



AIATSIS
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER STUDIES

FACT SHEET 11

Proof of Aboriginality or Torres Strait Islander Heritage

Worldwide knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present

Your Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage is something that is personal and you do not need a 'letter of confirmation' to identify as an Indigenous person. However you may be asked to provide a confirmation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander form or letter when applying for Indigenous-specific services or programs such as:

- Grants (such as Indigenous housing loans, research and study grants)
- University courses (with specific positions for Indigenous students)
- Centrelink and housing assistance (Indigenous-specific)
- Employment (Indigenous identified positions)
- School programs for Indigenous students

PLEASE NOTE: The AIATSIS Family History Unit is not able to comment on, prove or provide confirmation of anyone's Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Heritage.

The following is intended as a guide only. Guidelines and procedures may vary from region to region and between organizations. Universities, schools and government departments will often supply you with a form for this purpose

Why is it so involved?

These services and programs are intended to address the social, health and educational issues that Indigenous people often face as the result of past removal policies and inadequate educational, employment and health services. Requesting proof of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage from applicants helps to make sure that this intention is honoured.

How do I obtain proof of my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage?

Step 1 – Gather as much information about your family history and heritage as possible

When applying for a letter of proof of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage through an Indigenous organisation, you are likely to be requested to explain your heritage to their committee. For this reason it is often useful to gather as much information about your family history as you can before you contact them. This is particularly important if you or your ancestors have been displaced from your heritage.

Examples of useful information include birth, death and marriage certificates that trace your family to a particular Aboriginal station or reserve, oral history stories and even photographs. The AIATSIS Family History Unit is able to assist you with the family history research that you may need to undertake to demonstrate your Indigenous heritage and/or the area that your family is from.

Step 2 – Contact an Indigenous organisation

A 'letter of confirmation' is usually obtained from an incorporated Indigenous organization and must be stamped with their common seal. It is useful to contact an organization where your family is from, if possible, as someone in the community might know of or remember your family.

An Indigenous organization in the area where you live may also be able to provide you with this confirmation. For instance, if you live in Canberra and your family is from the Canberra region, you could contact the Ngunnawal Land Council in Queanbeyan. If you live in Canberra but your family is from elsewhere, you would contact the Land Council in the area your family came from or were known in.

To find the contact details of a Land Council or other Indigenous community organization, try searching the Yellow Pages online www.yellowpages.com.au. Type 'Aboriginal' in the WHAT box and the place name in WHERE. In the print version of the Yellow Pages, look under 'Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Associations & Organizations'.



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Do I meet the criteria for official confirmation?

There are three criteria which Indigenous organisations will usually require you to satisfy before they will provide you with a proof of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage letter. These criteria are outlined in the ATSIC Act and are:

1. Being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
2. Identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
3. Being accepted as such by the community in which you live, or formally lived

You will often be asked to demonstrate that you are known within the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community where you live or where your family is from.

