

Case study 7: Ngarrama – A Night of Reflection and Reconciliation

Creating meaningful, visible acts of reconciliation that foster learning, respect and healing

Australia Day remains a divisive date, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as it marks the beginning of colonisation and ongoing trauma. Opportunities for large-scale community-led truth-telling and cultural recognition are limited, especially in mainstream public spaces.

Ngarrama, meaning “to sit, listen and know”, is the University of Newcastle’s flagship annual reconciliation event held on the eve of Australia Day. Established in 2022 and inspired by the Barangaroo Vigil, Ngarrama is a culturally rich community gathering that centres truth-telling, storytelling, performance and dialogue.

Co-led with community and held on Awabakal and Worimi Country, Ngarrama creates a unique space in higher education for honest reflection and shared commitment to healing. Attendees consistently express deep appreciation for the event, describing it as “A new tradition for our family” and a “great opportunity to learn about our history and culture.”

“It was so amazing to see all those people stand up and show up with an eagerness to learn from one another... on a day that can be really hard for a lot of mob and community.”

Loren Collyer, Bandjin woman Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Strategy and Leadership and Head of The Wollotuka Institute from the University of Newcastle

Supported by philanthropic partnerships, Ngarrama continues to evolve as a collaborative initiative that exemplifies community-led philanthropy in action – advancing cultural responsiveness, supporting historical acceptance, and facilitating impactful partnerships with community. It reflects key themes of respectful collaboration, embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in program design, and shifting public discourse through cultural leadership and visibility.



Figure 32. Ngarrama documentary photography courtesy Eddie O'Reilly.



Scan to watch the [Ngarrama video](#)



Impact (what the community is telling us):

- People are showing up: About 4,000 people attended in 2025, with “thousands” returning each year, clear evidence of ongoing community interest and relevance.
- The experience is genuinely positive: Across 2024–2025, 97.87% of surveyed attendees reported a positive experience, showing Ngarrama delivers what it promises.¹
- It builds social connection: In the same two-year study, more than 97% said Ngarrama brings the community together and projects a positive image of the region, which aligns with the event’s reconciliation aims.
- People feel welcome and learn: 94% felt welcome and included, and 90% said they learnt something new across 2024–2025, highlighting Ngarrama’s role in inclusive cultural learning.
- Awarded a ‘Golden Pineapple’ for Event of the Year at the 2022 Hunter Diversity and Inclusion Collective Awards.
- It strengthens place-based pride: 96%+ agreed Ngarrama strengthens local pride and is an important part of the region’s cultural life across 2024–2025, showing value that lasts beyond the night itself.



Figure 33. Ngarrama artwork by Belle Leonard.

Figure 34. Ngarrama documentary photography courtesy Eddie O'Reilly.

27. Olivier, L., & Calvin, S. (2026). Attendee research (2024–2025): Findings from the Ngarrama events. University of Newcastle. Unpublished report.