

# Case Studies Series 2021

Core Values Awards 2021 Entry



## Western Sydney Aerotropolis Aboriginal Engagement

Western Sydney Planning Partnership, GHD and Zion Engagement and Planning



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### Highlights at a glance:

- GHD and Zion ran a successful and culturally inclusive engagement program with Aboriginal communities in the height of COVID-19, to help the Western Sydney Planning Partnership realise their commitment to starting with Country when planning for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis.
- **Organisation:** Western Sydney Planning Partnership commissioned GHD and Zion Engagement and Planning
- **Sector:** Planning
- **Geographical location:** Western Sydney
- **Engagement purpose:** To go beyond ‘business as usual’ and engage Aboriginal communities in early phases of strategic planning for the future of Western Sydney
- **Engagement objectives:**
  - Share information about the future Western Sydney Aerotropolis and precinct planning process with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders
  - Understand how Aboriginal communities would like to be engaged about the long-term planning for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis
  - Identify ways that connection to Country can be integrated into precinct planning

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- Identify potential social, cultural, economic and environmental opportunities for Aboriginal communities in planning for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis
  - **Engagement scope:** The single overarching objective to recognise Country underpins the Western Sydney Aerotropolis Plan. As a result, all planning for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis is required to start by recognising Country, and integrate these principles throughout planning processes. The scope for this project was to engage Aboriginal communities and stakeholders across Western Sydney and deliver on-Country training with Traditional Custodians for project staff, to understand ways Country could be integrated into the State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) and the Development Control Plan (DCP) for the Aerotropolis.
  - **Spectrum level:** Involve
  - **Engagement methods:**
    - Planned engagement activities: Yarning circles, community drop-in days, one-on-one interview, group workshops, phone calls, survey
    - COVID-19 engagement activities: one-on-one interviews, online workshops, online and hard copy survey, phone calls, online group interviews, in-person group workshops
  - Three **key outcomes** showing impact of engagement:
    - 1) High uptake of engagement with Aboriginal communities during COVID-19
    - 2) Outcomes of engagement are being embedded into future planning for Western Sydney Aerotropolis, such as cultural design guidelines to inform and help instruct planners to use the Development Control Plan
    - 3) Lessons learned and outcomes from project are being shared with other government agencies and industry to further embed and elevate the voice of Aboriginal communities in the many planning, design and construction projects in Western Sydney
  - Three **key engagement takeaways:**
    - 1) It is possible to run a culturally sensitive engagement program using online platforms provided it is well planned and relationships are prioritised
    - 2) Engagement programs need to be agile to respond to external factors and changing needs of Aboriginal communities
    - 3) Involving Aboriginal communities in early stages of the project can enable Country and culture to be embedded into planning processes.
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**Key search words:** Aboriginal engagement, Country, involve, Indigenous, precinct planning, NSW Government, Western Sydney

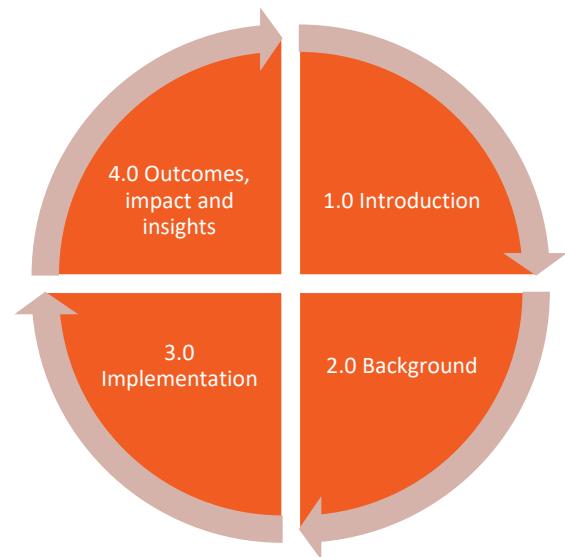
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## 1.0 Introduction

This case study presents an overview of the Aboriginal Engagement program run by GHD, in partnership with Zion Engagement and Planning for their client, Western Sydney Planning Partnership. Western Sydney Planning Partnership were preparing precinct plans for Sydney's newest CBD, the Western Sydney Aerotropolis. This area is 11,200 hectares located in Western Sydney surrounding the new Western Sydney International Airport. Western Sydney is home to the largest regional Aboriginal population in Australia, and as such it was critical to understand how Aboriginal communities might live, work and visit the new city. This project presented a new opportunity to understand how cities can be planned to be culturally appropriate, sensitive, and celebratory.



In 2020, Government Architect NSW released the draft Connecting with Country Framework to inform the planning, design and delivery of built form projects across NSW. It aims to help project teams gain a better understanding of, and to better support, Aboriginal culture in the built environment. As a result of this Framework, Aboriginal communities will be more involved in planning and design projects. Meaningful engagement with Aboriginal communities will be critical to its implementation.

**Section 2.0** provides an overview of the project background and public participation context including how the engagement project was designed and planned. **Section 3.0** describes the implementation phase including how the engagement was managed from delivery through to analysis and reporting. **Section 4.0** presents a reflection of the engagement with a focus on evaluation outcomes, impact and insights as well as evidence against the IAP2 Core Values for the practice of public participation.

This project advances knowledge or practice in engaging Aboriginal communities. Traditional engagement methodologies were adapted to be more culturally appropriate, whilst responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and changing restrictions. The engagement was also Aboriginal-led, meaning that cultural respect and competency was maintained with all engagement activities, despite them being held online. The public is often engaged during planning at key project milestones, during formal public exhibition processes. This traditionally has low uptake by Aboriginal communities. By engaging Aboriginal communities whilst precinct plans were being drafted and prepared, outcomes of the engagement could

be incorporated into other technical disciplines, and impact the overall draft precinct plans. This gave Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney a unique opportunity to be actively involved in the planning process.

Engaging Aboriginal communities requires flexibility, and a prioritisation of face-to-face engagement. What made this project innovative, was the way the team was able to conduct a culturally sensitive and inclusive engagement program using online platforms. Barriers around access and use of the internet and devices had to be navigated to ensure that Aboriginal communities were provided with all of the information and were provided with equal opportunities to provide their feedback. The ability to build trust and rapport with community was more difficult online, but was made possible through the team's commitment to engaging Aboriginal communities on topics that was of interest to them, and in ways that respected and valued their time and position in community.

This showed that it is possible to engage Aboriginal communities in culturally appropriate and inclusive ways online if carefully planned and supported by cultural competency of the engagement team. It also demonstrated the importance of building and nurturing relationships with Aboriginal communities during engagement, regardless on whether the engagement is taking place online.

## 2.0 Background

### Design engagement

This Indigenous engagement project was delivered by GHD and Zion Engagement and Planning for the Western Sydney Planning Partnership, to inform a strategic planning process in Western Sydney.

During precinct planning, there is no legislative requirement to engage. Once precinct plans are drafted, there are formal public exhibition processes, where the public is able to read and comment on the draft precinct plans and supporting technical studies. This engagement occurred outside of the legislative process, as it was conducted in parallel to the preparation of the precinct plans. It also focused on going beyond engaging Local Aboriginal Land Councils, to capture the voice of the wider Aboriginal communities who can be harder to reach in mainstream community engagement programs.

Planning for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis is underpinned by the single commitment to start by recognising Country. The purpose of engagement was to go beyond ‘business as usual’ to engage Aboriginal communities during precinct planning for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis, and to help Western Sydney Planning Partnership realise this commitment.

The key decision that needed to be made through this project, was how to incorporate Country into planning mechanisms, such as the SEPP and DCP, to enhance opportunities for social, cultural and economic wellbeing for Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal communities across Western Sydney, who will work, live, and visit the Aerotropolis, were engaged to:

- Share information about the future Western Sydney Aerotropolis and precinct planning process
- Understand how Aboriginal communities would like to be engaged for the long-term planning of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis
- Identify ways that connection to Country can be integrated into precinct planning
- Identify potential social, cultural, economic and environmental opportunities for Aboriginal communities in planning for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis

A key role of the project team, was to understand, analyse, and interpret these outcomes into planning concepts.

A number of key Aboriginal stakeholders in Western Sydney were targeted, including:

- Traditional Custodians
- Elders
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- Government agencies
- Local government – Aboriginal liaison officers and advisory committees

- Engagement with Aboriginal communities to inform precinct planning for the new Western Sydney Aerotropolis
- Western Sydney home to the largest number of Aboriginal people of any region in Australia
- Engagement helped Western Sydney Planning Partnership start with Country, and facilitated Aboriginal communities to help determine how the future of Western Sydney would be planned
- Multiple stakeholders were engaged with different levels of interest and influence
- Engagement was designed to allow stakeholders to identify how they would like to be engaged and on what material they would like to focus on

- Community organisations

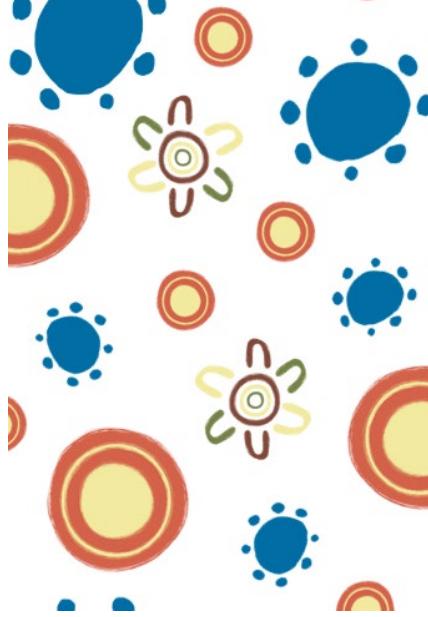
Each stakeholder group presented a different level of interest or influence in the project, as well as their own sentiment. This is summarised below:

Stakeholder group	Level of influence	Overall sentiment
<b>Traditional Custodians</b>	High	Engaged
<b>Elders</b>	Moderate	Engaged
<b>Local Aboriginal Land Councils</b>	High	Some engaged
<b>Government agencies</b>	High	Engaged
<b>Local government</b>	High	Engaged
<b>Community organisations</b>	Moderate	Engaged

Given the early stages of the project it was expected that most stakeholders would not have heard of the project before, or may associate the project with others in the same area (e.g. the Western Sydney Airport). There are also ongoing issues in Aboriginal communities about distrust of government, consultation fatigue, broken promises, and internal community sensitivities and politics. These factors can challenge engagement practitioners if not managed through the design and implementation of a culturally sensitive engagement program.

The number of planning and design projects occurring in Western Sydney meant there was a possibility that Aboriginal communities would experience consultation fatigue. As a result, some Aboriginal stakeholders may not have wanted to be involved in the project. Engagement needed to be designed with this in mind, to enable Aboriginal communities to discuss content that was interesting and meaningful to them.

Collateral was prepared using cultural design to ensure it was visual. This is important for Aboriginal communities, as it displays information clearly and in ways that are culturally appropriate. It also acknowledges cultural practices of visual art and communication, which are valued by Aboriginal communities. Participants were provided with prereading material (either electronically or via post to ensure barriers for engagement were managed). Facilitators of meetings used simple visual tools to assist with guiding discussions. This included a PowerPoint presentation that could be printed into a flipbook for face-to-face discussions.

 <p><u>Elements of cultural design used for all collateral and reports</u></p>	 <p><u>Cover of all collateral material</u></p>	<p><b>1.2.1 Aerotropolis-shaping objectives and principles</b> A single, overarching objective underpins this Plan and will be integrated into all planning:</p> <p><b>Recognise Country</b> Acknowledge Traditional Custodians and provide opportunities to Connect with Country, Design for Country and Care for Country when planning for the Aerotropolis.</p> <table border="0" data-bbox="1008 258 1489 437"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"><b>Productivity</b> </td><td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"><b>Sustainability</b> </td><td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"><b>Infrastructure and collaboration</b> </td><td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"><b>Liveability</b> </td></tr> </table> <p><b>A commitment to start by recognising Country.</b></p> <p><b>Source:</b> Western Sydney Aerotropolis Plan.</p>	<b>Productivity</b> 	<b>Sustainability</b> 	<b>Infrastructure and collaboration</b> 	<b>Liveability</b> 
<b>Productivity</b> 	<b>Sustainability</b> 	<b>Infrastructure and collaboration</b> 	<b>Liveability</b> 			

## Plan engagement

The project was delivered by GHD's Indigenous community engagement team with Zion Engagement and Planning for Western Sydney Planning Partnership. Team members from Western Sydney Planning Partnership attended each engagement activity to oversee the seamless integration of project outcomes into other disciplines of the project, and to begin to build long term, sustainable relationships with Aboriginal stakeholders that would last beyond the scope of the project.

There were five phases of the project:

- **Engagement planning:** Preparation of collateral, initial meetings with Aboriginal liaison officers, build stakeholders matrix, and make contact with stakeholders
- **On-Country Training:** We engaged Traditional Custodians to deliver training for Western Sydney Planning Partnership on-Country at the future Western Sydney Aerotropolis site (cover photo).
- **Engagement:** a five-week engagement period to conduct engagement activities. Stakeholders were able to identify how they would like to be engaged, and when they would prefer to be engaged during this time.
- **Reporting:** Analysis of engagement outcomes and preparation of engagement outcomes report.
- **Close-the-loop:** Once engagement outcomes had been finalised, they were circulated to those who participated in the engagement with links to the outcomes report. This included a summary of how outcomes of engagement influenced the planning process.

Stakeholders were identified through a combination of existing networks of the engagement team, and through early consultation with Aboriginal liaison officers from local government. Initial consultation with Aboriginal liaison officers helped us to identify stakeholders we had not engaged before, and helped to broaden our reach. Inputs from these key stakeholders also informed the Aboriginal Engagement Strategy for the project.

GHD and Zion worked with Western Sydney Planning Partnership to identify key project information in the Western Sydney Aerotropolis Plan. This information was translated into visual collateral that was easy to understand and streamlined the messaging to Aboriginal communities. Project information was sent to participants prior to engagement (either via Post or email) as a briefing pack. This allowed participants to prepare for engagement so conversations could be focussed on topics that interested them.

Engagement tools are outlined below. Engagement tools that were unable to be used due to COVID-19 restrictions included community days, stalls at local community events, and yarning circles.

<u>Tool:</u>	<u>Purpose:</u>	<u>Target stakeholders</u>
Collateral	PowerPoint slides to provide high level project information and create visual prompts for discussion across engagement activities	All
Email	Email was used throughout the project to communicate with stakeholders	All
Community phone	1800 phone information on all outgoing communications to establish a two-way communication channel between the community and the project team.	All
Online workshops	Deep dive into discussions with community regarding overarching principles for precinct planning, and specific considerations for each precinct.	Key organisations and service providers

		Aboriginal advisory groups
Social Media through external Aboriginal networks and organisations	Notify the community of the project and promote the engagement activities, particularly the survey	All
Phone interviews	Conduct phone or videoconference interviews with key knowledge holders and community leaders	Elders Community leaders
Household workshops	Due to COVID-19 restrictions, wider family groups were isolating at home together. Family workshops were conducted with family groups to discuss set questions with one another. This helped to mitigate risks associated with access and use of technology, by leveraging off younger family members who may be more proficient in technology.	Elders Youth Wider community
Community group workshops	Once COVID-19 restrictions began to ease, there were opportunities to host workshop with community groups.	Community leaders Elders

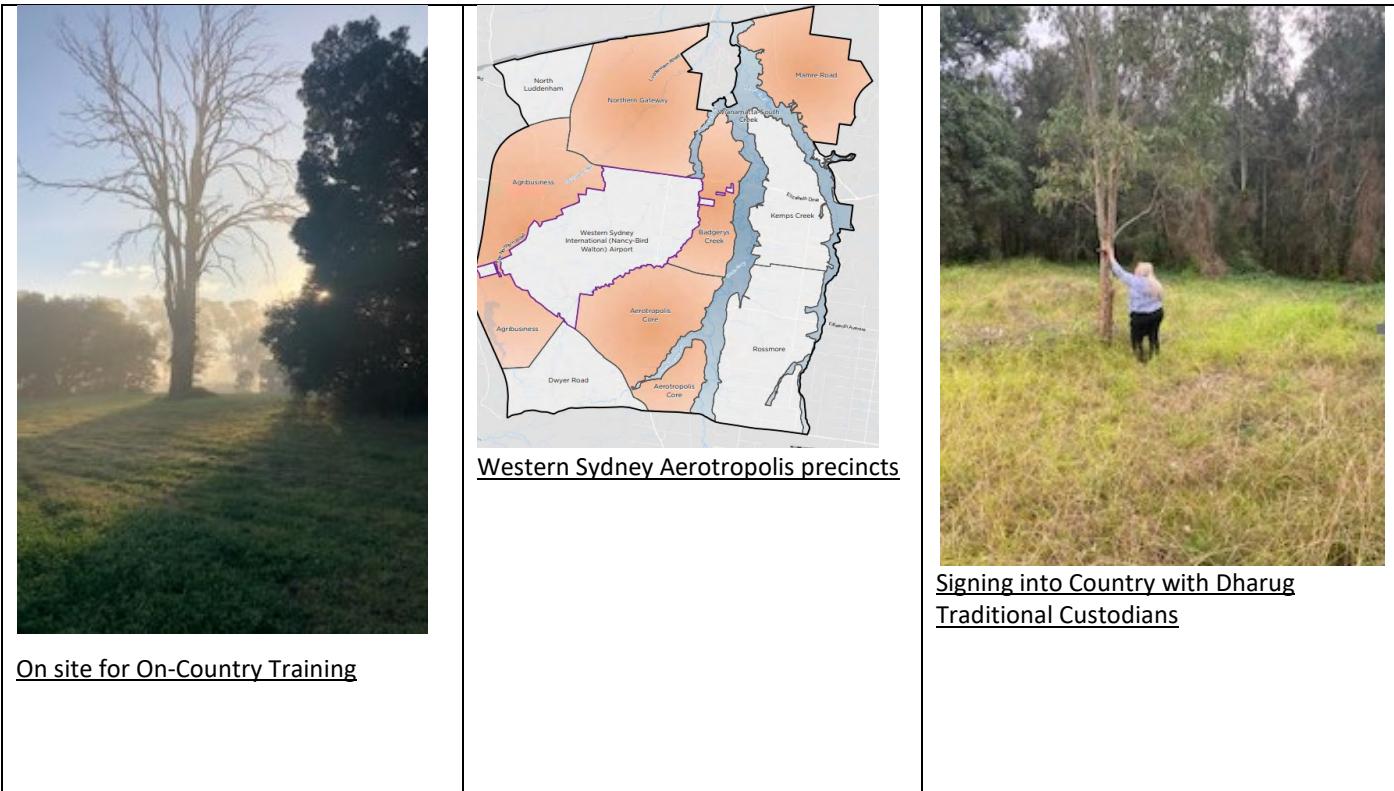
Each engagement activity was attended by two GHD/Zion facilitators and one person taking notes, and a Western Sydney Planning Partnership team member. Where necessary, teams were either all male or all female to observe cultural protocols and manage potential cultural sensitivities. All engagement activities were facilitated by an Aboriginal staff member from GHD or Zion.

Notes from the engagement activities were then collated and analysed using qualitative data coding. This was combined with outcomes from the online survey, which were collected by an online survey platform (Survey Monkey). Raw data was downloaded from each survey response and analysed using the same methods as the meetings notes.

Aboriginal communities who participated in engagement were informed of engagement outcomes, recommendations, and were provided an opportunity to provide their feedback on the engagement outcomes report through a closing the loop email. This included a summary of how they were involved in shaping the SEPP, DCP and precinct plans.

The project was delivered over four months, and was resourced by five GHD staff (of whom three identify as Aboriginal). GHD partnered with Zion Engagement and Planning, an Aboriginal business, through a sub-consultancy arrangement.





### 3.0 Implementation

#### Manage engagement

While the broader engagement program was undertaken during a five week period, several key stakeholders were also engaged during the planning phase to help inform the engagement approach. The table below shows how the engagement program was delivered.

Step	Phase (timing)
Initial meetings with Aboriginal liaison officers from local governments in Western Sydney.	Engagement planning (two weeks)
Initial contact with stakeholders via phone and email to inform them of the project and schedule engagement activities	Engagement planning (two weeks)
Follow up with stakeholders via phone and email	Engagement (five weeks – ongoing)
Conduct online engagement activities during engagement activities	Engagement (five weeks)
Conduct face-to-face engagement activities when COVID-19 restrictions allowed	Engagement (two days)
Facilitate On-Country Training with Western Sydney Planning Partnership when COVID-19 restrictions allowed	On-Country Training (one day)

Originally the team had prepared an engagement program that utilised face to face engagement methods that are usually so integral to successful engagement with Aboriginal communities. However, due to the restrictions imposed to manage COVID-19, the team had to identify ways to meaningfully engage Aboriginal communities using online tools. The project team also needed to be agile and adaptable as the COVID-19 environment changed over the course of the project.

Factors that were critical to the success of the project, included:

- A team with strong levels of cultural awareness and knowledge of cultural sensitivities in the project area
- Engagement was Aboriginal-led
- Partnering with an Aboriginal business (Zion Engagement and Planning)
- Established and respectful relationships with Traditional Custodians in Western Sydney
- Existing relationships and trust with Aboriginal liaison officers in Western Sydney
- A diverse stakeholder matrix that included a range of groups and locations
- Aboriginal team members facilitated discussions
- Diverse engagement tools, and an approach that allowed co-design and flexibility with Aboriginal communities who wanted to participate in engagement
- Use of visual engagement tools to help aid discussion and align with culturally responsive engagement
- Working closely with key stakeholders to understand more about specific needs of Aboriginal communities in each local government area
- Genuine intent from the team to incorporate engagement outcomes into precinct planning process
- Commitment from team to pursue engagement outcomes that were not specifically relevant to precinct planning (ie promotion of engagement outcomes to other government agencies)
- Publication of engagement outcomes report online, and circulation of report to other government agencies and departments

The approach to engagement needed to be updated as the project team responded to COVID-19 restriction changes and the needs of Aboriginal stakeholders and communities. As a result of conducting engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, new risks were identified and needed to be managed.

Risk	Mitigation strategy
Aboriginal communities may not hear about the opportunities to engage or provide their feedback, or may not feel like it is possible due to COVID-19 restrictions.	Leverage off existing networks who we knew were well connected to key community leaders and stakeholders in Western Sydney. Offered multiple tools using online and traditional methods to ensure engagement is as accessible and inclusive as possible.
Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a greater reliance was placed on online engagement. This may not be possible for more vulnerable groups, such as low income households, older stakeholders, or for houses without access to internet	Utilising other members of household groups to assist with setting up online or video conferencing engagement, offering other engagement options such as telephone calls or face-to-face meetings. Early engagement with key stakeholders allowed time for them to reach out to Aboriginal communities to establish online connections.
Project timeframes during COVID-19 may not allow for face-to-face engagement	Key messages about the project were developed to explain why the project must occur despite COVID-19 restrictions. They also explained how there are future opportunities for communities to provide

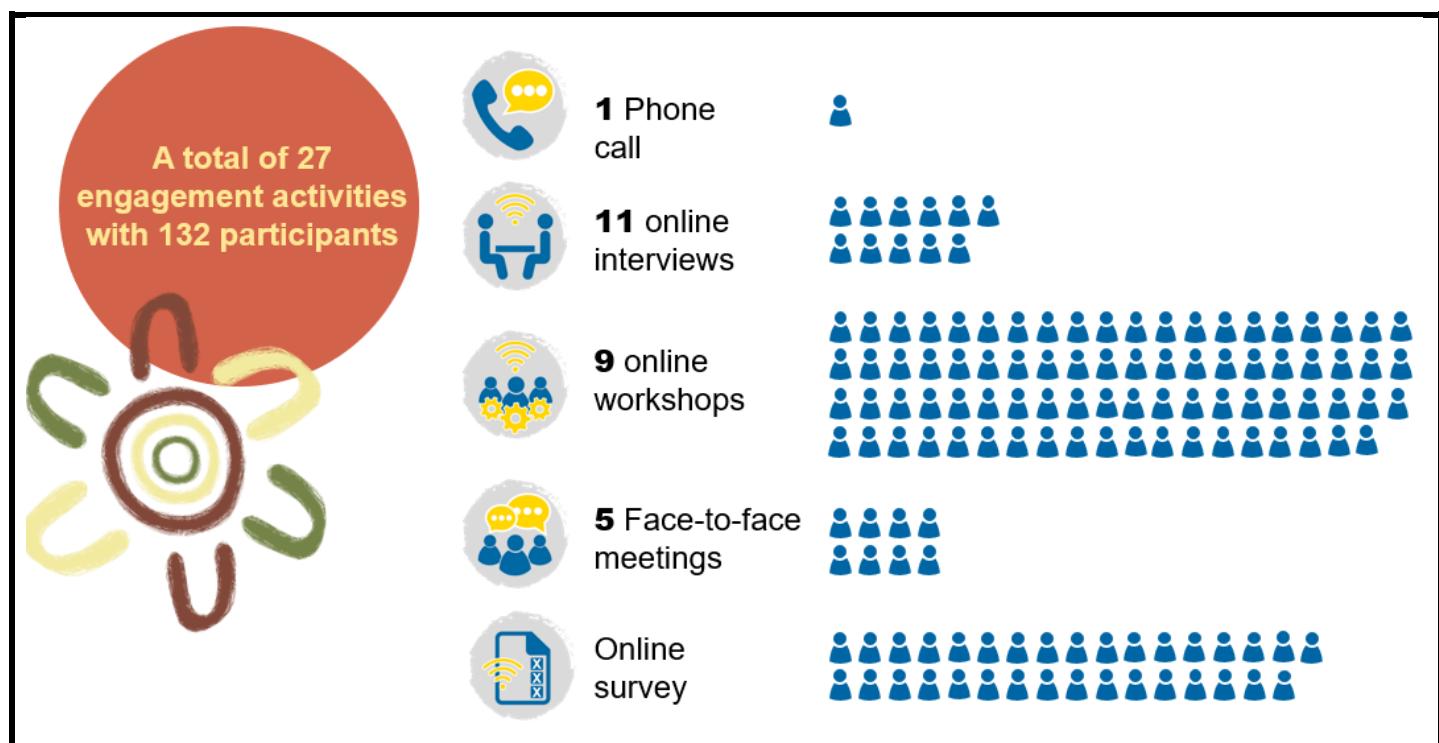
	meaningful feedback through the exhibition process.
Embedding outcomes of Aboriginal engagement into other technical disciplines in culturally appropriate ways	On-Country training was facilitated by Traditional Custodians to heighten cultural awareness and understanding of Country.

In addition to risks identified during early planning of the project, there were also unexpected challenges and constraints faced when delivering engagement included:

- Challenges with describing the Western Sydney Airport versus the Western Sydney Aerotropolis and the scale of the project
- Confusion about project timeframes and occasionally timeframes being beyond immediate interest of community (e.g. talking about economic opportunities that may not be realised for 20 years)
- Difficulty in communicating project purpose and concepts regarding precinct planning
- Online engagement meant that we couldn't provide groups or stakeholders with refreshments (which is sometimes expected in return for participation)
- Technical issues (e.g. network quality) that sometimes delayed or disrupted engagement activities

As a result of some of the confusion in community about the project and its purpose, key messages were updated and the approach to explaining the project was adapted over time. Applying learnings from each engagement activity was critical to improving subsequent engagement delivery. This was enabled by short briefing and debriefing sessions with the project team before and after each engagement activity. Lessons learned from each engagement activity were discussed and then applied in these sessions throughout delivery.

Overall, 464 Aboriginal stakeholders were informed of the project and the opportunities to provide feedback during the engagement period. A total of 27 engagement activities were held and with 132 Aboriginal participants. The distribution of these engagement activities is shown in the figure below.



Detailed notes were taken during engagement activities. These were transferred to an excel spreadsheet, and were analysed using thematic coding. Once results from the survey were available, raw data was added to the excel spreadsheet and included in the analysis. Questions in the survey were designed to align with the questions asked during discussions to allow for inclusion in the overall analysis.

Key themes were then discussed in an internal team workshop. Findings of engagement were presented back to key decision makers at Western Sydney Planning Partnership. They were also summarised and presented in an Engagement Outcomes Report. Findings included:

- Overarching principles that could be applied to all work or planning undertaken for the Aerotropolis
- Opportunities for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis identified by Aboriginal communities

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were detailed in the report:

- Recommendations that applied to Western Sydney Planning Partnerships planning responsibilities (eg precinct planning, State Environment Planning Policy and Development Control Plan)
- Recommendations reflected key issues and priorities raised during consultation, including:
  - Aboriginal Art Strategy
  - Cultural Design Framework (currently being prepared)
  - Aboriginal Employment and Procurement Strategy
  - Aboriginal Infrastructure and Service Delivery
  - Caring for Country Strategy
- Recommendations for how Aboriginal communities and stakeholders would like to be engaged long-term for the Western Sydney Aerotropolis

The Engagement Outcomes Report was published online, and is available here: [https://shared-drupal-s3fs.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/master-test/fapub\\_pdf/00+-Planning+Portal+Exhibitions/Western+Syd+Aero+Planned+Precincts+/WSAPP+/12527562\\_Western+Sydney+Aerotropolis\\_Aboriginal+Engagement+Summary+Report\\_FINAL PUBLIC 21.10.20.pdf](https://shared-drupal-s3fs.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/master-test/fapub_pdf/00+-Planning+Portal+Exhibitions/Western+Syd+Aero+Planned+Precincts+/WSAPP+/12527562_Western+Sydney+Aerotropolis_Aboriginal+Engagement+Summary+Report_FINAL PUBLIC 21.10.20.pdf)

Outcomes of the engagement and the recommended strategies directly align with the draft Connecting with Country Framework. This includes recommendations to further embed Aboriginal culture in the lifecycle of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis project.

Prior to the Engagement Outcomes Report being published online, stakeholders who were engaged on the project were provided with the following information to close the loop:

- Notification of public exhibition period and opportunities to provide further feedback through formal submission
- Engagement metrics (including the total number of engagement activities and participants)
- A summary of key themes and opportunities
- A summary of recommendations outlined in the Engagement Outcomes Report

The reporting process was as transparent as possible, with participants provided two avenues to provide feedback on the findings – through email directly to the project team, or via a formal submission online. To date, only one submission references the Aboriginal Engagement Outcomes Report, which is supportive of the findings and recommendations in the report.

**"We learnt as much as the community and inspired a level of enthusiasm that has spread throughout government. This project has deepened our understanding of connecting with Country."**

- Phil Graus, Western Sydney Planning Partnership

**"It was awesome to catch up and learn more about the Aerotropolis, and for everyone to think about something other than the [COVID-19] restrictions"**

- Debbie McCall



GHD and Zion meeting with Elder and community leader on Dharawal Country.



Elle Davidson (Zion) signing into Country at the on-Country training



**Western Sydney Planning Partnership**  
Western Sydney Aerotropolis Aboriginal Engagement  
Engagement Outcomes Report

October 2020



Aboriginal Engagement Outcomes Report

## 4.0 Outcomes, impact and insights

### Reflection and evaluation of engagement

This engagement process was considered a success, based on the following:

- Positive feedback from our *client*
- Positive feedback from our *team*
- Positive feedback from *community*.

Snapshots of this positive feedback have been provided above.

Relationships between the team and Aboriginal communities continue to develop as the Western Sydney Aerotropolis project progresses through subsequent stages of planning. It is critical to elevate Aboriginal voices in early stages of planning to ensure long-term, sustainable place-outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

The high uptake and reach of engagement indicated its success and effectiveness in community, in particular during a time of stress and worry for so many people.

Although engaging in early stages is critical, it is also important to take the time to build capacity in community. Strategic planning is a highly technical, and often conceptual field, that most Aboriginal communities aren't accustomed to discussing. Ensuring there is enough time to build that context and foundation is critical to receiving project-specific outcomes. When talking to community about opportunities in Western Sydney Aerotropolis, outcomes were focused on once the place was built and was functioning.

Lessons learned about how to engage Aboriginal communities in culturally appropriate ways, how to manage consultation fatigue, and how to embed Country into projects has been shared across government agencies. There are now multiple projects occurring in Western Sydney that are benefiting and learning from the outcomes of this engagement, and outcomes will continue to be applied in the near future.

A key positive outcome of the project and engagement program, was that Western Sydney Planning Partnership teams felt they increased their cultural awareness, understanding of Country in Western Sydney, and learned lessons on how to engage Aboriginal communities in culturally appropriate ways.

Engagement conducted influenced key planning documents and outcomes, and will continue to influence future planning of the Aerotropolis. Although Aboriginal communities were given space to provide genuine feedback, it was not necessarily decision making. As such, this engagement would have been on the involve level of the spectrum. It is the hope that Aboriginal engagement continues to be embedded into planning projects to eventually empower Aboriginal communities to make decisions about the future of their Country.

**Key outcomes** showing impact of engagement include:

- 1) High uptake of engagement with Aboriginal communities during COVID-19
- 2) Outcomes of engagement are being embedded into future planning for Western Sydney Aerotropolis, such as cultural design guidelines to inform and help instruct planners to use the Development Control Plan
- 3) Lessons learned and outcomes from project are being shared with other government agencies to further embed and elevate the voice of Aboriginal communities in the many planning, design and construction projects in Western Sydney

Three **key engagement takeaways**:

- 1) It is possible to run a culturally sensitive engagement program using online platforms provided it is well planned and relationships are prioritised
- 2) Engagement programs need to be agile to respond to external factors and changing needs of Aboriginal communities
- 3) Involving Aboriginal communities in early stages of the project can enable Country and culture to be embedded into planning processes.

#### **Alignment with IAP2 Core Values for the practice of public participation**

<b>IAP2 Core Values</b>	<b>Example or evidence from this project</b>
1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process	Any project has the potential to affect Country, and as such Aboriginal people and cultural connection. This project elevates Aboriginal voices to ensure Country is considered in early stages of planning, and to create more culturally respectful and celebratory places.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision	We delivered genuine and transparent engagement through identifying what elements of the planning process could be influenced. Outcomes of engagement were incorporated into the Development Control Plan, the State Environmental Planning Policy and the Precinct Plans. This helps to realise objectives of the draft Connecting with Country Framework.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers	Aboriginal communities were able to engage with information and material that interested them. Engagement was attended by team members from Western Sydney Planning Partnership, to help build long-term relationships between Aboriginal communities and key decision makers. Engagement outcomes were translated into recommendations that would have long-term outcomes for Aboriginal communities.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision	Conducting wide engagement with Aboriginal communities across Western Sydney allows for all Aboriginal people who may live, work and visit the future Aerotropolis to have their say in the planning process. Ensuring that a voice is given to Traditional Custodians who have a voice for Country across Western Sydney. This directly aligns with objectives of the draft Connecting to

	Country Framework which states that Aboriginal people's relationship to Country needs to be prioritised.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate	<p>Our engagement approach is built on collaboration and flexibility. Aboriginal communities and stakeholders selected how they wanted to engage with us, at a time that suited them (within the engagement period), and on subject matter that interested them most about the Aerotropolis.</p> <p>We also asked those engaged how they would like to be involved in the project moving forward. This will assist to build sustainable relationships with Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney and help to avoid consultation fatigue.</p>
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way	Material was provided to Aboriginal communities in a variety of ways to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. This including the presentation of collateral and information using cultural design.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision	We closed the loop with those engaged to summarise the outcomes of engagement, explain how these outcomes informed and influenced the planning process for Western Sydney Aerotropolis, and key next steps.



## Acknowledgements and to find out more

We would like to thank Western Sydney Planning Partnership, GHD and Zion Engagement and Planning for agreeing to share this case study and insights to advance engagement practice. This case study was authored/co-authored by Chloe Sullivan and peer reviewed by Elle Davidson and Lauren Harding

At the time of publishing, Chloe Sullivan was employed by GHD in the position of Social Sustainability and Engagement Consultant. Chloe has experience in the engagement sector and expertise in engaging Aboriginal communities and the use of cultural sensitive engagement methods. GHD was engaged by IAP2A to support practitioners to share their engagement story as a case study.

For more information about this project see:

- [GHD, Zion Engagement and Planning and Western Sydney Planning Partnership](#)

To connect with the authors:

- Chloe Sullivan – <https://www.linkedin.com/in/chloe-sullivan-b63629120/>
- Elle Davidson – <https://www.linkedin.com/in/elle-davidson-69075398/>
- Lauren Harding - <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lauren-harding-18550563/>

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