

Cultural responsiveness at AERO

September 2025



This paper provides an overview of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)’s cultural responsiveness work to date and outlines the commitments and actions we have taken to strengthen our culturally responsive research and organisational practices.

Background and lessons learned

In 2022, as part of AERO’s research agenda, we commissioned a systematised literature review titled *The Nature and Effectiveness of Cultural Responsiveness for Indigenous Peoples: Current Literature and Theory*. While the review highlighted key themes in the existing evidence base, it offered AERO an important opportunity to reflect on and strengthen its internal understanding of cultural responsiveness.

The process identified areas where our approach could be more rigorous, particularly in embedding First Nations-led knowledge systems and broadening how we define and apply evidence. AERO published a [summary of key research findings](#) from the review and used this experience to inform a more responsive and accountable approach to our research and organisational practices. This work continues to shape how we engage, make decisions and ensure First Nations perspectives are embedded meaningfully and consistently.

Commitments and current actions

To shift its approach, AERO has embedded the following commitments and undertaken the following actions:

- a dedicated First Nations team
- First Nations Executive leadership
- First Nations Charter
- First Nations Expert Reference Group
- First Nations research rationale
- embedding of Indigenous Data Governance principles across all work
- whole-of-organisation cultural responsiveness training.

Responsiveness at AERO means actively noticing, reflecting on and adapting to the values, needs, strengths and perspectives of the people, communities and systems we work with. It requires an openness to feedback, an ability to identify and a willingness to question our own assumptions, and a commitment to shaping our work in ways that are contextually relevant, respectful and relational.

At its core, responsiveness is about being accountable. It involves listening deeply, learning continuously and acting in ways that centre the experiences and aspirations of others, particularly those who are historically underrepresented and marginalised. This principle sits at the heart of how AERO operates. It informs:

Cultural responsiveness

The practice of engaging respectfully and meaningfully with diverse cultural identities, knowledges and lived experiences.

Responsive research

Designing and conducting research that is co-created, flexible and grounded in the needs of those its intended to support.

Responsive organisational practice

Building internal systems, capabilities and policies that are reflexive, inclusive and adaptable.

Responsiveness is foundational to AERO's role as a national education evidence body and essential to ensuring that our work builds trust, relevance and impact across communities and systems.

Future direction and resources

Grounded in reflection and with a future focus, AERO is developing a model to demonstrate how culturally safe environments require reflexive and responsive practices, policies and protocols. Based on emerging evidence, AERO is planning a suite of resources to support the model that are transferable, practicable and scalable to other contexts, namely schools, systems and sectors. These include modules that can be contextualised, tools that develop reflexive and responsive behaviours, training frameworks and monitoring and evaluation tools.

