, obtain written consent from the family (a letter or email from the eldest descendant or family spokesperson). The Victorian naming rules require evidence of family consultation when proposing a commemorative name. Her Place Women's Museum has a Family Invitation Letter Template that can be sent via a council or developer where privacy laws prevent direct contact.¹¹

5. Wider family involvement: Ask the eldest descendant if other family members should be consulted. Some families may want a collective decision. Aim for broad family support, not just a single signature.

6. Respect a refusal: If the family do not give permission or express concerns, pause and reassess. Open a dialogue to see if modifications could address concerns. If there is outright refusal, be prepared to adjust the approach or select a different honouree.

7. Unlocated family: Where a person passed away long ago or family details are scarce, demonstrate due diligence: advertise via newspaper, social media or community networks. Keep records of all efforts. If no family is found after exhaustive search – particularly if the person has been deceased for over 70 years – the project may proceed with caution, noting that consent was sought but the family could not be reached.¹²¹³

8. Ongoing communication: Once permission is obtained, keep the family involved. Share draft biographical text for their feedback and invite them to contribute personal anecdotes. A collaborative approach often enriches the content significantly.

Family consent is paramount¹⁴¹⁵

"If a person has passed, approval must be sought from the family around the use of their name and image." – Australian Government Style Manual (2021). Commemorative naming is about community esteem and should never come at the cost of family distress. This principle applies to all women, and carries additional cultural weight for First Nations women.

¹⁰ stylemanual.gov.au

¹¹ unstats.un.org

¹² land.vic.gov.au

¹³ land.vic.gov.au

¹⁴ unstats.un.org

¹⁵ stylemanual.gov.au

3 Protocols for mentioning relatives in content

When writing biographies or plaques, other family members of the deceased woman may be mentioned. It is important to handle this carefully to protect the privacy and feelings of living relatives.

- ◆ Use generic references as a default: refer to family in general terms without full names unless those individuals have consented. For example, “her husband” or “the Smith family” rather than first names.
- ◆ If it is important to include a name, consider using a respectful title and surname only (e.g. “her daughter, Mrs Smith”). This provides connection without unnecessary exposure.
- ◆ If a living family member is central to the story, seek their permission to include their name or details, explaining how and where the information will be used.
- ◆ In some Aboriginal kinship systems, personal names of certain relatives – especially the deceased’s own name – may be avoided or modified. Check with the family or community on acceptable ways to reference relations.
- ◆ Do not include sensitive personal information about living family members (such as exact addresses or personal struggles) in public-facing content unless absolutely necessary and approved.

◆ Finding Her tip

The family’s comfort level dictates the level of detail. When families see that only appropriate references are made, and that permission was obtained where specific names are used, it builds trust in the institution’s handling of their loved one’s legacy.

4 Culturally safe biographies and images

Creating a biography or displaying an image of a deceased woman – particularly a First Nations woman – requires cultural sensitivity. The following guidelines address both written narratives and the use of photographs.

Biographical narratives

- ◆ Involve people from the woman’s community – family, Elders or knowledge-holders – in crafting the biography. This ensures accuracy and that the tone honours cultural perspectives.
- ◆ Note the First Nation the woman belonged to and the Country she was connected with (for example: “A proud Wurundjeri woman, she...”). Use correct terminology – capitalise terms like Elder, Country and Nation as guided by the community.¹⁶
- ◆ Present her life in a strengths-based way. Acknowledge challenges factually, but focus on resilience, contributions and legacy rather than portraying her as a victim.¹⁷

¹⁶ stylemanual.gov.au

¹⁷ stylemanual.gov.au

- ◆ If the biography includes culturally sensitive content (ceremonial details, names of other deceased persons), check with community advisers before publishing. If included, add a content warning where appropriate.¹⁸
- ◆ Verify all facts, especially cultural terms or descriptions of community roles. Attribute quotes and stories to their source, giving credit to Indigenous voices directly included.
- ◆ Where possible, have the draft biography reviewed by an Indigenous cultural adviser or someone from the relevant community before publication.

Use of photographs and images

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have “sorry business” practices that restrict showing a person’s name or likeness after they have passed away. The following guidelines apply:¹⁹

- ◆ Obtain permission to use any image of the deceased from the family and, where relevant, the community or Elders. Always ask: Is it acceptable to use her photo in this public way? And if so, which photos?²⁰
- ◆ If the community observes an avoidance period, respect that. You may need to delay using the image until that period has passed, or use an alternative in the interim.
- ◆ Include a respectful advisory in any publication, exhibit or digital material: “Warning: includes the name and photograph of a deceased person, used with permission.” This is in addition to obtaining permission — not a substitute for it.^{21 22}
- ◆ Ensure clearances from all people visible in an image. If a person in a group photograph cannot be identified or named, consider not using that photograph at all.²³²⁴
- ◆ Always caption photographs with as much identifying context as possible — who, when, where. Displaying images of Indigenous people without names or context can be seen as disrespectful.²⁵
- ◆ If photos cannot be used due to cultural reasons, consider alternatives: a painting by an Indigenous artist approved by the family, or an image of a place or symbol important to her. Always check that alternatives do not conflict with any cultural protocols.

AIATSIS Code of Ethics²⁶

The AIATSIS Code of Ethics (2020) notes that “mourning protocols may restrict use of names/images of deceased persons”. It also confirms that “clearance will need to be sought from the people who are shown in the image” — beyond copyright, this is about respecting everyone’s rights and privacy. Treat biography and image permissions as a consulted, collaborative process, not a sign-off formality.

¹⁸ stylemanual.gov.au

¹⁹ stylemanual.gov.au stylemanual.gov.au

²⁰ stylemanual.gov.au

²¹ stylemanual.gov.au

²² stylemanual.gov.au

²³ stylemanual.gov.au stylemanual.gov.au

²⁴ aiatsis.gov.au

²⁵ stylemanual.gov.au

²⁶ aiatsis.gov.au

5 Process for naming new places commemoratively

Commemoratively naming a new public place requires balancing Victoria's official naming rules with the cultural protocols set out in this framework. The following steps integrate GNV naming regulations with additional considerations for First Nations honourees.

- 1. Assess eligibility and timing:** Victorian guidelines prefer naming after someone who is deceased — usually for at least two years — and who was held in high regard by the community. If the death was less than two years ago, a GNV exemption is required; exercise this only in exceptional cases with strong justification and family and community support.²⁷²⁸
- 2. Secure family consent:** Obtain consent from the family before putting the name forward officially. Geographic Names Victoria will ask for evidence of family consultation when you submit the proposal. The naming process should not move to public consultation until every effort has been made to obtain the family's blessing.²⁹³⁰
- 3. Engage Traditional Owners:** If the place is on Traditional land, or if the person being honoured is an Aboriginal woman, involve the Traditional Owner group early. GNV's naming rules explicitly list recognising Traditional Owners as part of commemorative naming aims. A collaborative approach may result in a dual name in the Indigenous language.³¹
- 4. Comply with naming conventions:** Follow the technical rules in the Naming rules for places in Victoria. Use of surnames only is preferred for commemorative names of localities and roads. Avoid honorific titles or post-nominals in the official name. Ensure the name is not duplicating another place nearby. Use the GNV Pre-Submission Checklist to prepare your submission.³²³³
- 5. Prepare background and justification:** Document the person's achievements, connection to the place, and community significance. Include confirmation that family consent and Traditional Owner support have been obtained. This write-up informs both the GNV submission and public consultation.³⁴
- 6. Run public consultation:** Follow the required process: a minimum 30-day notice period during which residents can comment. Present the woman's story and the reasons the name is fitting. Address

²⁷ unstats.un.org/land.vic.gov.au

²⁸ land.vic.gov.au

²⁹ unstats.un.org

³⁰ land.vic.gov.au

³¹ land.vic.gov.au

³² unstats.un.org

³³ land.vic.gov.au

³⁴ unstats.un.org

questions respectfully. Where people are unfamiliar with the honouree, use consultation as an opportunity to educate and build community pride.³⁵

7. Lodge with GNV: Submit the proposal via the VICMAP Editing Service (VES) with all supporting evidence: family consent documentation, summary of consultation feedback, letters of support and any council resolutions. GNV will check compliance with naming rules and the completeness of consultation before gazettal.³⁶

8. Unveiling ceremony: Plan a respectful event that involves the family and Traditional Owners. Where the honouree is Indigenous, incorporate cultural elements important to her. Invite an Elder to perform a Welcome to Country or smoking ceremony. This is more than formality – it is an opportunity for cultural protocols to be observed and for the community to pay respects.

9. Interpretive signage: Alongside the official name sign, install an interpretive plaque or panel that tells the woman's story – especially important if only a surname is used. Include a short biography, her photograph (with permissions confirmed), and an Acknowledgement of Country. Ensure all text is approved by the family and, where relevant, the Traditional Owner group.³⁷

◆ Finding Her tip

Her Place Women's Museum can help prepare the biography and supporting evidence for your GNV submission. A well-documented biography submitted alongside the GNV Pre-Submission Checklist significantly strengthens a commemorative name proposal. Contact hello@finding-her.com.au for research support.^{38,39}

6 Updating or renaming existing commemorations

Changing an existing place name or adding a commemorative name to an already named place can be sensitive. Whether the goal is to honour a woman where none were before, or to incorporate an Indigenous name alongside an English one, approach this as a gradual, consultative journey.

- ◆ Research the context: understand why the place has its current name and what it signifies before proposing any change.
- ◆ Community buy-in is essential for renaming. Engage not only the immediate community but also historical societies or any stakeholders of the current name. Frame the change in the spirit of truth-telling and inclusion rather than erasing history.
- ◆ Where community attachment to the existing name is strong, consider a dual naming approach – the new name alongside the old – rather than an immediate full replacement.

³⁵ static1.squarespace.com

³⁶ land.vic.gov.au

³⁷ land.vic.gov.au and land.vic.gov.au

³⁸ land.vic.gov.au

³⁹ land.vic.gov.au

- ◆ Consider commemorating the superseded name in some way: for example, a plaque noting “formerly X Park, renamed in 2025 to honour Y”. This shows respect for history while making a positive change.
- ◆ Renaming triggers the same official naming rules and GNV procedures as a new name: provide family consent, Traditional Owner support, and the same community consultation process.
- ◆ If adding an Aboriginal name, conduct a culturally respectful ceremony when installing the new name. Acknowledge the significance of the change as a step toward justice and inclusion.
- ◆ Be proactive in public communications: use local media, council newsletters and updated signage to tell the story of the woman being honoured or the cultural significance of the new name.

7 Dispute resolution and decolonial practices⁴⁰

Despite best efforts, disputes or differing views can arise during the commemoration process. A family member may disagree with certain content, community members may oppose a naming, or different cultural expectations may clash. Handling these conflicts requires sensitivity, patience, and what Deborah Bird Rose refers to as “enlarged thinking” – a willingness to understand multiple perspectives and hold an open dialogue.⁴¹

1. Establish a culturally safe forum

Convene a meeting or mediation that is culturally safe for all involved. Ideally, hold this on neutral ground or on Country. Include an Indigenous facilitator or respected Elder if the matter involves Aboriginal content – someone who can ensure protocols are followed and open proceedings appropriately.

2. Practise “enlarged thinking”⁴²

Encourage all parties to situate themselves in the presence and place of others – actively listening to understand, not just to rebut. Establish dialogue guidelines: everyone speaks without interruption; speak from personal experience; and allow space for silence, grief and emotion as valid parts of the process.

3. Relational accountability⁴³

Remind all involved that they are part of an ongoing relationship. In Indigenous worldviews, accountability is not just legal – it is relational. Frame the issue as a collective problem to solve: “We all care about this community”. Highlight shared values. Participants should feel a duty to maintain respect because these relationships continue long after the dispute is resolved.

4. Involve witnesses⁴⁴

In some Indigenous protocols, having witnesses present is important. A witness – a neutral Elder from another community or a representative from an independent body – can vouch that the process was fair and help keep focus on the broader picture. Symbolically acknowledging that the land and ancestors are witnessing the proceedings can instil a sense of humility and shared responsibility.

5. Focus on restorative solutions⁴⁵

⁴⁰ static1.squarespace.com.

⁴¹ static1.squarespace.com

⁴² static1.squarespace.com

⁴³ static1.squarespace.com

⁴⁴ static1.squarespace.com

⁴⁵ static1.squarespace.com

Use a restorative justice approach rather than a win-lose mindset. Ask: “How can we make this right for everyone?” Be creative and flexible — the answer may be an adjustment or addition rather than cancellation. Look for mutual accommodation: a workable compromise that maintains relationships even if it is not a perfect outcome for either party.

6. Decolonise the process

Avoid imposing a top-down decision. Value consensus, patience and respect for storytelling over formal hearings or majority votes. Allow time — multiple meetings if needed. If the dispute is complex, consider bringing in a cultural mediator who understands both Western and Indigenous law and practice. Co-creating a solution is inherently a decolonial act, shifting power to a shared space.

7. Documentation and follow-up

Document any agreement clearly: what was resolved, and who will do what by when. All parties should review the record to confirm it reflects their understanding. Follow through on all commitments. Conduct a post-resolution check-in once the commemoration is in place to gather feedback from the family and community, and thank everyone for their cooperation.

Disputes handled with enlarged thinking, relational accountability and restorative approaches can ultimately strengthen a project’s legitimacy and the community’s unity. As Deborah Bird Rose’s work reminds us: including ancestral and non-human others in our considerations, and focusing on relationships to Place and to each other, leads to more lasting and meaningful resolutions.

8 Integration with council RAPs and policies

This framework is most effective when embedded in existing institutional commitments rather than treated as a standalone document. For Victorian councils, integration with Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) and naming policies ensures these protocols become standard practice.

- ◆ Reference this framework explicitly in your council’s RAP as the method for achieving commitments to increase female and Aboriginal place names. Report progress on commemorative naming initiatives as RAP outcomes.
- ◆ Update your council’s Place Naming Policy to state that when naming after a person — especially an Aboriginal person — family permission and Traditional Owner consultation are required in line with this framework.
- ◆ Ensure relevant council staff in parks, arts and culture, and community development are trained in these protocols. Cultural awareness sessions using resources from Reconciliation Victoria’s Maggolee website and ANZSOG are a useful starting point.⁴⁶
- ◆ If the council has an Aboriginal Advisory Committee, actively involve them in designing and reviewing commemorative projects. Their involvement demonstrates respect and can satisfy RAP requirements for community consultation.
- ◆ Build partnerships with bodies such as the Koorie Heritage Trust, local land councils and Aboriginal co-operatives to co-develop exhibits, naming stories and commemorative programs.

⁴⁶ maggolee.org.aumaggolee.org.au

- ◆ Maintain an internal resource library including: the Victorian DPC guidance on Traditional Owner engagement, the AIATSIS Code of Ethics, the Naming rules for places in Victoria, and case studies of successful commemorative namings.⁴⁷⁴⁸
- ◆ Treat this framework as a living document. Gather learnings from each project and review annually – ideally via your RAP working group – updating protocols as Victorian government guidance or peak body advice evolves.

9 Resources and further reading

The following key resources underpin this framework. Councils and institutions are encouraged to consult these for detailed guidance when implementing the above protocols.

Victorian and government guidance

- ◆ Victorian DPC – Guidance on Engaging Traditional Owners (2024): Comprehensive step-by-step advice on when and how to work with Traditional Owners in Victoria. firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au
- ◆ Naming rules for places in Victoria: Official GNV naming rules including Principle I (Commemorative Names), Principle E (Traditional Owner Languages) and community consultation requirements. land.vic.gov.au/place-naming
- ◆ Land Victoria – Commemorative Naming Guidelines: Plain English summary of the commemorative naming process for naming authorities, emphasising the two-year rule, community sentiment and family consent documentation.

Ethics and cultural safety⁴⁹

- ◆ AIATSIS Code of Ethics (2020): National standard for ethical research involving Indigenous people. Sections on consent and mourning protocols are directly relevant to biography and image use. aiatsis.gov.au
- ◆ Australian Government Style Manual (2021) – Inclusive Language, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Practical guidance on respectful terminology, sorry business conventions, and permission requirements for use of deceased persons' names and images. stylemanual.gov.au

Reconciliation and community engagement

- ◆ Reconciliation Victoria – Maggolee (“here in this place”) website: A clearinghouse of resources for local government working with Aboriginal communities, with sections on Engagement, Cultural Safety and Naming Places. maggolee.org.au
- ◆ Reconciliation Australia – RAP Framework: Toolkits on how to embed cultural protocols into everyday practice. reconciliation.org.au
- ◆ ANZSOG – Wise Practice Library: Case studies and papers on Indigenous engagement in public administration. anzsog.edu.au

⁴⁷ aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au

⁴⁸ firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au

⁴⁹ stylemanual.gov.au

Decolonial practice and dispute resolution

- ◆ Deborah Bird Rose (2011) – “Conflict Resolution and Decolonisation: Aboriginal Australian Case Studies in ‘Enlarged Thinking’”: Provides insight into Indigenous approaches to conflict resolution, including enlarged thinking, relational accountability and place-based justice.
- ◆ “Our Culture, Our Heritage, Our Name” (2020) – Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council: A report on increasing the visibility of Aboriginal place names and how this can be done in partnership with Traditional Owners.

Her Place Women’s Museum — support and partnership

Her Place Women’s Museum is available to support councils, developers and community organisations at any stage of this framework. We offer research, consultation support, community connections, and biography preparation.

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Related documents in the Finding Her suite

Finding Her Place — Guide to Commemoration · GNV Submission Readiness Checklist · Intersections in Place — Guideline · Intersections in Place — Checklist · Biography Template · Biography Research Guidance · Finding Her Nomination Submission Form · Family Invitation Letter Template