

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA)

Cultural Ambassador Governance Guideline

Connection to Country Committee (CtCC)

Version 02



We acknowledge and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia, as the traditional custodians of our lands, waters and seas.

We recognise their ability to care for 'Country' and their deep spiritual connection with 'Country'.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom ensure the continuation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

We acknowledge with gratitude, the support and guidance of our inaugural Cultural Ambassadors.

AILA invited Aunty Ruby Sims – a Mununjali and Wangerriburra Elder and a founding Cultural Ambassador for AILA – to guide this document through 'Proper Way'¹ processes.

The Guideline draws together shared experiences from the inaugural CtCC and Cultural Ambassador partnerships.

Introduction

A Cultural Ambassador once asked us, 'Why did YOU become a Landscape Architect?' The question requires our deep reflection. It provides a grounding point and base from which to build shared connection.

AILA members have generally entered the profession through a deep love for landscape, with a commitment to protect sensitive environments and habitats, or create vibrant and safe places that nurture and gather communities. In individuals, and as a profession, there is a growing awareness and respect for the cultural values and perspectives of First Australians; recognition of our professional capacity and responsibility to value Indigenous Knowledge Systems that have been practiced in 'Country' for thousands of years; and support for the sensitive integration of traditional practices into contemporary landscape management. Despite this, First Australians are not well represented in the AILA membership (currently less than 1%).

A 2019 survey of AILA members reported that over 90% of respondents consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to them and their practice. Similarly, about 90% of respondents overwhelmingly supported AILA to offer more cultural awareness training to members.

Aunty Ruby Sims believes that the purpose of engagement with Cultural Ambassadors is to support AILA practitioners to practice Deep Listening - to start our own conversations with the Land and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to 'Give a voice to Country' through our projects. This will allow us as a profession to move forward in the 'Proper Way'.¹

The Guideline is a supporting document to the CtCC's Terms of Reference (Appendix 1). It should evolve over time as our awareness grows and we learn deeper ways to show cultural respect.

Summary

The Guideline was achieved through many discussions and reflections, and includes:

- Experiences from our first CtCC and Cultural Ambassador partnerships.
- Recommended processes and practices to guide incoming committee members.
- Recommended administrative processes to nurture and support new partnerships.

Terms used in this Guideline

- *'Cultural Ambassador': an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has entered into a partnership with AILA to provide cultural guidance relating to 'Country', generally through the National CtCC.*
- *'Cultural Facilitator': a CtCC member who is given responsibility to engage with and support the Cultural Ambassador on behalf of AILA and the committee, to build relationship and to respect knowledge shared.*
- *'Country': this is not just the land beneath our feet, but all things – seen and unseen – that are part of, or have formed that 'Country' – the rocks, soil, water, trees, animals, insects, stars, wind, fire ... and the people who have walked there – past and present.*

Supporting Weblinks

- Reconciliation Australia <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/>
- Australians Together <https://australianstogether.org.au> (cultural awareness training)

Co-authors

Aunty Ruby Sims, Lani Roberts, Jill Orr-Young with input from members of current AILA National or State Connection to Country committees.

'Every day since September, we have lived and breathed this document, encouraged by Aunty Ruby to recognise and draw on our own Elder wisdom and share what we have learnt from our journey with her. We accepted our 'Gunyaji' (owning the responsibility) and followed Proper Way processes, and in doing so, have built stronger relationships and discovered new truths. We now share this with AILA.'

(Jill and Lani, 28 November 2020.)

Graphic design & layout by Peta Miskovich.

¹ 'Proper Way': a process of talking and walking together with respect and within a cultural mind-set, with regard for the land. It is always process led, not outcome focused.

Cultural Ambassador Partnerships

*'I see this meshing of our relationships with each other
as the only thing that holds our human habitation of this world together.
How we build interconnectedness is what will stand
long after written words have passed.
This is the meshing. It is our humanity.
It's not held together by borders and ships on the move,
it is held together by our relationships.'*

Aunty Ruby Sims, Mununjali and Wangerriburra Elder, and AILA's current Cultural Ambassador.

Our First Cultural Ambassador Partnerships

AILA commenced its journey with Cultural Ambassadors in 2017, bringing the Victorian state chapter initiative to a national level. The Cultural Ambassadors were invited to advise the first CtCC on the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)² that would guide AILA in practices that recognise and engage with First Australians as the Traditional Custodians of 'Country'.

The Cultural Ambassadors helped build awareness of the complexities of 'landscape' as 'Country' for many AILA members. Our shared cultural journey at National level has allowed reflection on the divergent practices that have defined our different world views, and our common values.

The first Cultural Ambassadors were invited through existing professional relationships with CtCC members in August 2017. Each was an individual whose informed voice contributed to intended priorities. AILA appointed five Cultural Ambassadors, including three respected Elders from very different Countries - Aunty Lynette Crocker (Kurna) in Adelaide, Aunty Ruby Sims (Mununjali & Wangerriburra) in Scenic Rim, Queensland, and Dr Noel Nannup (Noongar) in Perth. Paul Herzich AILA (Kurna & Ngarrindjeri) in Adelaide also advised as a Cultural Ambassador, along with Rueben Berg (Gunditjmara) in Melbourne. Their cultural guidance was crucial to preparing AILA's REFLECT RAP and other early documentation. However, as Elders will only speak from their own community perspectives and for their 'Country', not for the whole of Australia, the Cultural Ambassadors represented only a very small sample of First Australian communities.

At the time of seeking and appointing our first Cultural Ambassadors, AILA's standard communication processes had not considered cultural protocols. It was essential to first build local relationships – reflecting the local level of 'Country' – and for partnerships to be based on trust, respect and personal commitment. Other concerns included traditional protocols around what information could be shared in mixed company, the need for reflection and deep listening during engagement, and respectful practices such as avoiding eye contact.

The engagement process was amended over time by appointing an existing CtCC member to liaise directly with each Cultural Ambassador for advice. Cultural Ambassadors could then be engaged without need for their attendance at the committee's online meetings.

This process modelled greater cultural respect, allowing individual cultural protocols to be learnt and respected throughout the partnership. We learnt, for example, to respect Indigenous perspectives that are reflected in storytelling and yarning circles; concepts of time³, and 'inverted hierarchy'⁴ - some of the essential differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous world views.

² AILA's REFLECT Reconciliation Action Plan

³ 'In Indigenous systems/time is not linear/It moves in cycles' ('Living on Stolen Land', Ambelin Kwaymullina, Magabala Books, 2020)

⁴ 'Inverted hierarchy' reflects community decision-making processes, with a spokesperson appointed to share the community's decisions

Over time, Cultural Ambassador relationships developed through personal introductions to other committee members, and also to AILA members at events. This gave the Cultural Ambassadors a comfortable space in which to develop understanding of AILA culture, landscape architecture practice and priorities.

It is now recommended that AILA prioritise member activities that begin at a 'Country' level of focus rather than a National one.

In September 2020, the AILA Board approved remuneration for up to five (5) Cultural Ambassador partnerships, representing a geographical distribution across States and Territories. This will coincide with the appointment of a new CtCC through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

For our next phase, it is proposed that committee members will partner (as Cultural Facilitator) with a Cultural Ambassador as a joint appointment to the committee. A partnership relationship will be strongest between the Cultural Facilitator and their Cultural Ambassador, which like any respectful relationship, will require frequent dialogue and care.

Should AILA's Cultural Ambassadors be Elders?

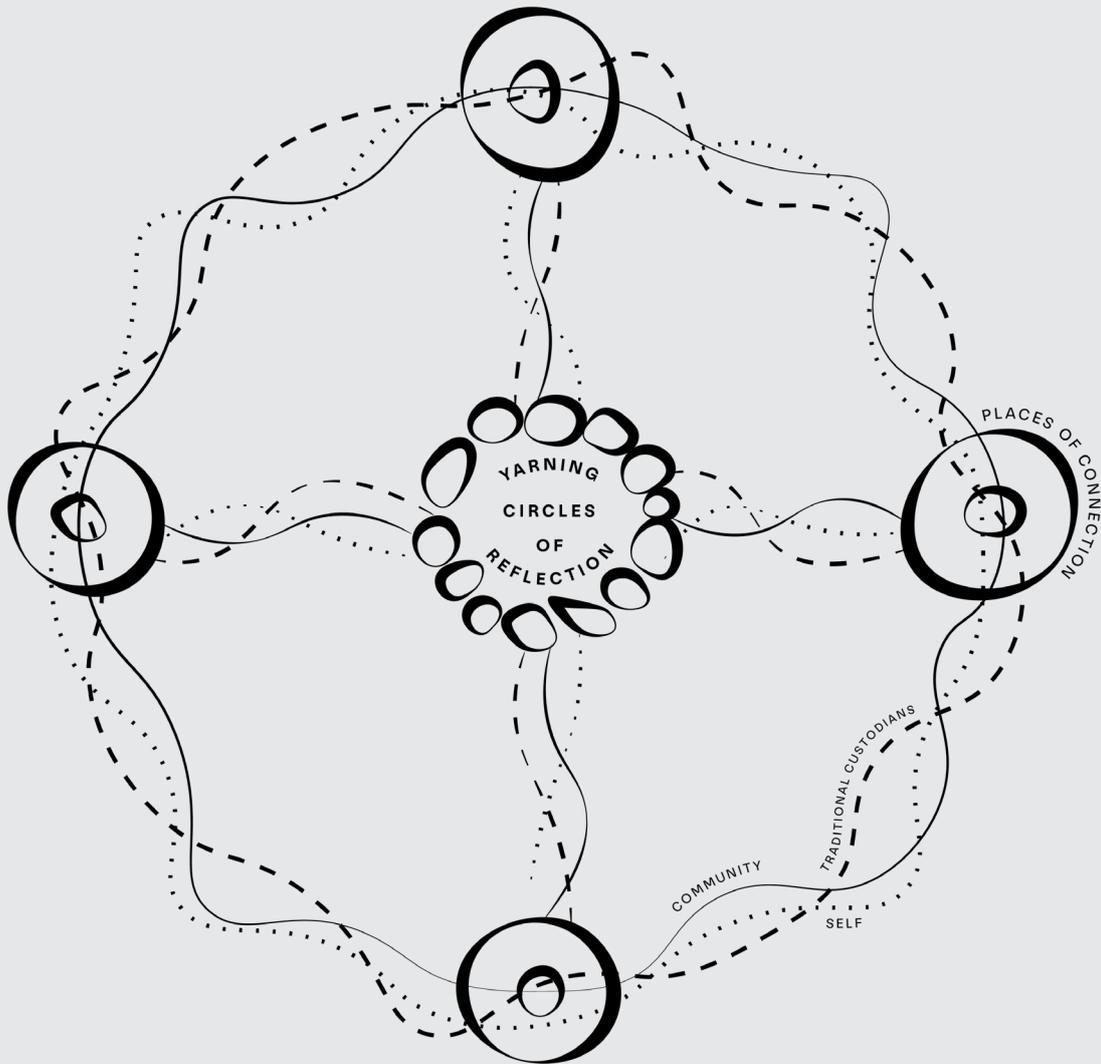
The question of whether AILA Cultural Ambassadors must be Elders is left open. Certainly, their depth of knowledge and cultural experience is respected and valued by AILA. However, 'consultation fatigue' is now affecting many Elders - caused by increasing demands for their time and attention, often by a growing number of non-Indigenous organisations. This situation has been exacerbated with the emergence of COVID 19 health priorities and restrictions with resultant social impacts that have caused great distress in many communities. AILA's engagement must avoid impacting negatively on the health and well-being of Indigenous Elders.

It is therefore proposed that future Cultural Ambassador partnerships may include Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who have cultural knowledge and active mentorship from an Elder within their community. This also provides opportunities for intergenerational representation to support the committee.

Similarly, it may benefit the partnership for Cultural Facilitators to each include and mentor a graduate AILA member, to initially observe, and gradually take an active role in supporting the partnership. Our new graduates will embrace and more seamlessly integrate cultural learnings into their professional practice from the beginning, and are the ones who will have to stand and face the many emerging challenges for 'Country' and community brought about by Climate Change and now COVID 19. (AILA may also reflect on the benefit of engaging their own Elders - experienced Landscape Architects who are no longer active in practice - as a council of Elders.)

It is also recommended that the newly appointed Cultural Ambassadors include a person claiming Torres Strait Islander lineage, due to their important responsibilities for 'Country' comprising waters and seas. This would allow a greater representation of 'Country'.

'Giving Voice to a Shared Journey in Country'⁵



We reflect on the multiple perspectives of our Reconciliation journey

*The journey of **Self**: Connecting into 'Country'*

*The journey of Connecting into 'Country' with **Community***

*The journey of Walking into 'Country' with **Traditional Custodians***

We consolidate the knowledge received on our journey.

With our learnings we rest in a safe place for reflection, seek out a yarning circle for conversation and sharing, then continue... Our journeys are individual, unique and continuous.

Always, our journeys are the deepest when we take them ourselves.

We journey with respect for the Earth – our Mother.

⁵ Concept by Aunty Ruby Sims, kindly designed and translated to a digital format by Molly-Rose Coulter.

Cultural Protocols

Cultural Protocols are respectful behaviours based in traditional laws and customs. They are drawn from the Land, the wisdom of Elders and their ancestors, and are an essential part of showing respect. They may be required when working with individuals, with community, or when working in 'Country'. Some are general, while others might be very specific to the Cultural Ambassador relationship.

Time must be allowed to develop clear processes for engagement and communication that consider the Cultural Protocols of the Cultural Ambassador.

AILA acknowledges the oral traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and honours the tradition by bringing voices of Cultural Ambassadors into our documents, including by the use of direct quotes. In some circumstances, a written response may compromise cultural safety or respect.

AILA members are encouraged to practice and give an Acknowledgement of 'Country', from the heart and specific to the place, meeting or event. Also, it is good to reflect on and share your own story about place and ancestry, especially when meeting a Cultural Ambassador for the first time.

'Sorry Business' (the death of a relative or community member) can occur at any time. Cultural Protocols will often require Cultural Ambassadors to be absent from mainstream events or meetings. They may need to travel some distance to be with family and community who need their attention and support. Should this occur, it may be necessary to find alternatives for planned AILA activities.

Privacy and Intellectual Property

AILA and CtCC members may be exposed to privileged, private, or sensitive information through Cultural Ambassador partnerships. To ensure cultural and personal respect for Cultural Ambassadors, it is important for AILA and CtCC members to:

- Respect the Cultural Ambassador's intellectual property and any specific requests relating to cultural knowledge, together with other CtCC resources or information.
- Respect culturally sensitive material – ensuring safe and confidential handling with appropriate permissions.
- Respect the privacy of the Cultural Ambassadors' personal information and contact details.
- Contact the Cultural Facilitator for a Cultural Ambassador's consent prior to approaching them directly on any CtCC or external projects.

*'... Many Settler processes
are things of calendars
and ticking clocks
often demanding
an Indigenous response
by a certain date
within a certain time
impatient to get support
for an outcome
said to be good for Indigenous peoples
But what is the outcome really?
If it is something
that is supposed to support us
nurture us
or Country
then the process
by which it's achieved
must also support us
support Country
support Indigenous processes
which are of relationships
Date and time
is not important
what matters
is the making of connections
this is what moves things along...'*

from 'Processes', 'Living on Stolen Land',
Ambelin Kwaymullina, Palyku,
Magabala Books, 2020

Roles and Responsibilities

'Mentoring and guidance from Cultural Ambassadors is critical to the integrity of AILA's decisions, documents and activities in relation to First Australian's knowledge of landscape and their communities.

The committee cannot achieve its purpose and objectives in the Terms of Reference without Cultural Ambassadors. Shared respect and commitment to walk, talk – to understand and share perspectives with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples – is fundamental to Reconciliation and Connection to Country.'

Jared Barnes, inaugural Co-Chair of AILA's CtCC, 2020

Practices for all CtCC members to consider include:

- Looking for ways to develop deeper partnerships and being open to what will benefit our Cultural Ambassadors and support First Australian communities.
- Being sensitive to Cultural Ambassador protocols and 'Proper Way' processes, including deep listening, reciprocity, and ways of being (feeling/thinking; reflection, silence).
- Programming your own continued cultural awareness training and reflection, sharing these with colleagues. Note: cultural awareness development is most effective as an individual's program, for incremental learning that may include reading (book lists, book club), webinars, documentaries, yarning circles, walking on 'Country', and events (e.g. NAIDOC week).
- Reporting your attendance at 'events', with personal 'reflections', as a shared document on CtCC Trello board.
- Being aware that 'Western Way' decision-making processes within meeting agendas may be counter-productive and limiting to the partnership and to the success of proposed activities. Video conference calls, while becoming more commonplace, may still be uncomfortable or culturally inappropriate for the Cultural Ambassador. When unsure about what is comfortable or appropriate – in this case, a process of engagement – being prepared to ask and find alternatives to existing practices.
- Consider sharing annual reflective statements to our Cultural Ambassadors (reciprocity). This may be about something you have learnt and what (or how) you may have changed as a result.
- Sharing information between states to support the development of cultural awareness programs for landscape architects and related professionals.

Recommendations for proposed partnerships

BEFORE proposing a Cultural Ambassador through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process:

- Take the time to build rapport and relationship, sufficient to ensure a personal commitment to supporting your Cultural Ambassador regardless of the EOI outcome.
- Provide background information to help a proposed Cultural Ambassador decide if they can and are interested in being involved. Include an introduction to AILA, and why you became a Landscape Architect, an outline of the CtCC's milestones.
- Allow time for reflection and questions before asking someone to commit to the role.
- Ensure a clear understanding of protocols.
- Liaise with the CtCC Chair (or AILA office) on any specific considerations to be addressed in AILA's Memorandum of Understanding. (Refer to Administrative Processes).

Recommendations for appointed Cultural Facilitators:

- Use your own initiative to appropriately support your Cultural Ambassador - building trust and sharing professional knowledge and experience.
- Manage culturally sensitive information in appropriate ways. (See Privacy and Intellectual Property.)
- Keep your Cultural Ambassador informed of committee activities and progress.
- Listen and reflect with your Cultural Ambassador. Ensure adequate time for their response.
- Support the cultural safety and comfort of your Cultural Ambassador at AILA events.
- Be prepared to support logistics (e.g. remuneration and event attendance).
- Manage contacts between your Cultural Ambassador and AILA staff or members where required.

Cultural Ambassador contributions can assist the committee through:

- Sharing cultural perspectives on specific issues or activities.
- Input to future Reconciliation Action Plans and AILA CtCC documents.
- Providing guidance on cross-cultural training, especially in the developmental stages.
- Also, by leading 'yarning circles' or a walk on 'Country' when convenient.
- Providing guidance on advocacy and news articles.

Recommendations for the CtCC Chair to support Cultural Ambassador relationships:

- Ensure cultural perspectives are sought at appropriate stages of committee activities.
- Support Cultural Facilitators to manage Cultural Ambassador workloads and logistics.
- Offer support to negotiate or resolve any admin-related matters.
- Set up a template on Trello for Cultural Facilitators to record their engagements with Cultural Ambassadors as a reference for partnership achievements and future planning.

Refer also to [Appendix 1 Terms of Reference](#).

Administrative Processes

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) should be written to confirm the two-year period appointment of engagement. This provides certainty for both AILA and the Cultural Ambassadors, especially if staff changes occur. It is recommended these documents include:

- Modifications to suit specific cultural considerations.
- Confirmation that Cultural Ambassadors are NOT expected to attend the committee meetings; that they can be included on the committee's email group but are NOT expected to read and respond unless specifically addressed. (The time implications for Cultural Ambassadors will vary throughout the year, and will be dependent on community priorities.)
- Details of remuneration and other benefits, including payment methods and timing.

Remuneration and other benefits:

- An Honorarium has now been approved by the AILA Board for each Cultural Ambassador.
- AILA e-news (including subscription to Foreground, National and State communications) and a subscription to Landscape Architecture Australia Magazine will help keep the Cultural Ambassador informed of issues and activities relevant to AILA and its members.
- Invitations to AILA events (within their State) would allow Cultural Ambassadors to build their understanding and knowledge. Travel expenses could be offered where appropriate.
- Certificates or letters of appreciation, specifically acknowledging significant contributions made by the Cultural Ambassador during their partnership would be highly regarded.
- Where specific cultural services are requested, e.g. a 'Welcome to Country' or panel participation by a Cultural Ambassador, these are NOT covered by the Honorarium. Separate fees should be offered to cover their time involved in researching, preparing and attending.

What happens after the formal engagement period? How does AILA continue to honour the relationship?

AILA's journey with Cultural Ambassadors will continue, even after their official role has been completed.

To honour an ongoing relationship with Cultural Ambassadors who have shared their cultural knowledge over the period of their appointment a new category of AILA membership may be needed. They may be called upon for advice, e.g. as mentors of young Indigenous graduates of Landscape Architecture, but this should be left open for future negotiation and agreement.

Appendix 1

AILA Connection to Country Committee Terms of Reference (TOR)

Revision date: September 17 2020

Next revision date: September 2022

Purpose/Objectives

1. To identify, propose, support and advance Reconciliation with First Australians within AILA.
2. To support a change in the culture of landscape architecture in Australia (ethics, governance, education and practice), from its settler-based origins to a respectful inclusion of multiple Aboriginal Countries and communities.
3. To enable greater capacity building for Indigenous leadership and representation within AILA activities including the integral support of Cultural Ambassadors and greater Indigenous membership.

Role/Responsibilities of the Connection to Country Committee (CtCC)

- Provide strategic advice to the Board and CEO for national directions related to Reconciliation across the organisation.
- Monitor progress and completion of the AILA's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).
- Identify opportunities and culturally appropriate content to disseminate achievements against AILA's Reflect RAP milestones to the broader AILA membership.
- Develop a Cultural Ambassador Governance Guideline to accompany the Terms of Reference.
- Promote Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Protocols, and associated literature which support the AILA's Reconciliation journey.
- Foster a dialogue with AILA national committees Chairs to enable and support a better integration of the RAP and CtCC objectives. For example the NEC and CPD committees.
- Progress discussions across the 2020-2022 period regarding the drafting of a next stage, AILA Innovate RAP, and make a recommendation to the AILA Board for the November 2021 Board meeting.
- Recommend the inclusion of a line item in AILA's National and State operating budgets to support Cultural Ambassador engagement at the National and State Chapter levels.
- Identify opportunities to fund RAP Actions and other Reconciliation activities at the National and State Chapter levels.
- Encourage an environment whereby State Chapter Executives can request guidance from the CtCC in relation to local Connection to Country issues or questions.
- Commit to using the five (5) Dimensions of Reconciliation (Reconciliation Australia) as touchstones for the assessment of the work of AILA in progressing a reconciliation agenda.

Committee Membership

- Up to seven (7) AILA members + CEO with a minimum of two (2) Cultural Ambassadors (CA) and up to a maximum of five (5) Cultural Ambassadors who represent the geographical distribution of our members. In addition to the seven members, one (1) AILA Board member where practical. While the committee recognises this may not always be practical, a Board member can provide background to proposals and discussions because we are mostly dealing with 'new' theories, processes and ways of working. In the absence of a Board member sitting on the CtCC, the Chair requests the opportunity to address the Board directly if required.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members are encouraged to apply.
- Each CA should be associated with one of the AILA members of the committee. This ensures the CA is supported directly by the member and often, this occurs because there are existing relationships at play.
- In accordance with the above, joint-application for CtCC membership between AILA members and CA is encouraged. It is preferable that the relationship between the AILA member and CA exists at the state level and doesn't impact existing state-based executive/committee relationships.
- It is encouraged that broad geographical representation of members from as many States/Territories as possible are included on the committee.
- CAs do not need to attend Committee meetings, and can work in parallel with their associated AILA committee member to progress discussions, advise directions and assist in framing resolutions.
- From time to time, the Committee can appoint additional members with expertise, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people external to the organisation to support the objectives. These roles will be clearly defined by the CtCC at the time.
- The Chair will be elected by the committee and rotated annually. The Committee supports a Co-Chair structure with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person where possible.
- Term of appointment to the committee is two (2) years, with a suggested maximum service of two (2) consecutive terms to allow other AILA members to participate. However, members may participate for longer to ensure continuity of the committee's activities where appropriate.
- Committee members are expected to participate in at least 4/6 meetings annually, actively volunteer for assignments, and contribute to the tasks agreed upon. Where consistent nonattendance (i.e. more than two consecutive meetings missed) or inactivity is recorded, a committee member may be asked to vacate their position. This does not apply to CA engagement. Please refer to the Cultural Ambassadors Governance Guideline (CAGG).

Cultural Ambassadors

The associated CAGG outlines the engagement of CAs for the organisation and should be read in conjunction with the TOR.

Accountability

- Chair to provide twice yearly reports to the AILA Board, inclusive of the Annual report.
- Chair to meet with the National Committee Chairs inline with the National Committee Chairs' Meeting schedule.

Meetings

- National Office leads meetings with the CEO every two months (bi-monthly).
- Requirements for CA engagement is outlined in the CAGG.
- A quorum is a minimum of four (4) Committee AILA members.
- Agenda setting - AILA CEO in consultation with the Chair.
- Minutes - no formal minutes from meetings required. Action points and resolutions to be recorded and distributed by the secretariat and added to the shared Trello page.

Secretariat

AILA Staff member.

Review of Terms of Reference

CEO to conduct annual review of TOR with the Chair and committee members.

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