


DesignInc

Architecture
Urban Design
Interiors
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Reconciliation Action Plan

August 2023 – February 2025 | Melbourne Studio





We acknowledge and pay respect to the past,
present and future Traditional Custodians and
Elders of this nation and the continuation of
cultural, spiritual and educational practices of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



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Message from the CEO



Inaugural Reflect RAP

Reconciliation Australia welcomes DesignInc Melbourne to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.

DesignInc Melbourne joins a network of more than 2,200 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes.

These outcomes contribute towards the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.

This Reflect RAP enables DesignInc Melbourne to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations DesignInc Melbourne, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

Karen Mundine

Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia

Our Business

About us

DesignInc Melbourne is an architecture and design practice with over 65 staff. We combine a holistic approach to the built environment with expert knowledge in education, health, research, community, workplace, defence and urban design.

We are motivated by projects that can make a difference to the world we live in. We strive to make a positive difference to the health and happiness of people's lives through the quality of every environment we create.

At DesignInc Melbourne, we start our work with the premise: How can architecture improve people's lives? It is our role and obligation as designers to add value to our clients' projects by innovating with integrated architecture that is visually enriching, socially responsive, and ecologically restorative. Listening to and involving First Nations peoples is intrinsic to the positive project outcomes we seek.

This Reconciliation Action Plan is for the DesignInc Melbourne business. Our RAP is a commitment to supporting the uplifting of First Nations' histories, cultures, and peoples.

We will action this throughout Victoria and other places where we work by engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and seeking their contributions to our work.

We will build our relationships with First Nations groups through engagement, listening and consultation. By building these relationships, we aim to create work opportunities for First Nations peoples and offer them opportunities to influence the development of the built environment. We commit to listening and learning from First Nations peoples and communities and commit to sharing our learnings and creating cultural awareness amongst our staff and the wider community.

Currently, DesignInc Melbourne does not directly employ any First Nations peoples, to our knowledge. With our Reflect RAP as a first step, we aim to increase the number of First Nations staff we employ by assessing our recruitment processes and other potential hiring barriers. We commit to developing mentoring, training and employment opportunities for First Nations youth who seek careers in architecture and design or in practice support roles, such as accounts, administration and marketing.



Our Business

History of the business

In 1905, Alex S. Eggleston FRAIA began his practice in Melbourne, leading to the establishment of renowned architectural practice Eggleston, Macdonald and Secomb in 1954.

In 1989, the name was changed to Eggleston Macdonald. In 1999, the practice formed an association with interstate firms to create a national practice known in Melbourne as Eggleston Macdonald DesignInc. When DesignInc Melbourne formed between 1998-2000, our architectural heritage was already well established through the prior firm's legacy of over 90 years of experience.

In 2000, the firm changed to its current name of DesignInc Melbourne. Today, directors Rohan Wilson, Christon Batey-Smith, Stephen Webb and Darryl Suttie are leading DesignInc Melbourne into the next century of excellence in architecture.

Nationally, DesignInc is an association of independent architectural practices with offices in Adelaide (Kaurna land), Brisbane (Turrbal land), Melbourne (Wurundjeri Woi- Wurrung land), Perth (Wajuk land) and Sydney (Gadigal land). The group is a powerful union of design talent, professional expertise, and multidisciplinary skills.

In 2020, Wiradjuri architect, Craig Kerslake, came together with DesignInc Sydney to form an exciting new business – Nguluway DesignInc – which is majority First Nations owned. The joint venture adds First Nations leadership and cultural knowledges to the architectural expertise of DesignInc.

Social and environmental charter

We believe in equality, diversity and sustainability. As a commitment to our social responsibilities, DesignInc Melbourne is Just Organisation approved. The Just program is a voluntary transparency platform for organisations to disclose their operations and optimise policies that improve social equity and enhance employee engagement. Our policies, detail our procedures for pay equity, charitable giving, environmentally positive products and service procurement. In our Local Communities Policy, we are committed to supporting our local First Nations communities by building relationships and creating work opportunities for First Nations peoples.

We are currently updating our Just policies. When complete these will be accessible via our website – www.designinc.com.au.

Sustainable design is our core business. DesignInc Melbourne have been Carbon Neutral since 2020 and are proud to share our Sustainability Action Plan with you on our website – <https://www.designinc.com.au/studios/melbourne>. We have set project targets in four areas, carbon, energy, water, and materials, that we are tracking to measure our progress towards readily quantifiable aspects of resilient, regenerative buildings.

People and culture

DesignInc Melbourne is committed to a workplace culture of collaboration that supports each individual on their career journey.

Regular communications, group meetings and social events foster an inclusive collective experience underpinned by an ethos of equal opportunity for diverse people. Our team members benefit from flexible work arrangements, mentoring and leadership programs to support personal and professional growth through Continuing Professional Development (CPD), regular social occasions, team events and work functions.

Our practice focus on wellbeing includes staff access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a 'toolkit' of mental health resources. The resources, flexibility and workplace culture are available to all who work at DesignInc Melbourne. As we aim to increase the number of First Nations employees across the spectrum of student and graduate positions through to professional roles, First Nations employees, their families and communities will also benefit.

Regular communications, group meetings and social events foster an inclusive collective experience underpinned by an ethos of equal opportunity for diverse people.

Our RAP

Walking together, side by side

Reconciliation is a shared journey involving everyone. At DesignInc Melbourne, we acknowledge the ongoing strength and resilience of First Nations peoples in sustaining the world's oldest living cultures.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the land we work on in, Naarm. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land. We acknowledge that they are of continuing importance to the Wurundjeri people living today.

Our vision for reconciliation is to listen, learn and show respect to First Nations peoples. It is important to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and move forward together to heal each other. Many steps, big and small, are required to reach this vision. We commit to actioning change within our organisational culture, partnerships, our community in Victoria and Australia and through broader industry initiatives. As a leading design firm shaping places across Melbourne, regional Victoria and Australia, we recognise that we have a responsibility to bring the voice and wisdom of First Nations peoples into the design of our built environment. We will do this by listening to our local First Nations peoples through consultation, so we can understand and show respect to the places on Country that our buildings will occupy.

At DesignInc Melbourne, we actively foster a culture of diversity and inclusion across gender, culture and ability.

Our first Reflect RAP will align with and expand upon our existing organisational values. In our Reflect RAP, we commit to the practical actions required to build relationships, create mutual respect and improve opportunities for First Nations peoples and communities.

Our commitments to working toward reconciliation are:

- to increase cultural literacy and awareness within our team;
- create new methodologies for embedding stories of Country into the built environment;
- connect with and provide opportunities for First Nations peoples through our organisation.

We aim to achieve these goals through formal and informal initiatives. These will include:

- talking with our Wurundjeri Elders and Custodians, the native title holders of Naarm/Melbourne where our studio is situated;
- partnerships and collaborations with First Nations peoples' product and service providers;
- developing project methodologies, presentations and resources to assist professional staff with bringing stories of Country into the design process as a part of our continuing professional development (CPD) program;
- increasing access to resources, training opportunities, events, experiences and workshops that build cultural literacy within our team;
- developing a mentorship program for First Nations peoples who are interested in entering our industry, along with general practice support such as accounts, administration and marketing;
- connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and networks to share employment opportunities.

Recognising barriers and identifying opportunities

In the Reflect stage of our reconciliation journey, we will build relationships within our local Wurundjeri and surrounding communities of the Eastern Kulin Nation (Bunurong, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wadawurrung peoples), along with the secondary school system to identify First Nations youth who express an interest in our industry. We will provide industry guidance and mentorship through a work experience program for students to learn about the industry.

**Our vision for reconciliation
is to listen, learn and show
respect to First Nations peoples.
Many steps, big and small, are
required to reach this vision.**

Our RAP Working Group (RWG)



Jane Sayers
Principal



Emma Osorio
Associate



Amelia Warman
Interior Design Graduate



Our RAP Champion

As a highly regarded design architect, Jane works across a range of projects, especially education, health and other community-focused developments. During her two-decade career, she has collaborated on many exceptional award-winning buildings that deliver outstanding results for the communities they serve. She puts people and their experience of a place at the heart of each design to create memorable and uplifting spaces that perform their purpose beautifully.

RWG Chair

Emma Osorio leads communications and marketing at DesignInc Melbourne, advancing DesignInc Melbourne's reputation as a leader in healthy building design. As the manager of graphics, marketing, and communications, her ability to lead, bring out the best in her team, collaborate with external partners and contribute to business development has strengthened the practice and contributed to new business growth.

RWG Secretary

An interior designer who is passionate about community orientated and accessible design, Amelia's main sector interests are in health care, sustainability and design for wellbeing. Underpinning her approach to developing interiors concepts is her emphasis on research and user engagement, which aligns with her philosophy that good design stems from an in-depth understanding of the building users.

RWG Member

As we progress through our RAP and our reconciliation journey, we will continue to invite staff from across DesignInc Melbourne to join our RWG.

'As a leading design firm shaping landscapes throughout Melbourne, regional Victoria, and Australia, we commit to incorporating the perspectives and wisdom of First Nations peoples into the design of our built environment.'

Jane Sayers, DesignInc Melbourne Principal

Our Current Activities

At DesignInc Melbourne, our vision is to contribute to a fairer society by reducing inequality and creating tangible opportunities for First Nations peoples, particularly within the design and construction sector. We acknowledge that many steps, large and small, are required to reach this vision and bring about change at personal, organisational and industry levels. We commit to contributing to this change through our internal workplace culture, partnerships and opportunities, our approach to design, and broader industry initiatives.

As a leading design firm, DesignInc Melbourne recognises we have a responsibility to bring the voice of Australia's First Nations peoples into the creation of our built environment. Along with the development of our Reflect RAP, we continue exploring authentic and meaningful opportunities to work with First Nations communities. In doing this, we are preparing to commit to practical actions to strengthen our relationships, create mutual respect, and improve opportunities for First Nations peoples.



Jacinta Keefe Photography

Our Current Activities



We have already begun building relationships with First Nations peoples.

Several of our current education, health and community projects (which cannot name as yet due to client confidentiality) have involved consultation with local First Nations group members from the local areas.

Here are some of our current and recent activities:

Craig Kerslake

Director at
Nguluway DesignInc

Through our partnership with Nguluway DesignInc, a majority First Nations-owned design firm on Gadigal land of the Eora Nation, we are fortunate to have the guidance of Wiradjuri Architect Craig Kerslake. This unique partnership fuses First Nations design thinking with the technical capability and capacity of DesignInc to listen and collaborate to bring First Nations peoples' perspectives to our projects and practice.



Billy-Jay O'Toole

Artist for Deakin University
ManuFutures 2

To link the building with Country, the DesignInc Melbourne team connected with local Aboriginal artist Billy-Jay O'Toole, a Wadawurrung man and artist whose work is already present on the Deakin University Waurin Ponds campus. Billy-Jay was created a 44m graphic installation along the length of the ManuFutures 2 hallway to make a strong visual statement that connects hub and tenant spaces. The artwork makes the space welcoming with warm rich colours that tie the facility to Country.

Our Current Activities

Jacinta Keefe

Photographer

Jacinta Keefe is a proud Wiradjuri woman with blood ties from the Galari Bila (Lachlan River) in New South Wales. She is currently living and working in Naarm (Melbourne). She is a visual artist with a background in photography and a love of live music.

Through her connection to culture and her strong photographic skills and abilities to think outside the box, Jacinta started working for First Nations Non-for-profit Ngarrimili.

Her role there allowed her to become engaged with the Victorian First Nations communities more than she already is, learn to build websites and e-commerce with Queensland-based First Nations business, Empower Digital and continually grow her skill set in a well-supported and loving environment.



In February 2022, Jacinta decided to step away from Ngarrimili and take the leap into full-time photography work and hasn't looked back.

Through her connection to culture and her strong photographic skills and abilities to think outside the box, she's been able to work some big events, such as First & Forever held by Creative Victoria and Mushroom Publishing and even go on an international trip to Aoteroa (New Zealand) to participate in a cross-cultural exchange.

Jacinta was commissioned to photograph the Glenroy Festival in 2022 which was the official opening of Glenroy Community Hub (designed by DesignInc Melbourne). When developing our Reflect RAP we approached Jacinta again to purchase some local Victorian landscape images and smoking ceremonies for use in our Reflect RAP and other DesignInc Melbourne collateral.



Our Current Activities

Other initiatives and activities

Our studio has a number of other current initiatives and activities that include:

- Promoting National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, and other relevant events to our studio at our weekly office meeting, providing regular 'What's on' emails, displaying posters and relevant content on our pinup board in the office, and on social media.
- Doing an Acknowledgement of Country at the opening of meetings and presentations.
- Adding reference Country on our website for our studio and project locations, on social media accounts, on letterheads, email footers, project sheets and other collateral.
- Developing a 'RAP Resources' Airtable board that includes links to fiction/non-fiction books, films, documentaries, podcasts and webinars, language group and native title references, case studies, maps and other materials for our teams own learning.
- A commitment to continually learning and developing our way forward to Reconciliation. We are investigating First Nations Cultural Awareness Training for the whole office, which we aim to do in the first half of 2024.



Relationships



We are committed to fostering authentic, long-term relationships with First Nations peoples to ensure we are creating mutually-beneficial outcomes in the communities in which we operate.

DesignInc Melbourne embraces cultural diversity and the many benefits that diversity brings to our organisation. We are dedicated to developing and learning from our cultural networks and raising awareness internally on the importance of reconciliation in Australia.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations	Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence	September 2023	Interior Design Graduate
	Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations	September 2023	Interior Design Graduate
Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW)	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff	May 2024	Interior Design Graduate
	RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event	27 May – 3 June 2024	Interior Design Graduate
	Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW	May 2024	Interior Design Graduate
Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff	August 2023	Interior Design Graduate
	Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey	August 2023	Interior Design Graduate
	Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey	August 2023	Interior Design Graduate
Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies	Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination	November 2023	Interior Design Graduate
	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs	November 2023	Interior Design Graduate

Respect



At DesignInc Melbourne we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, and of the land on which our projects are located.

We understand that respect is the foundation of long-lasting relationships with First Nations peoples.

We are committed to ensuring that our engagement process is respectful of and appropriately acknowledges First Nations peoples, their histories and cultures.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning	Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation	November 2023	Interior Design Graduate
	Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation	November 2023	Interior Design Graduate
Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols	Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area	August 2023	Interior Design Graduate
	Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols	August 2023	Interior Design Graduate
Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week	Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week	June – July 2024	Interior Design Graduate
	Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area	June – July 2024	Interior Design Graduate
	RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event	2 – 9 July 2024	Interior Design Graduate

Opportunities



DesignInc Melbourne is committed to contributing to the economic and social wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the communities in which we operate.

We believe it is important to enhance and increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve their quality of life, wellbeing and provide opportunities for them to contribute to the built environment.

We are also passionate about building the community of First Australian architects through university scholarships, internships, mentorship and employment opportunities.

DesignInc Melbourne aspires to increase the number of First Australian professionals in the design industry, as this is greatly lacking.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development	Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation	November 2024	Associate
	Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities	November 2024	Associate
Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes	Develop a business case for procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses	October 2023	Associate
	Investigate Supply Nation membership	October 2023	Associate

Governance



Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP	Form a RWG to govern RAP implementation	September 2023	Principal
	Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG	September 2023	Principal
	Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG	September 2023	Associate
Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments	Define resource needs for RAP implementation	September 2023	Principal
	Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments	September 2023	Principal
	Appoint a senior leader to champion our RAP internally	September 2023	Principal
	Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments	September 2023	Associate
Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally	Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence	June annually	Associate
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire	1 August annually	Associate
	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia	30 September annually	Associate
Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP	December 2024	Associate

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We are an association of independent practices with national offices in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

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