



Research on Aboriginal land

What you need to know about applying to undertake research on Aboriginal Land in the Northern Land Council (NLC) region.

Traditional Aboriginal owners recognise that research on Aboriginal land is important, so long as it is culturally appropriate, respectful of Indigenous knowledges, and benefits the community.

When applying to access Aboriginal land for research, you will be asked to provide detailed information of about you research including the purpose, methodology and benefits to traditional Aboriginal owners. Applications will be shared and discussed with relevant traditional Aboriginal owners and resulting instructions will be conveyed back to the applicant as permit conditions.

Researchers must agree to the conditions set by traditional Aboriginal owners. Research permits can be complex applications and it can take time to gain approvals where negotiation with several Traditional Owner groups is required.

NLC recommends the use of a cultural monitor or local interpreter for the project. Interpreters and cultural monitors can assist you navigate Aboriginal language, culture and communities on a fee for service basis.

Language barriers

For many Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, English is often not their first language. Having an interpreter is encouraged, as many people, particularly the elderly, prefer to talk in their traditional language. An interpreter can also assist in explaining your project and purpose, which might not directly translate into the local language.

Right people, right topic

In many Aboriginal communities, certain people have the authority to talk about certain issues. Make sure you are talking to the correct person. NLC recommends the engagement of cultural monitors, who can assist with cultural etiquette, connect you with appropriate persons to engage, and provide advice on site selection, timing and other planning and delivery activities.

Provide details of your project

NLC requires research permit applicants to complete a Supplementary Form. It seeks information on objectives, methodology, research partners, funding, benefits, intellectual property, harm minimisation, publication and cultural issues. Applicants should address the AIATSIS Research Principles and undertake to conduct themselves according to their profession's Code of Conduct. Where research involves humans, a copy of the Menzies Human Research Ethics Committee approval for your research project is required.

When applying for a research permit, be as specific as possible in providing information about your project as this will facilitate consultation with traditional Aboriginal owners. If the subject matter is of a sensitive nature, the proposal is lengthy, or there are concerns regarding the proposal, traditional Aboriginal owners may require additional information to assess the application. The NLC may also decide to obtain professional referee reports.

While the NLC makes every effort to expedite your permit applications, the final decision rests with traditional Aboriginal owners.



Before you travel

Once you have your permit, it is your responsibility to check that the area you wish to travel to remains open to visitors. Landowners have the right to revoke permits at short notice, usually due to ceremonial reasons or road conditions.

Ensure you have identified a place to stay. There is limited or no commercial accommodation available to visitors for either short or long term stays in most communities.

Be prepared for delays in your itinerary. People you wish to interview may not be available for a variety of reasons. Make sure you have sufficient flexibility in your schedule to accommodate changing circumstances. Remember that community life moves to a different rhythm than life in the cities and big towns.

Access terms and conditions

By applying for a research permit you agree to NLC's standard conditions including the following special conditions for research access.

You agree that:

- This permit is valid for conducting research as listed in your permit application and your Supplementary Form for Research Permits. If the applicant wishes to use material obtained on Aboriginal Land for additional purposes, further permission must be sought.
- Aboriginal people have the rights described in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

You agree to:

- Provide, on request, to the NLC a report about the objectives, ethics approval and methodology for your proposed research (Research Project) in a format suitable for presentation to the traditional Aboriginal owners in order to support the consideration of your application.
- Use cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions and related intellectual property only in accordance with the wishes of the owners of that heritage, knowledge, expressions and property and otherwise treat it as confidential.
- Credit ownership of cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions and intellectual property rights appropriately.
- Provide, upon request, to the NLC a digital copy of the final draft of any publication resulting from the Research Project prior to it being released.
- Provide to the NLC a digital copy of any reports, thesis, article, book, or any other publication resulting from the Research Project.
- Provide, upon request, to the NLC a report of the Research Project in a format suitable for presentation to the traditional Aboriginal owners.

More questions? For more information on research permits and access to Aboriginal land, please contact: NLC Permits Tea, permits@nlc.org.au or Head Office on (08) 8920 5100