

Victorian Government

Self-Determination Reform Framework





Image: Sunrise over Yiruk Wamoon (Wilson's Promontory), Victoria. **Photo:** Hollie Johnson
Cover image: Shaun Thomas and his son Taten Thomas mixing ochre. **Photo:** Mikaela Egan



Acknowledgement

We proudly acknowledge Victoria's First Nations peoples and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise that there are long-lasting, far-reaching and intergenerational consequences of colonisation and dispossession. The reality of colonisation involved establishing Victoria with the specific intent of excluding Aboriginal people and their laws, cultures, customs and traditions. Over time, the development of Victorian laws, policies, systems and structures explicitly excluded Aboriginal Victorians, resulting in and entrenching systemic and structural racism. We acknowledge that the impact and structures of colonisation still exist today, and that the Victorian Government have a responsibility to transform its systems and service delivery so that Aboriginal Victorians can be the ones to hold decision-making power over the matters that affect their lives.

We also acknowledge that Aboriginal self-determination is a human right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and recognise the hard work of many generations of Aboriginal people who have fought for this right to be upheld. This document is intended to guide Victorian Public Service action to enable Aboriginal self-determination in line with government's commitments in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023.

Image: River Red Gum in bloom, Shepparton.
Photo: Mikaela Egan



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Chapter 1

About the Framework

1.1 Background

In 2018, the Victorian Government refreshed the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023 (VAAF) in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians through broad and inclusive engagement. The VAAF is Victoria's overarching strategic framework for working with Aboriginal Victorians to drive improved outcomes.

The VAAF includes goals, indicators and measures to guide and track government progress to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians across six domains:

- **children, family and home**
- **learning and skills**
- **opportunity and prosperity**
- **health and wellbeing**
- **justice and safety**
- **culture and country.**

The VAAF commits government to advancing Aboriginal self-determination. In doing so, the VAAF builds on and goes beyond previous government approaches, by recognising that to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians, government must enable self-determination through systemic and structural transformation. The VAAF also requires that government report on its efforts to enable self-determination in the annual Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report (VGAAR) and commits to establishing an Aboriginal-led Evaluation and Review Mechanism to track government's progress against the VAAF.

Scope of this Framework

The Victorian Government is comprised of a range of entities, from government departments, to independent agencies and authorities, to government-funded organisations in the service sector. As a starting point for enabling self-determination, this Framework focuses primarily on government departments, but is not intended to restrict further action or limit areas where self-determination work has already extended beyond this. This scope will be reviewed in future and may be expanded as government's capacity to enable self-determination increases.

How does this Framework relate to treaty?

This Framework does not limit or anticipate the impact and role that a future treaty or treaties may have on the Victorian Government's efforts to enable self-determination. Treaty will provide the foundation for a new, positive relationship between the State and Aboriginal Victorians by determining how each party's priorities, interests and responsibilities can be realised together into the future. The priorities and actions in this Framework will be reviewed regularly and will respond to the actions and changes required in the future to facilitate outcomes of a treaty or treaties.

Image: Mural at Charcoal Lane. Photo: Mikaela Egan



1.2 Purpose





This document, the Self-Determination Reform Framework, is intended to guide public service action to enable self-determination in line with government's commitments in the VAAF. It also provides an architecture for reporting on this action.

The purpose of this Framework is to:

- 1. Build on and update the 2011 Victorian Government Aboriginal Inclusion Framework (VGAIF).** The VGAIF committed to embedding inclusive, consistent and accessible services to Aboriginal people within the processes of government and has been critical in focusing government action. Since then, the Victorian Public Service (VPS) has built on this commitment to Aboriginal inclusion and gone further by acknowledging government's role in enabling Aboriginal self-determination. This Framework reflects this growth, builds on existing action across government, and refocuses efforts around self-determination.
- 2. Provide a consistent understanding of how government should enable self-determination.** Aboriginal Victorians have identified four self-determination enablers (articulated in the VAAF, *Figure 1*) as ways in which government should transform its systems and structures over the next five years to facilitate self-determination. This Framework, based on the enablers, will be the key reference point for government reforms to facilitate self-determination, to ensure we are all working from a shared understanding and working collaboratively towards common goals.
- 3. Provide guidance for whole of government and departmental transformation to enable self-determination.** This Framework will ensure there is a coordinated approach across the Victorian Government to enabling self-determination. It is designed to unify existing fragmented action, ensuring government transformation is comprehensive, and encourage an environment of collaboration, knowledge-sharing and learning from both successes and challenges. Consistent commitment and resourcing from departments will likely be required to ensure genuine action under this Framework and the VAAF.
- 4. Provide a consistent approach to reporting on government's efforts to enable self-determination.** This Framework will ensure government is accountable for its progress towards enabling self-determination, primarily through annual departmental reporting against the template in Chapter 3.2. As committed to in the VAAF, government's approach to system-wide, whole of government self-determination action will be reported annually in the VGAAR. Annual departmental reporting under this Framework will inform the qualitative content included in the VGAAR.

Figure 1. VAAF self-determination enablers

Self-determination enablers

-  Prioritise culture
-  Address trauma and support healing
-  Address racism and promote cultural safety
-  Transfer power and resources to communities

1.3 Government's commitment to self-determination

What is self-determination?

The VAAF outlines government's commitment to advancing Aboriginal self-determination.

This commitment is built on community perspectives and priorities regarding self-determination, acknowledging the decades that Aboriginal Victorians have fought for self-determination and their right to make decisions on matters that affect their lives and communities.

While Aboriginal self-determination means different things to different people, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) describes self-determination as the ability for Indigenous people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development. It also describes self-determination as a right that relates to groups of people, not individuals.

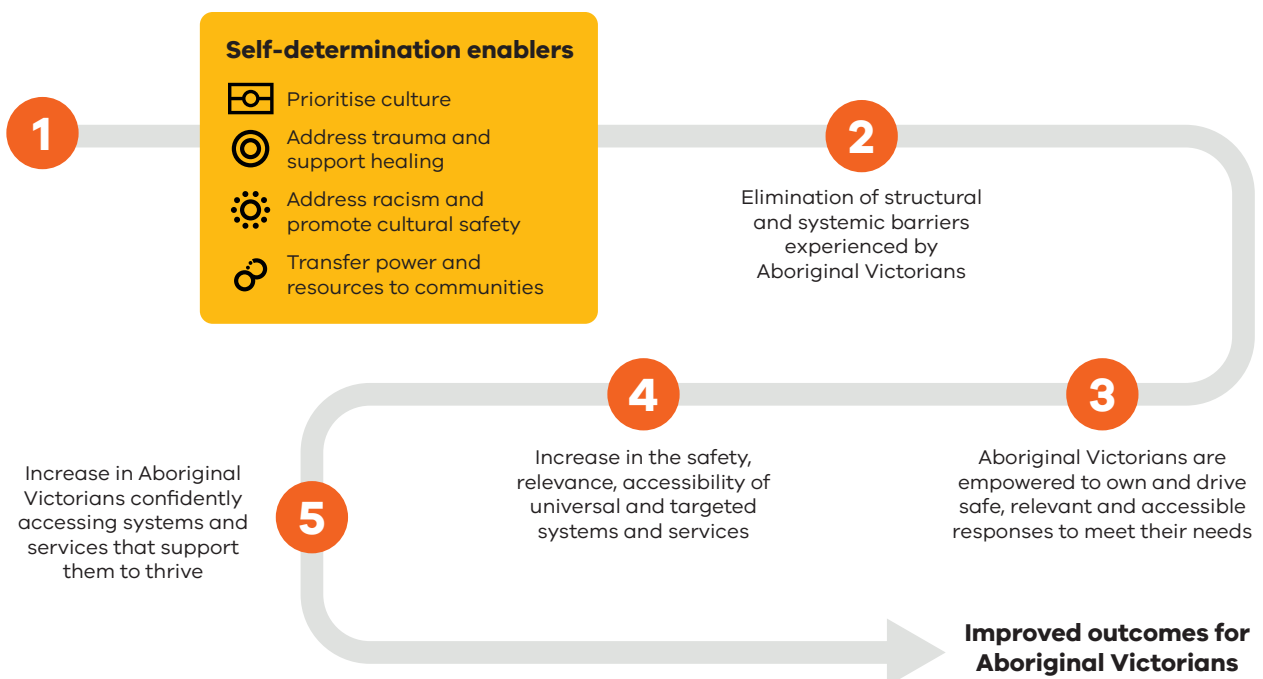
Government has heard from community that Aboriginal self-determination encompasses a spectrum of rights that are necessary for Aboriginal Victorians to achieve economic, social and cultural equity, based on their own values and way of life.

Why is self-determination important?

Self-determination is the key approach that has produced effective and sustainable improvement in outcomes for Indigenous people across many jurisdictions.

Government action to enable self-determination acknowledges that Aboriginal Victorians hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for themselves, their families and their communities. Building on this, the VAAF action logic (Figure 2) acknowledges that government action to enable self-determination is the critical first step in achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

Figure 2. VAAF action logic



What should government do to enable self-determination?

While Aboriginal self-determination is driven by community, government has responsibility for many of the systems and structures that enable self-determination. Government must therefore transform its systems and structures to support self-determination and improve outcomes for Aboriginal people.

The way government enables Aboriginal self-determination will continue to evolve over time, based on changing community expectations and needs. However, through broad engagement with community in developing the VAAF, participants identified four self-determination enablers that government should commit to and act upon to make Aboriginal self-determination a reality (Figure 2).

Across Victoria, there are many community-led and culturally responsive initiatives and strategies already enabling Aboriginal self-determination. Work to implement the four self-determination enablers will acknowledge, align with, and build from these existing initiatives and strategies.

How should government implement self-determination?

Eleven self-determination guiding principles were developed following extensive community engagement with Aboriginal Victorians. In enabling self-determination, government action should be consistent with the guiding principles:

- **human rights**
- **cultural integrity**
- **commitment**
- **Aboriginal expertise**
- **partnership**
- **decision-making**
- **empowerment**
- **cultural safety**
- **investment**
- **equity**
- **accountability.**

The guiding principles set the minimum standards for all existing and future work with Aboriginal Victorians and will guide all government work to progress self-determination going forward.

Image: Artefacts, Albert Mullet. Photo: Hollie Johnson

Chapter 2

Structure of the Framework

This chapter outlines the structure of this Framework, which builds on the VAAF and the Public Sector Reform architecture to embed structural change.

2.1 Reform domains

The Victorian Government is committed to comprehensive and innovative reform of the public sector. The Public Sector Reform Statement (2017) outlines government's approach to transforming its systems and structures. This architecture consists of four reform domains: **People, Systems, Outcomes** and **Accountability** (Figure 3). This Framework builds on the existing Public Sector Reform architecture to ensure consistent and coordinated reform.

This Framework also provides guidance for government on what it means to enable self-determination under each of the reform domains (Chapter 2.3). This guidance is structured around goals, approaches, whole of government actions and departmental actions.

Figure 3. Public Sector Reform architecture

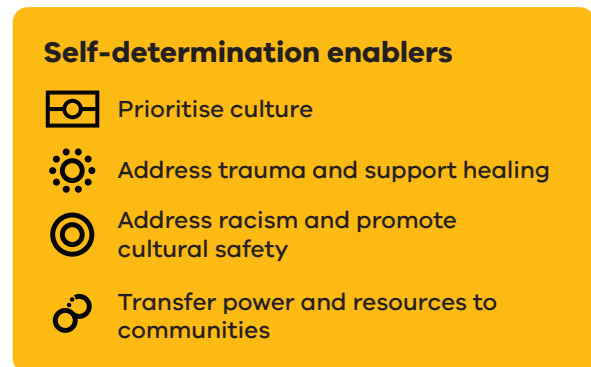


2.2 Goals and approaches

Goals and approaches for each reform domain have been agreed by the Secretaries' Leadership Group on Aboriginal Affairs (SLG) and apply across whole of government to provide a common purpose. The goals describe what success looks like in each reform domain and integrate the VAAF self-determination enablers (Figure 4) into the public sector reform architecture.

The approaches sit under the goals and provide a high-level, aspirational picture of how government will achieve the goals and what needs to change to support self-determination in each reform domain.

Figure 4. VAAF self-determination enablers



2.3 Actions

To align this Framework with the model of self-determination outlined in the VAAF, actions within each reform domain are structured to advance one or more of the self-determination enablers (Figure 4).

To achieve the whole of government goals, and put into practice the whole of government approaches, two levels of action are required. Departments will work together on coordinated whole of government actions, as well as undertaking departmental specific actions (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Actions under the Self-Determination Reform Framework



Whole of government coordinated actions

Whole of government actions will be:

- agreed by all departments through SLG
- coordinated by DPC, with input from all departments to ensure actions are meaningfully implemented.

Whole of government actions will not remain fixed. SLG will review, evaluate and update these actions yearly as work to advance self-determination progresses.

DPC is currently leading work in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians to establish an Aboriginal-led Evaluation and Review Mechanism. When established, the Mechanism will take on the function of evaluating and reviewing this Framework, which will lead to changes to the Framework's governance in the future.

Departmental specific actions

Departments will continue to develop actions specific to their policies, service delivery systems and programs. This Framework provides greater opportunities for collaboration across government as departments communicate relevant initiatives and actions. This is designed to help departments collate actions across a range of strategies, share successes and challenges with other departments, identify gaps in policy and work to more effectively enable self-determination. A template for departmental reporting is provided in Chapter 3.

2.4 Self-Determination Reform Framework

People

Change only occurs through the actions of people. The VPS workforce must be equipped to drive the development and implementation of culturally safe policies and programs that promote and enable self-determination. In doing so, it is also government's responsibility to support Aboriginal Victorians to participate fully in policy development and decision-making processes, both through employment in the VPS and meaningful engagement with, and transfer of decision-making to, Aboriginal communities.



Goal

Our goal is to build a culturally safe public service workforce that understands and has the capacity to enable Aboriginal self-determination in all policies and programs.

Self-determination enablers

-  Prioritise culture
-  Address trauma and support healing
-  Address racism and promote cultural safety
-  Transfer power and resources to communities

Approach

To achieve this goal, government will:

- Ensure the workforce has a common understanding of self-determination, including the enablers and guiding principles, allowing government to advance its commitment to Aboriginal self-determination.
- Build the skills of the workforce to effectively engage with Victorian Aboriginal communities.
- Build the skills of the workforce to embed the self-determination enablers and guiding principles in policies and programs and ensure this is part of core business.
- Ensure the VPS is a culturally safe employer and an employer of choice for Aboriginal Victorians.

Whole of government actions

Departments will work together to:

1. Develop and implement a whole of government approach to cultural safety.
2. Develop and roll out a self-determination training and resources package.
3. Continue to develop and implement a whole of government approach to supporting and increasing the Aboriginal workforce, including in leadership roles.

Departmental actions

Examples of departmental actions could include:

- A trauma-informed approach to developing policies and programs.
- An Aboriginal Employment Plan.
- Implementing initiatives under Barring Djinang, such as the Aboriginal Cultural Capability Toolkit.
- A departmental Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework.

Systems

The structures and systems established during colonisation had the specific intent to exclude Aboriginal people and their laws, customs and traditions, resulting in entrenched systemic and structural racism. Government must therefore transform its systems to address structural racism and unconscious bias and enable Aboriginal self-determination.



Goal

Our goal is to transform government systems and structures to enable Aboriginal decision-making, leadership and strategic service provision by embedding the self-determination enablers.

Self-determination enablers

-  Prioritise culture
-  Address trauma and support healing
-  Address racism and promote cultural safety
-  Transfer power and resources to communities

Approach

To achieve this goal, government will:

- Ensure that effective engagement mechanisms exist across government to support a self-determination-based approach to working with Aboriginal Victorians.
- Ensure government departments demonstrate understanding of the ongoing structural impacts of colonisation, racism and unconscious bias.
- Address racism, discrimination and unconscious bias in government laws, policy, practice, systems and institutions.
- Recognise and remove the barriers to the Aboriginal community accessing services and participating fully in social and economic activity.

Whole of government actions

Departments will work together to:

1. Develop and implement a whole of government approach to reforming processes and systems for funding and supporting Aboriginal organisations.
2. Improve procurement processes to make them more inclusive and accessible to Aboriginal Victorians, building on activity to implement the Social Procurement Framework and the Aboriginal procurement target.
3. Review key Aboriginal governance structures across government to ensure they align with the VAAF and ensure they are progressing government's self-determination agenda.
4. Develop and implement a whole of government approach to improving the quality, accessibility and use of Aboriginal data and consider data sovereignty.

Departmental actions

Examples of departmental actions could include:

- Strategies for prioritising program funding for Aboriginal organisations.
- Strategies for evaluating and addressing structural racism in the process of drafting legislation.
- Strategies for working with Aboriginal Victorians to develop budget proposals.

Outcomes

Self-determination is the key policy approach that produces effective and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal people. Moving from measuring outputs to also measuring outcomes better facilitates self-determination in policy design and service delivery. Government is already and will continue to work with Aboriginal Victorians to design policy and programs that achieve community-defined outcomes, and ensure investment is directed to responses that work.



Goal

Our goal is to adopt an outcomes-focused approach that will enable flexibility and Aboriginal leadership in government's efforts to embed the self-determination enablers.

Self-determination enablers

-  Prioritise culture
-  Address trauma and support healing
-  Address racism and promote cultural safety
-  Transfer power and resources to communities

Approach

To achieve this goal, government will:

- Actively support the development of Aboriginal community-defined outcome, rather than output, measures that reflect community aspirations, and ensure these are aligned across government.
- Improve the quality of Aboriginal data across government, to enable current challenges to be clearly defined and work with Aboriginal Victorians to develop effective solutions.
- Overcome government silos and fragmentation, and instead collaborate based on achievement of key shared outcomes and lessons learnt from unsuccessful strategies.
- Continue to move away from deficit-based approaches to Aboriginal affairs, focusing instead on a strengths-based approach.

Whole of government actions

Departments will work together to:

1. Prioritise action and investment to achieve all goals and outcomes in the VAAF.
2. Reform funding arrangements for Aboriginal organisations, working towards pooled, outcomes based funding, and support Aboriginal organisations through these changes.
3. Improve data accessibility for and data usage by Aboriginal organisations and community to inform self-determining responses to community issues and priorities.

Departmental actions

Examples of departmental actions could include:

- Strategies for improving the quality and accessibility of data.
- Strategies to remove reporting inefficiencies to government-funded Aboriginal organisations.
- Identifying opportunities to streamline funding agreements and associated reporting requirements for Aboriginal organisations.
- Setting funding and policy priorities with reference to goals and outcomes in the VAAF.

Accountability

Self-determination means that Aboriginal Victorians have the right to make decisions about issues that affect their lives. Accountability is key to ensuring that the government's commitment to self-determination is translated into meaningful action. Government and government-funded organisations must be held accountable to Aboriginal Victorians for delivering services that are responsive to and meet the needs of Aboriginal communities. Government must also be held accountable for improving its systems and structures to enable Aboriginal self-determination.



Goal

Our goal is to establish transparent, Aboriginal-led accountability of government and government-funded organisations to ensure that policies and programs are responsive to Aboriginal needs, priorities and aspirations, and that government action in Aboriginal affairs is consistent with the self-determination enablers and guiding principles.

Self-determination enablers

-  Prioritise culture
-  Address trauma and support healing
-  Address racism and promote cultural safety
-  Transfer power and resources to communities

Approach

To achieve this goal, government will:

- Ensure Victorian Aboriginal communities are supported to hold government and government-funded organisations accountable.
- Increase integrity, transparency and accessibility of government data on Aboriginal outcomes.
- Move towards measuring community-defined outcomes – what we are achieving for and with Aboriginal Victorians – and robustly evaluate investment and programs against these outcomes.
- Ensure that government-funded Aboriginal organisations are directly accountable to the communities they serve.

Whole of government actions

Departments will work together to:

1. Develop and implement an Aboriginal-led Evaluation and Review Mechanism with Aboriginal Victorians, which may play a role in monitoring action under this Framework in the future.
2. Table the VGAAR in Parliament, showing progress against the VAAF.
3. Publish disaggregated and accessible VAAF data against all 111 measures via a public data platform.

Departmental actions

Examples of departmental actions could include:

- Strategies to evaluate investment against outcomes sought in the VAAF.
- Strategies to increase regional engagement to ensure government-funded programs are responsive to local Aboriginal needs, priorities and aspirations.
- Strategies to ensure departments are responsive to the Aboriginal-led Evaluation and Review Mechanism.

Chapter 3

Reporting against the Framework

3.1 Flexible implementation

Under this Framework, departments are encouraged to reflect on, and work towards improving, how they enable self-determination. To do this, each department will complete an annual report against this Framework. This chapter sets out the reporting requirements and provides a guidance template.

Why an annual reporting mechanism?

Annual reports provide a way for departments to assess their contributions to self-determination reform. The reporting mechanism allows departments to collate relevant actions that are occurring across existing strategies, as well as changes being made across internal operations and service delivery, without the need to draft a new document.

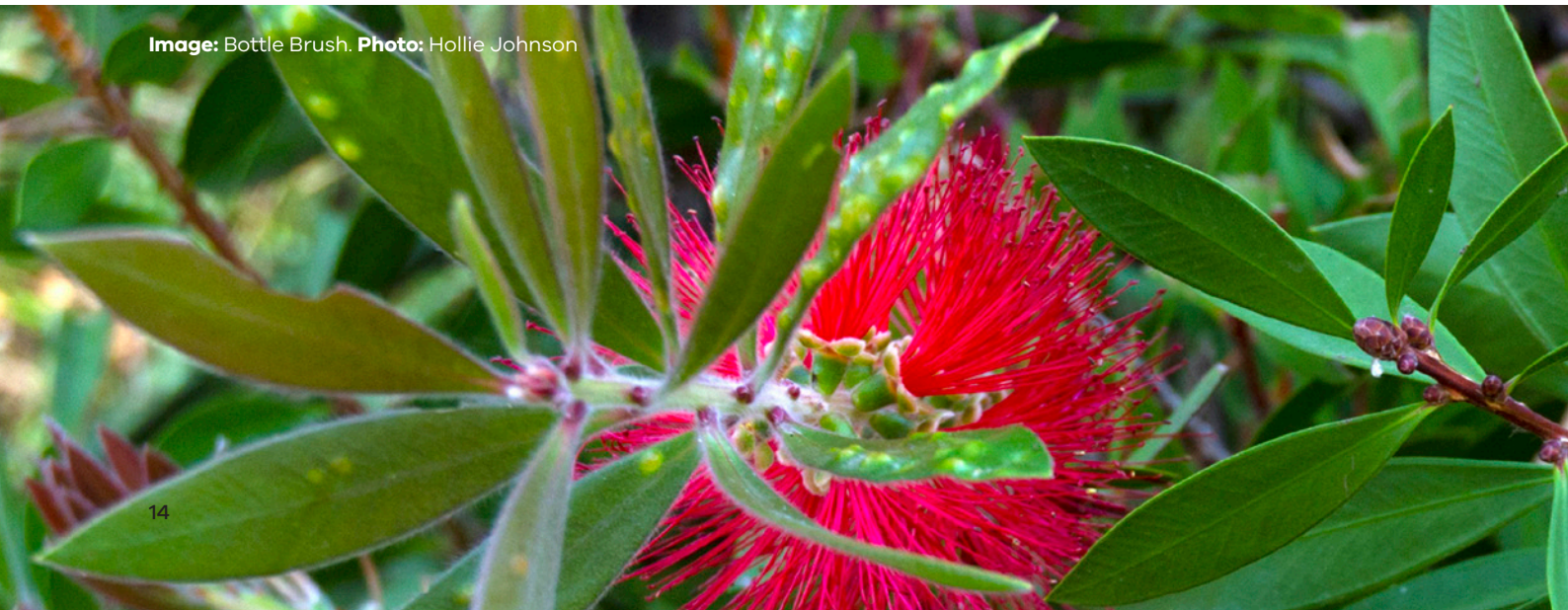
This mechanism is designed to be a valuable tool for departments to identify areas of strength and gaps in strategy, as well as review whether departmental actions align with the self-determination enablers. It will also ensure that departments are all working towards the agreed whole of government priorities. It is also intended to encourage knowledge sharing across departments to develop best practice for progressing self-determination.

What if my department has already completed a Departmental Action Plan (DAP)?

Departments may choose to implement a DAP, like those completed under the previous VGAIF. This approach recognises that departments may demonstrate commitment to self-determination through a range of approaches, such as: DAPs, Aboriginal Employment Plans, Strategic Action Plans and/or Aboriginal Cultural Safety Plans.

This Framework, including the reporting template, asks departments to strategically consider how best to articulate their efforts to enable self-determination. By having a living Framework and asking departments to complete annual reporting, government has flexibility to adapt to new approaches.

Image: Bottle Brush. Photo: Hollie Johnson

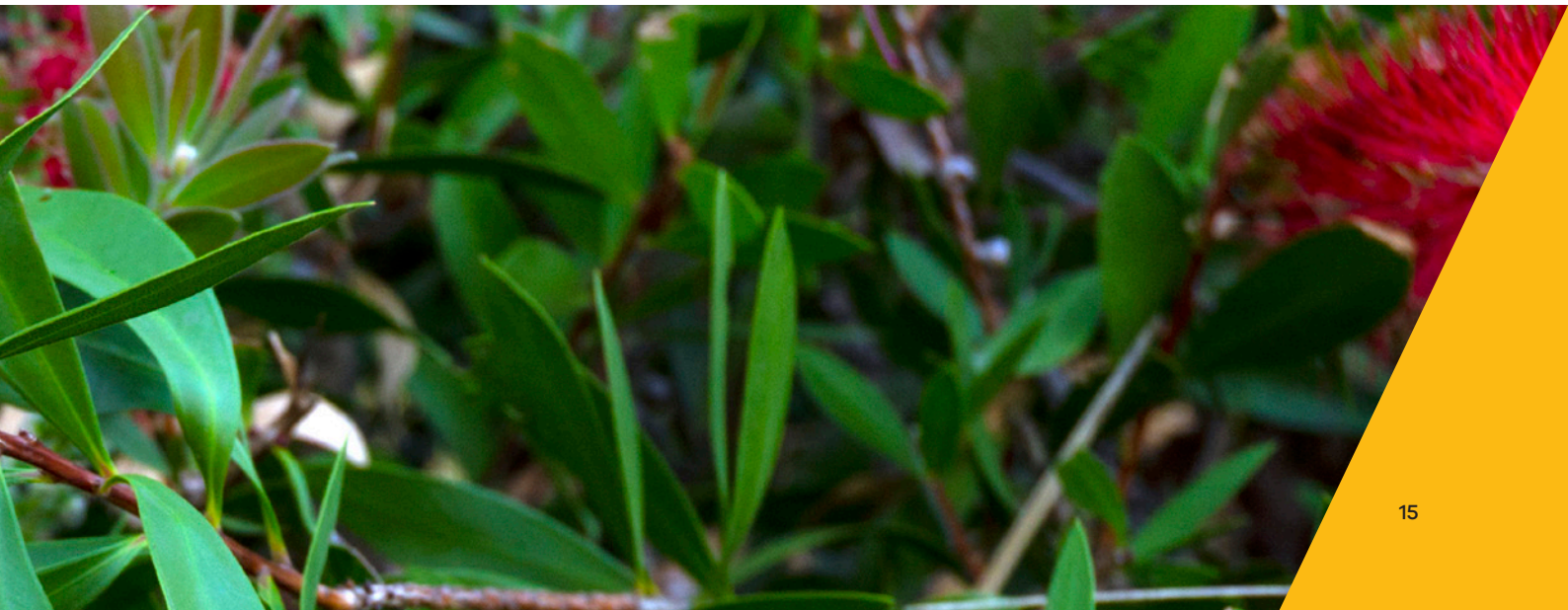
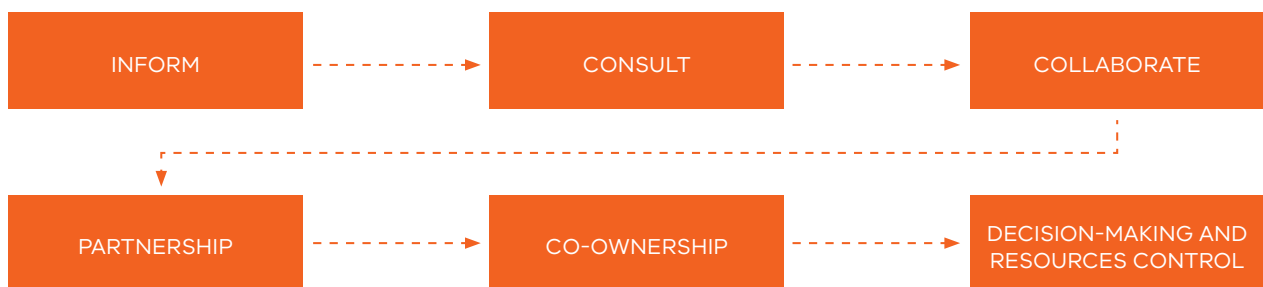


Assessing against the self-determination continuum

The questions in the reporting template are designed to be reflective and ask departments to consider where they are currently in relation to enabling and implementing Aboriginal self-determination reform. Further planning and reporting may be needed to meet departmental requirements for certain actions and progress against the self-determination enablers.

To encourage reflection and innovation, whole of government and departmental actions will be considered against the self-determination continuum (articulated in the VAAF, *Figure 6*). The continuum recognises that government transformation is a process of continual improvement, and that government should actively build its capability to enable Aboriginal self-determination. It also acknowledges that different policies, initiatives and strategies across government are at different stages of advancing self-determination.

Figure 6. Continuum towards Aboriginal self-determination



3.2 Departmental Reporting Template

Questions in **bold** provide a recommended structure for departmental reporting, to ensure consistency across government. Text in *italics* is for guidance and provides additional information.

Section 1

Self-determination



What do you say publicly about your commitment to self-determination?

- *How does the department demonstrate its commitment to enabling self-determination?*
- *How does the department communicate and support its workforce, policies, programs and funded organisations to meet these expectations?*
- *This may take the form of a variety of difference documents, such as: standalone policy, practice guide or statement.*



How do you ensure the systematic application of the self-determination guiding principles in the development of policy, programs and initiatives?

- *The self-determination guiding principles (page 7) set a minimum standard for how all action to enable self-determination should be conducted.*
- *For example, the department may develop an overarching policy, or a process to be applied to all departmental initiatives, to ensure the guiding principles are applied.*



Do you have examples or case studies of approaches that have enabled or hindered enabling self-determination across the department?

- *Departments, policies, strategies and initiatives across government are all at different stages of advancing self-determination. There are many examples of promising practice across government, as well as initiatives that have faced challenges.*
- *Sharing examples of initiatives that have enabled self-determination, as well as those that have been less effective in achieving positive outcomes, will enable departments to learn from each other.*

Section 2

Actions – Whole of Government and Departmental

Please respond to these questions for each goal of the four reform domains (**People, Systems, Outcomes, Accountability**).

Consider departmental specific actions as well as the department's contribution to whole of government actions. DPC will coordinate reporting against whole of government actions, based on departmental reports and additional requests for information as necessary.



What actions is the department currently undertaking to achieve the goal?

- Reference relevant actions the department is undertaking in its approach to achieve the goal.
- Consider the department's policies, programs or initiatives related to enabling self-determination.
- How is each action consistent with the VAAF's self-determination enablers and guiding principles?
- How has the department worked with the Aboriginal community to develop and implement actions?
- Where does each action sit on the continuum towards self-determination? How will the department provide Aboriginal Victorians with the opportunity to progress each action further along the continuum in the future?



What outcomes has the department seen because of these actions?

- Consider whether the actions have been successful and had the intended effect in enabling self-determination. If the actions have not been successful, consider why this could be.



How can the department improve its actions to achieve the goal?

- What are the gaps between the department's actions, and achieving the goal? What is causing these gaps, and how do you plan to address these gaps?
- How can you add, change or stop certain actions to ensure you are better working towards the goal? What policies, programs and initiatives can you implement to progress further?

3.3 Monitoring and accountability

Annual departmental reporting

This Framework is designed to be dynamic, with actions that are updated over time as the public sector becomes more advanced and proficient at embedding approaches to enable greater self-determination into its core business. Departments will report yearly on their self-determination reform to encourage regular reflection, collaboration and innovation.

Departments will create the first report against this Framework by 30 June 2020, with regular reporting to occur annually. This will be an opportunity for departments to consider what they are currently doing to enable self-determination, and how that fits within the values of the VAAF and this Framework. Through this process, departments will then identify any strengths to build on and maintain, gaps and/or opportunities, and focus attention on planning how to achieve structural change in line with this Framework.

In addition to reporting on their departmental specific actions, each department will report on their contributions to whole of government actions. DPC will coordinate reporting against whole of government actions based on information provided by departments and further requests for information as necessary. Through this process, government will continue to engage with key stakeholders and Aboriginal governance forums to ensure that work to enable and advance self-determination remains consistent, coordinated and in line with community expectations over time.

The role of Secretaries' Leadership Group (SLG) on Aboriginal Affairs

SLG will act as the governance body for monitoring progress and approving strategic direction under this Framework. Annual departmental reports, as well as reporting on whole of government actions coordinated by DPC, will be provided to SLG and will inform reporting under the VGAAR. SLG will then review progress towards enabling self-determination including successes and challenges across government.

The role of the Aboriginal-led Evaluation and Review Mechanism

In 2019, DPC is developing an Aboriginal-led Evaluation and Review Mechanism in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians. The VAAF states that the Mechanism will track government's progress against the VAAF, including qualitative reporting on efforts to progress the self-determination guiding principles and enablers. The broader nature and scope of the Mechanism's role is still to be determined in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians. However, once the Mechanism is operational, it will take on a role in evaluating and reviewing this Framework and its associated reporting, as committed to in the VAAF.

Image: Darebin Parklands, Alphington. **Photo:** Mikaela Egan







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Image: Gunai Country, the Knob Reserve, Stratford.
Photo: Hollie Johnson

