

How AERO's ways of working support Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance

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At the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), we're committed to ensuring that our work reflects respectful, inclusive and ethical ways of engaging with First Nations Peoples, data and knowledges.

As a non-First Nations organisation, we understand that supporting Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance involves listening deeply, learning continuously and adjusting how we work. We know this work strengthens not just our relationships, but the quality, relevance and impact of what we produce.

This explainer outlines AERO's 4 ways of working to support Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance.

The 4 ways of working

These ways of working are drawn from [AERO's First Nations Charter](#) and build on the work of established Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance frameworks.



1. Listening and learning

We acknowledge that we're still learning, and we're committed to building a deeper understanding of First Nations knowledges, experiences and expectations. This includes ongoing reflection on our roles, assumptions and practices – individually and as an organisation.



2. Creating space for First Nations leadership

We're building systems and processes that better reflect First Nations priorities, leadership and expertise. This includes supporting mechanisms like the Expert Reference Group, and promoting leadership roles in governance, research and decision-making where appropriate.



3. Adapting how we work

We're embedding culturally safe and accountable approaches across our internal systems, from consent processes and data handling to project design and engagement. These changes aim to make our work more respectful, transparent and useful.



4. Ensuring mutual value

We work to ensure our partnerships deliver clear benefits for First Nations communities. This means recognising contributions, developing data capacity and literacy when sharing outcomes, and maintaining trust through respectful, 2-way engagement.

Conclusion

As a non-First Nations organisation, AERO has a responsibility to work in ways that don't assume control over First Nations data or decision-making. Instead, our role is to support First Nations people to lead, ensure their priorities guide our work, and be transparent and accountable in how we use data and knowledge.

The Expert Reference Group, established in 2024, is one example of how we're meeting this responsibility within AERO's structures, while upholding the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance.

Our work to uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty is guided by:

- [AERO's First Nations Charter \(2024\)](#)
- Maiam nayri Wingara (2018)
- Lowitja Institute (2024)
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Code of Ethics (2020)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

These frameworks help ensure that our work isn't done on behalf of First Nations communities, but instead is conducted in partnership, with integrity and care.