

Indigenous Protocols

Protocols are essentially guidelines for working in an ethical manner. They foster positive and mutually beneficial working relationships between parties. Sensitivities and understandings are made explicit and developed so that a productive working and trust environment is developed.

The nature of working with Aboriginal communities means that Aboriginal cultural and customary protocols must be respected. These can be different for each Aboriginal group or even between clans. What one group feel is the right way to act may be slightly different to another group.

Generally these protocols include respect for Elders, respect for cultural obligations, respect for Aboriginal Law, use of collaborative and open consultative processes, correct access to material, respect for privacy, personal, gender based or sensitive issues and information, explicit project outcomes and respect for the need for Elders to consult and make decisions following customary practice.

Noongar Boodjar Language Centre provides a range of services including:

- Noongar linguistics
- Noongar educational programs
- Noongar translating and interpreting
- Noongar heritage projects
- Noongar Welcomes

Other partnerships and projects welcomed

To discuss or obtain a quote:

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Membership and associate membership of NBLCAC is welcomed. See the NBLCAC website for more information and membership forms.

Linguistic Works at Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Centre

Keeping the Noongar Language Alive



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Linguistic Works at Noongar Boodjar Language Centre

Noongar Boodjar Language Centre (NBLC) is a program of the Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (NBLCAC).

Following on from the incorporation of NBLCAC in 2013, NBLC was established in 2015 in recognition of the urgent need to record, linguistically analyse and preserve the extremely endangered Noongar language.

The preservation work is being undertaken in the form of recordings of speakers, specialist linguistic databases, dictionaries, grammars and associated materials.

There may be three dialects of the Noongar language; a Southeastern, a Northern and a Southwest dialect. The 14 clan groups that make up the Noongar nation traditionally spoke one or more of these dialects. Linguistic analysis on the Noongar language has yet to be done to say with certainty that there were three dialects and which clan group spoke which dialect.

The Noongar language is in a critical state with very few fluent speakers, many partial speakers, many more people who have passive understanding of the language and many thousands more who have little to no knowledge of their language.

The work of the NBLC is to ensure the preservation, analysis and use of the language throughout the Noongar Nation for Noongar people and future generations.

Recording the Noongar Language

In order to preserve a language, many hundreds of hours of recordings of speakers must be done. Speakers are sought who can tell stories in their language or who can have conversations so that natural speech is recorded. Natural speech is critical as it provides a lot of linguistic detail about the language.

These recordings are then transcribed, or written down word for word, so that the Noongar words and bits of words can be identified and analysed.

After transcribing the language and analyzing it, the words and bits of words are entered into an electronic database that assists linguists to keep a track of the language. This database is called 'Toolbox'.

Databasing the Noongar Language

Linguists use the specialist database called 'Toolbox' to record each word and analyse it. A great deal of information is entered into the database about each word such as how it was spoken, who said it, where they said it, what it means, how it is used in a sentence, the synonyms, antonyms and variations to the word. Linguists also look at how the word changes (morphology) and how it is used in sentences (grammar).

The integrity of the material on these databases is critical. Specialist linguistic processes are carefully followed to ensure each word entered is absolutely correct. Each time the word is heard, it is re-analysed until we see a pattern of it being used by a number of people in the same way. Then linguists are certain of the details of the word.

Rigorous academic scrutiny and evaluation of the methods used to collect, analyse and enter this data are adhered to and forms an integral part of NBLC's processes.

A number of databases have been set up; one for the whole of the Noongar language but which identifies dialect origins of words, one database for each of the three dialects and one database for each of the clan groups. Linguistic data is analysed and entered on each database so that over time, very comprehensive dictionaries can be made for the whole Noongar language, for each dialect and possibly for each clan group.

The information on the databases can be used to make dictionaries, grammars and documents with confidence that the material is correct and preserved for future generations.

Preserving the Noongar Language

To preserve the Noongar language, the Toolbox databases are kept on secure computers so that they are not lost, damaged or tampered with. Copies are made on external hard drives in case of fire or computer theft. Rigorous policies have been put in place by the NBLCAC Board to ensure material is kept safe.

Linguistic Records

The recordings and field notes done by linguists with Noongar speakers are stored in the Noongar Language Archives at the NLC. Every recording is digitized and the agreement made with the speaker at the time the recording is done is kept with the recording.

Only NBLC linguists may access the archives and use the material to add to the linguistic databases or produce academic papers examining facets of the Noongar language.

Some material will be nominated by speakers as being for public use and at a later date, this material will be made available through the NBLC for study and use.

Linguistic Protocols

NBLC linguists use a number of types of protocols to carry out the work of the organisation. They use linguistic protocols which dictate how the linguistic material is to be gathered with speakers. They use fieldwork protocols about how to work with speakers and the speech community. They use publishing and production protocols to ensure the integrity of published material. The Senior Linguist oversees the adherence to these protocols and ensures they are regularly updated and improved, as required.

In this way, the speech community and wider community, can be sure that the linguistic work is done in an ethical and strictly academic fashion and therefore have confidence in the material produced by the NBLC as being correct and collected in an ethical and just manner.

