

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW

Understanding the Differences: Reference Committees, Steering Committees and Advisory Boards

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Reference Committees are community-centered, offering ground-up guidance.

Steering Committees are project-focused, blending Aboriginal input with oversight responsibilities.

Advisory Boards provide strategic, high-level input to shape policies or organisational direction.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Reference Committee:

Purpose: Specifically focused on representing Aboriginal perspectives, ensuring cultural relevance, and addressing issues of importance to Aboriginal communities.

Role:

- Act as a voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a project, program, or organisation.
- Provide guidance on cultural protocols, data collection tools, community engagement, and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Ensure the project aligns with Aboriginal values and priorities.

Committee members: Made up of Aboriginal representatives, often from local or regional communities, organisations, or leadership groups.

Decision-Making: Typically, not a decision-making body but offers recommendations and insights to influence outcomes.


Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee:

Purpose: Oversees and guides the execution of a specific project or initiative, ensuring it stays aligned with its goals, timeline, and budget. Provides strategic oversight and direction for a specific project or initiative with Aboriginal stakeholders or themes. Ensures successful implementation aligned with Aboriginal values.

Role:

- Monitor progress, provide strategic direction, and resolve high-level issues.
- Review project deliverables and make key decisions regarding scope, priorities, and resources.
- Ensure alignment with Aboriginal priorities, timelines, and resources.
- Address challenges or barriers during the project's lifecycle.
- Ensure accountability and alignment with organisational objectives.





Committee members: Includes key stakeholders such as project sponsors, executives, and representatives from involved teams or organisations while maintaining cultural integrity.

Decision-Making: Often has decision-making authority within the scope of the project.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board:

Purpose: Provides high-level advice and recommendations on strategic issues or organizational matters related to Aboriginal peoples, culture, or governance often without direct accountability for outcomes.

Role:

- Offer recommendations and insights based on cultural expertise or lived experience.
- Serve as a sounding board for ideas, strategies, and decisions.
- Provide an external perspective to support long-term planning or innovation. Help maintain relationships with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Committee members: Includes experts, stakeholders, or representatives with diverse expertise relevant to the organisation's mission.

Decision-Making: Does not typically have formal decision-making power; acts in an advisory capacity to inform decision-makers.



Snapshot of each committee

Feature	Aboriginal Reference Committee	Aboriginal Steering Committee	Aboriginal Advisory Board
Focus	Aboriginal cultural relevance and input Community and cultural alignment	Project oversight and execution through a cultural lens	Strategic, policy, or governance advice
Purpose	Represent Aboriginal communities Represent and guide from a community lens	Ensure project success while reflecting Aboriginal priorities	Provide expertise for organisational or strategic matters
Composition	Diverse Aboriginal community representatives with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Chair	Aboriginal stakeholders tied to the project and Investigators on project	Experts, Elders, or community leaders with strategic insights
Decision-Making	Advisory only	Can include decision making authority, including budgets	Advisory only
Scope	Project specific and culturally specific	Project specific	Broad, often organisation-wide

