

Stolen Generations Survivors Style Guide for Descriptive Practice

[Find and Connect Web Resource](#)

Our Statement of Care

The Find and Connect Stolen Generations Project team acknowledges the dual nature of the archives as places of healing and places of pain.

We acknowledge Stolen Generations Survivors and their descendants. We also acknowledge Ancestors whose lives are recorded in the archives.

We acknowledge the systemic issues facing Stolen Generations Survivors and their descendants in accessing records relating to their histories, cultures and experiences. Each stage of our project is guided by principles of care and respect.

Our work prioritises the voices and experiences of First Nations people and Stolen Generations Survivors. Our work is based on the recognition of Indigenous rights to access archives about themselves, their families and communities as part of a trauma-aware and healing-informed agenda.

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Part One. Context and Introduction

1.1.1 Background to the project

The *Stolen Generations Survivors Style Guide for Descriptive Practice: Find and Connect Web Resource* has been developed as an outcome of the *Find and Connect Stolen Generations* project. The project brought together a research team from the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology with Find and Connect team members, to undertake research with the guidance of an expert First Nations Reference Group.

The purpose and aims of the project were as follows:

- Contribute to a movement of archival transformation with a specific focus on increasing the representation of Stolen Generations Survivors on the Find and Connect web resource.
- Recognise that the work we are undertaking sits within a wider body of advocacy to support better access, engagement and control of archives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Address issues of archival bias and misrepresentation in the context of documentation of Stolen Generations Survivors experiences in Australia.
- Seek expert advice from the First Nations Reference Group on the development of frameworks and content on the Find and Connect web resource.

This Style Guide seeks to address areas of descriptive practice to support better access for Stolen Generations Survivors to the Find and Connect web resource. It provides principles and practices for describing records and institutions on the Find and Connect web resource in ways that respect and accurately represent First Nations peoples, histories, and experiences.

Find and Connect assists people who grew up in 'care' - in orphanages, children's homes, missions, and foster care - in Australia to learn about and locate records about their past. Many of these people are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were forcibly removed from their families as part of government policies now known as the Stolen Generations.

1.1.2 Purpose of the Style Guide

This Style Guide supports the reclamation of First Nations people's histories and experiences, which have been systematically erased, distorted, and weaponised through colonial archival practices. It specifically creates a space for Stolen Generations Survivors to have agency and control over, and input into, how records relating to their experiences are documented through archival descriptive practices within the Find and Connect web resource.

The Style Guide confronts the legacy of First Nations people's experiences being silenced and marginalised in archival description and promotes the elevation of Survivors' voices in archival finding aids. In doing this, the Style Guide asserts the importance of culturally appropriate terminology in archival description and lays the foundation for acknowledging First Nations people's rights to participate in and have authority over knowledge that relates to themselves and their communities.

1.1.3 Stolen Generations Survivor-led reparative archival description supporting a Right of Reply to archives

Reparative archival description addresses the need to intervene in archival practices to address issues of archival bias and harms. Frick and Proffitt's (2022) [Reimagine Descriptive Workflows: A Community-informed Agenda for Reparative and Inclusive Descriptive Practice](#) identifies key areas for attention in archival description practices. Of relevance to this project, they identify the following areas where power and bias are present in description (p.9):

- Controlled access points (such as subject headings, place names, personal and corporate names)
- Language used in the body of the description (supplied titles, notes fields)
- Classification systems
- Language in which the description is made.

This work builds upon Australian scholarship in archival studies that prioritises self-determination and archival autonomy in practice (Evans et al., 2015). It further engages with frameworks supporting Indigenous wellbeing and safety in archives (Evans et al., 2020, Thorpe, 2024), particularly trauma-informed approaches to archival access (Wright & Laurent, 2021).

The term "reparative description" as a specific practice gained prominence in the late 2010s, but the underlying concepts evolved from longer traditions of critical archival studies that questioned neutral or objective approaches to description. This project responds to a gap in reparative description by asserting the importance of Survivor-led descriptive practices. It also addresses the gap in guidance for prioritising Stolen Generations Survivors' input into descriptive practices within existing guidelines, such as the *Guidelines for First Nations Collection Description* (Raven et al., 2023), highlighting a significant gap in current archival standards.

Broadly, it also contributes to scholarship on enacting the Right of Reply (Indigenous Archives Collective 2021; Thorpe, 2025) in archives, specifically within the context of archival descriptive practices that centre the voices of Stolen Generations Survivors represented in collections.

1.2. Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of this research project are shared in this Style Guide to frame our approaches and to provide context about how the research provides a stepping-stone for further work and engagement.

1.2.1 Responding to the recommendation from government reports and enquiries

- **The Bringing Them Home Report, from the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (1997)**

The Bringing Them Home report made 54 recommendations broadly relating to an apology, reparations for past wrongs, support for rehabilitation, education and training and implementation of new policies that focussed on self-determination.

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/projects/bringing-them-home-chapter-16>

- **The Healing Foundation Historical Records Taskforce: Final Principles**

These four broad principles focus on improving access to records nationally for Stolen Generations Survivors. <https://healingfoundation.org.au/historical-records-taskforce/>

- **Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2012 - 2017)**
https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_volume_8_recordkeeping_and_information_sharing.pdf
- **Principles for nationally consistent approaches to accessing Stolen Generations records**
 Examples are provided of 'What does this look like in practice?'
https://cdn.healingfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2023/06/18121657/Principles-for-nationally-consistent-approaches-to-accessing-records_FINAL.pdf

1.2.2 Our approaches to Trauma-Aware and Healing-Informed practice

Additionally, the Style Guide has been developed through approaches supported by Trauma-Aware, Healing-Informed practice as outlined by The Healing Foundation:

Trauma-aware, healing-informed practice is a strength-based approach to healing that is guided by a shared understanding of, and responsiveness to, the impacts of trauma. It prioritises cultural, spiritual, physical, psychological, and emotional safety but does not avoid addressing issues of high importance that are likely to be sensitive and triggering of trauma responses. (Healing Foundation, n.d)

Atkinson's (2013) Core Values of Trauma Informed Services connect our work to focus on healing in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, adapted from Guarino et al. (2009). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand trauma and its impact on individuals, families and communal groups 2. Promote safety 3. Ensure cultural competence 4. Support client's control 5. Share power and governance 6. Integrate care 7. Support relationship building 8. Enable recovery 	The Blue Knot Foundation's five core principles of trauma-informed practice support our approach. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Safety 2. Trustworthiness 3. Choice 4. Collaboration 5. Empowerment
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1.2.3 Our approaches to transforming archival practices

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration of the International Council on Archives (2019)

Five priority areas for immediate action for supporting the care of Indigenous archives internationally.

Priority Area in the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration	Connected activities addressed in the Style Guide
1 - KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITIES: Acknowledging there are Indigenous cognitive frameworks to understand ideas of history, memory, heritage and cultural identity. These co-exist, often unacknowledged, with the institutional knowledge authorities embedded in colonial institutions of heritage and culture. Public archives in colonial	Stolen Generations Survivors are acknowledged as authorities of their knowledges. Find and Connect actively engages in reciprocal

jurisdictions must inform their archival practices with a perspective of reciprocal respect, a respectful engagement across imperial and Indigenous worldviews. The respectful braiding of these knowledge authorities begins the work to decolonize state-sanctioned, institutional houses of memory.	relationships and engagement to incorporate Indigenous worldviews.
2. PROPERTY AND OWNERSHIP: Understanding that there is a need for state-sanctioned archival institutions to recognize Indigenous ownership of Indigenous traditional knowledge, cultural expression, knowledge and intellectual property.	Indigenous peoples own their own stories including their traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, and intellectual property.
3. RECOGNITION AND IDENTITY: Understanding that the 500-year history of the colonial encounter has been an Indigenous struggle for recognition. The common representation of Indigenous peoples in colonial archival institutions is a product of forced assimilation and cognitive erasure of Indigenous culture and identity. Indigenous peoples have the right to be recognized in archival representational systems (e.g., in the arrangement and description of archives) as holding unique kinship, identity and cultures as distinct peoples.	Find and Connect actively engages in practices to address the cognitive erasure of Indigenous cultures and identities. Stolen Generations Survivors views are centred in archival description.
4. RESEARCH AND ACCESS: Recognizing research and access to archival records is a socially mediated process and a conceptual site of conflict between European and Indigenous ways of knowing.	The Find and Connect seeks to support better access to records for Stolen Generations Survivors.
5. SELF-DETERMINATION: As noted in the UNDRIP, "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development";	The Find and Connect resources actively support the process of Stolen Generations Survivor-led description to address the historical legacy of the archives holding colonial narratives. Stolen Generations Survivor-led description is informed by Indigenous historical experiences and perspectives.

The ATSILIRN Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services

The Style Guide addresses the following ATSILIRN Protocols:

- **Protocol 3: Content and Perspectives** addresses how collections are described and organised, highlighting the importance of incorporating Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems in content description. Find and Connect address this by incorporating Stolen Generations Survivors' perspectives into how records are described.

- **Protocol 4: Intellectual Property** relates to acknowledging Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights. Find and Connect address this by recognising Survivors' rights to control how they and their experiences are described in archival materials.
- **Protocol 5: Accessibility and Use** concerns creating accessible descriptions that respect cultural sensitivities. Find and Connect support this by creating descriptions that are respectful and trauma-informed.
- **Protocol 8: Description and Classification of Materials** specifically addresses descriptive practices, calling for consultation with Indigenous communities about how materials are described and classified. Find and Connect directly addresses this by involving Stolen Generations Survivors in the descriptive process.
- **Protocol 9: Digitisation and Managing Digital Collections** includes how digital collections are described and accessed. Find and Connect incorporate these considerations when creating and curating digital content for the online finding aid.

Indigenous Archives Collective Right of Reply Statement

The Style Guide supports the Indigenous Archives Collective Position Statement on the Right of Reply across several key areas:

1. **User-centred archival practices:** The Style Guide supports the statement's emphasis on repositioning archival practices to centre Indigenous users by involving Stolen Generations Survivors in descriptive practices, directly addressing the statement's call for "archival description that acknowledges different perspectives."
2. **Self-determination in representation:** By incorporating Survivors' input into descriptive practices, the Style Guide aligns with the statement's assertion that "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage" including how they are represented in archives.
3. **Correcting inaccuracies:** The Style Guide supports the statement's call for "mechanisms to correct inaccuracies in records" by creating pathways for Survivors to provide their perspectives on archival descriptions.
4. **Trauma-informed approaches:** The Style Guide addresses the statement's recognition that archives can be sites of trauma by implementing descriptive practices that are sensitive to the experiences of Stolen Generations Survivors.
5. **Ethical recordkeeping:** The Style Guide supports the statement's emphasis on ethical recordkeeping practices that "acknowledge differing world views" by incorporating Indigenous perspectives into archival description.
6. **Challenging colonial narratives:** By centring Survivors' voices in descriptive practices, the Style Guide supports the statement's call to challenge "descriptions that perpetuate colonial narratives" and instead promote "descriptions that recognise Indigenous perspectives."
7. **Recognition of harm:** The Style Guide acknowledges the statement's position that archives have been instruments of colonisation and can perpetuate harm through insensitive descriptive practices.

The Style Guide particularly supports Point 5 of the statement which calls for "mechanisms that empower Indigenous peoples to add context or alternative perspectives to material in collections" through its work to incorporate Stolen Generations Survivors' input into archival descriptions.

1.2.4 Our approaches to support Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance

By enabling Stolen Generations Survivors to shape how their histories and experiences are described in archival contexts, the Style Guide acknowledges Indigenous peoples' inherent right to control data and information about themselves.

The approaches outlined in the Style Guide align with Indigenous Data Sovereignty by:

- Recognising that descriptions of records related to Stolen Generations are not neutral and represent power relationships that have historically excluded Indigenous perspectives.
- Shifting authority over descriptive practices from institutional frameworks to Stolen Generations Survivors whose lives and communities are documented in the collections.
- Developing approaches and engagement for Survivors to assert control over how their histories are represented and interpreted.

From an Indigenous Data Governance perspective, the Style Guide supports:

- Establishing clear and transparent protocols that centre Indigenous voices in descriptive practices
- Acknowledge that Survivors have cultural authority to determine appropriate descriptions of materials related to their experiences
- Develop methods to increase Indigenous participation in archival processes.

Part Two. Style Guide for Descriptive Practices

2.1.1. First Nations-Led Approach to Description



- **Centre the lived experiences of those in 'care':** Descriptions should reflect the lived experiences of those who were in 'care', not just the administrative perspective of the institutions.
- **Recognise the diversity of First Nations peoples:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent distinct language groups and nations with different cultures, languages, and traditions. Avoid generalisations and be specific whenever possible.
- **Prioritise First Nations self-identification:** Use the terms that communities and individuals use to describe themselves. When in doubt, consult with representatives from the relevant communities.
- **Acknowledge the colonial context of records:** Institutional records were created within systems designed to control and assimilate First Nations peoples. Make this context clear when describing such records.
- **Use strengths-based language:** Focus on resilience and survival rather than deficit-based descriptions that emphasise victimhood.

2.1.2. Terminology Guidelines

Writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Survivors

- Use terms consistently - First Nations peoples / Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Capitalisation – capitalise First Nations / Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Capitalise names of Country and community such as – Noongar, Gamilaroi, etc

Nothing about us without us

- Prioritising sources that are written by or written in collaboration with Survivors and descendants

Writing with trauma-informed language

- Recognise the ongoing trauma associated with these histories
- Avoid language that minimises harm. For example: using "removed" rather than "taken away"
- Use active rather than passive voice to clearly identify responsible people/institutions/legislation. For example: "Government officials removed children from their families" rather than "Children were taken"
- Balance discussing institutional mistreatment with respect for dignity and privacy
- Avoid including detailed experiences of abuse to ensure respect for Survivors and keeping people safe when accessing the Find and Connect web resource
- Provide appropriate content warnings for sensitive material.

Writing About Records and Institutions

- Describe institutional 'care' appropriately and with sensitivity
- Contextualise historical records with a critical focus
- Actively address colonial and racist perspectives in source materials
- Handle sensitive content with trauma-informed approaches
- Connect institutional pages to relevant Royal Commissions and/or truth-telling processes where appropriate
 - Link directly to related external web pages
 - Identify key findings relating to institutions and cite reports in each institutional page
- Tag Stolen Generations institutions in archival descriptions.

Racist, discriminatory and offensive language

- Minimise and contextualise harmful language. Harmful language and discriminatory terms may be used in direct quotations only where necessary to provide evidence – must be in quotation marks with clear citation
- All quotations must have citations and be used in quotation marks
- Do not use possessive terms such as "our First Nations people" or "Australia's Indigenous people" or "Australia's Aboriginal people"
- Do not engage in 'saviour' narratives such as notions of children being 'rescued'
- Avoid outdated terms like "full-blood," "half-caste," "native," or "aborigine"
- Do not use "ATSI" as an abbreviation
- Terms like "the Aboriginal problem" or "primitive" or "nomadic" reflect colonial perspectives and should only be used in direct quotes with appropriate context
- When historical records use offensive terms, acknowledge this with a content note such as: "This record contains language that reflects the attitudes of the period and may be offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples"
- Contextualise the institution adequately given that some people will come to the web resource page directly via a Google search, therefore they may not have the context provided by the homepage.

Choosing sources and resources

- Always consider the intended users of the web resources, finding aids and catalogues and the experiences of Stolen Generations Survivors and descendants

- When choosing sources for historical or contemporary discussions - consider who are / where are the sources from
- Trusted sources, community voices and Survivor representation must be considered – see [Indigenous Referencing Guidance for Indigenous Knowledges](#) for assistance in choosing resources
- Transparency of where sources are from is key to building a trusted web resource. Clearly cite all sources and include in reference list
- Include page numbers where possible
- Check for broken links periodically
- Carefully consider potential associations made between the resources linked to and the institutional pages within which they are placed – speak directly and consider how web resource users may “read between the lines”.
- Online archive finding aids and web resources need to be useful and easy to use for Survivors and descendants. Provide as much information as possible and in the clearest way possible.
- Develop institutional pages to provide context and history from a Survivor perspective as much as possible.

Citations, referencing, and use of quotations

- Do not paraphrase Survivor testimonies or use out of context
- All quotations must have citations and be used in quotation marks

Workflow to prioritise Stolen Generations Survivors Voices

- Consistently use a workflow for prioritisation of Stolen Generations Survivors’ voices. Drawing on the Indigenous Archives Collective’s *Indigenous Knowledges Attribution Toolkit* (IKAT) and the *IKAT Decision Tree* (Indigenous Archives Collective, Faulkhead, Thorpe, Sentance, Booker & Barrowcliffe, 2023), the *Find and Connect Stolen Generations Project* developed a workflow to prioritise Stolen Generations Survivors Voices. See the Style Guide’s *Part Three. IKAT for prioritising Stolen Generations Survivors experiences*.

3. Ongoing Survivor Input to Descriptive Practices and Review Process

It is essential that Stolen Generations Survivors continue to be involved in implementing the *Stolen Generations Survivors Style Guide for Descriptive Practice* and establish clear protocols addressing: who has authority to speak on specific matters, how ongoing decision-making processes for written materials will be structured, and what formal systems will govern these collaborative decisions.

Establishing an ongoing practice of Survivor-led input

- Identify appropriate representatives (consider cultural authority, lived experience expertise, formal roles)
- Allow sufficient time for meaningful engagement and decision-making not just quick approval
- Resource engagement with community experts, paying advisors appropriately for their time and knowledge
- Document decisions and outcomes and how feedback was incorporated

- Maintain ongoing relationships rather than one-off consultations
- Incorporate and update information on enquiries relevant to institutions/'care' in relevant state and territory contexts.

Handling requests for review, corrections and feedback

- Establish a clear process for community members to request changes
- Respond promptly to feedback and correction requests
- Document changes made in response to community feedback
- When conflicting perspectives arise, prioritise those with direct experience or cultural authority
- Develop a page describing the workflow and processes of the organisation and how a review of content and requests for prioritisation are managed.

Archival organisations should develop a webpage outlining their processes for content review and prioritisation, and clearly describe any reparative description efforts undertaken. Reparative description should be led by Stolen Generations Survivors and their descendants.

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Part Three. IKAT for Prioritising Stolen Generations Survivors Experiences

The *IKAT for prioritising Stolen Generations Survivors experiences* has adapted the 'Indigenous Knowledges Attribution Toolkit' (Indigenous Archives Collective et al, 2023) developed by the Indigenous Archives Collective and CAVAL to prioritise attribution of Stolen Generations Survivors Voices. The Indigenous Knowledges Attribution Toolkit was created with a Creative Commons Licence CC BY-NC-SA which allows re-users to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.

References

Indigenous Archives Collective; Faulkhead, S; Thorpe, K; Sentance, N; Booker, L; & R, Barrowcliffe. (2023) Indigenous Referencing Guidance for Indigenous Knowledges. Indigenous Archives Collective and the UTS Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research. https://www.caval.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CAVAL_Indigenous_Knowledges_Citation_Guide.pdf

