



Guidelines for addressing cultural issues for State Events

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Introduction

NSW society respects and values cultural diversity. As a result, multicultural principles have been enshrined in Government policy and legislation in the State for over twenty years.

The Government also recognises the unique position of Aboriginal people and heritage in our society. As such Aboriginal cultural and heritage has enriched many official functions (see “Aboriginal Protocols”).

It is important that all people feel welcome and respected at official functions hosted by the NSW Government or one of its agencies. Therefore, individuals and institutions organising functions are expected to cater to the diversity of tastes, beliefs, and preferences of people attending.

Please note, the larger the function, the greater the expectation of ‘exact’ protocol. Similarly, functions held in the greater Sydney area are also expected to be more culturally inclusive with regards to venues, catering and etiquette, simply because agencies in this area have greater access to resources and supports.

Planning and consultation

Prior to issuing invitations, try and ascertain the possible requirements of the guests. These requirements may influence the choice of venue, caterer and protocol at the event.

To ascertain accurate dietary needs, request information on special dietary requirements of guests, where practicable, on any RSVP form. Where guests are being invited by phone, request this information when the invitation is extended and or the reservation is taken.

In cases when it is believed or known that the guest of honour, or a significant number of guests, has some special dietary requirements, more specific research and preparations are needed. For example, contacting an organisation that can advise the host on specific requirements.

Catering

Principal Statement: Organisers of official functions need to ensure, as much as possible, that individuals needs are accommodated, within the context of an official function. Providing appropriate foods and beverages is one consistent way of recognising and responding to peoples needs. As a matter of good practice, always serve a selection of vegetarian and meat foods on separate trays. A variety of non-alcoholic drinks should always be available.

The following guidelines regarding the dietary requirements of some religious groups are general descriptions only. For a full description of dietary requirements, contact the appropriate religious organisation.

Buddhist

If the guest of honour, or a significant proportion of guests are monks or nuns of the Buddhist religion, provide vegetarian food. Do not serve alcohol unless those guests advise that they have no objection to alcohol being available for other guests.

Lay-people of the Buddhist faith also prefer vegetarian food, and do not drink alcohol. It is acceptable, however, to serve alcohol to other guests at the function.

Again, it is wise to provide some vegetarian dishes at all functions to cater to the preferences of a significant part of the population.

Hindu

Do not serve meat and alcohol to guests of the Hindu faith, although alcohol on the premises for other guests is allowed.

Judaism

If the guest of honour is an observant member of the Jewish faith, or if this applies to a number of the guests, the services of a kosher caterer should be engaged. Jewish dietary law prohibits the consumption of pork products containing pork derivatives such as gelatine, lard and animal shortenings, as well as shellfish. There are also prohibitions against mixing meat with dairy products, including food preparation utensils. Procedures are also prescribed for the slaughter and preparation of meat which means that observant Jews will avoid meat that has not been prepared in this way.

The presence of alcohol on the premises is acceptable.

Islam

If Islam is the religion of the guest of honour or of a significant number of guests, the services of an halal caterer should be engaged. Islamic dietary law prohibits the consumption of pork, products containing pork derivatives such as gelatine, lard and animal shortenings, as well as shellfish.

The guest of honour should be asked if it would be preferred that alcohol was not served. If a small number of guests are observant Muslims, a small selection of halal products, on separate trays from other dishes, is appropriate. Alcohol on the premises for other guests is allowed.

Sikhs

Observant Sikhs do not drink alcohol or consume meat. Also, observant Sikhs do not smoke.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Agencies catering functions need to be mindful of the very high diabetes rate among Aboriginal people, especially those of mature age. People who are insulin dependent need to know exact meals times so they can plan their medication and 'therapeutic snacks' accordingly.

Other requirements**Choice of venue**

Sometimes, the guest of honour, or a significant number of guests, cannot drink alcohol or be in premises where alcohol is served for religious reasons. Therefore, in such cases where possible, try to avoid organising a function at a venue that regularly serves alcohol, even if it is intended not to offer alcohol at the function. This guideline applies particularly to devout Muslims and Sikhs. It is recognised that this may be difficult for agencies in some regional and rural communities.

Gambling is strictly against the precepts of the Muslim and Sikh faiths. Therefore, premises likely to present difficulties include licensed clubs, hotels, licensed restaurants and casinos. If such premises are to be used, organisers should:

- specify in the invitation that alcohol will not be served;
- consult prospective guests and explain the reason for the venue;
- ensure that guests do not have to walk through areas where alcohol is being consumed;
- ensure that alcohol is not on display in the function room.

Seating

In general, religious members (officials) should be seated at the front of the room, and lay members at the back.

Buddhist monks of the Theravada tradition, who come from Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Laos and Malaysia, and Muslim clerics, prefer not to be seated next to women.

Greeting/Receiving

Most people are comfortable shaking hands in greeting and parting with others.

However, women from some Asian-Buddhist communities, and Buddhist monks, may prefer a traditional greeting. In this instance, people should join their palms together and raise them up to face level while saying their greeting.

Some practising Muslims and members of the Jewish faith do not shake hands with the opposite sex. Again, this information can be ascertained when consulting with the appropriate agency. Usually observing how these people prepare to greet others is a good indication of their expectations and practices.

Dress

Most male lay participants at an official function will wear Western-style attire as designated on the invitation. However, some may attend in their national costumes, depending on the occasion.

In general, members of religious orders such as Christian priests, Buddhist monks and nuns, or Muslim Imams will wear religious gowns or robes.

Aboriginal Protocols

At official events, agencies should recognise the unique position of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Recognition should be appropriate to the type of event.

Major events such as Sector launches, major public events, citizenship ceremonies, conferences, international events and major festivals, should include a *'Welcome to Country'* by appropriate Aboriginal community elders. It is appropriate to contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) for information regarding relevant elders. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) may also be a resource for agencies hosting functions.

Speakers at such event should be encouraged to recognise the "country" and the appropriate Aboriginal community. Again, ATSIC and/or DAA will be able to provide the information required.

Other official events should include a *'Welcome to Country'* or an acknowledgment of country and community, by the event facilitator.

Hygiene and Quality

Host of official functions have an obligation to ensure appropriate hygiene and quality. The very wide range of circumstances in which official hospitality is provided makes it impractical to prescribe procedures and requirements. However, where agencies are engaging caterers, and are uncertain of how to ensure hygiene and quality are delivered, the use of a caterer who is a member of the Caterers Gold License is preferred. Details of such licence holders can be obtained from the Restaurant and Catering Association of NSW on telephone 9211 3500 and 1300 650 646 or facsimile 9211 3800.