



Commissioner Romlie Mokak

Indigenous Evaluation Strategy
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins St East
Melbourne VIC 8003

17 August 2020

Dear Romlie,

RE: Australian Evaluation Society (AES) Response to the draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

The AES welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (the Strategy) released in June 2020.

Overall, the development of a whole of Australian Government Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is a positive step forward, and we commend the Commission's strong focus on policy and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In framing our response, we note the objective of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is to:

“Improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by having policy and program decisions informed by high quality and relevant evaluation evidence” (page 6).

The following response developed by the AES Indigenous Cultural and Diversity Committee (ICDC) makes eight overarching recommendations about the draft Strategy for your consideration. Background about strategies the AES has adopted to support, strengthen and build Indigenous and non-Indigenous capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use is at Attachment A.

Yours sincerely,

John Stoney
President



Our response

The AES Indigenous Cultural and Diversity Committee (ICDC) has met on several occasions to review the Strategy, Guidance and Background documents prepared by the Commission.

The development of the draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is a positive step in a long journey for improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While no single strategy, policy or program can achieve this outcome, there are a number of key considerations that pertain to evaluation of policies and programs that the committee would like to raise with the Commission as it finalises the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy later in 2020.

Our recommendations

Recommendation 1: Building cultural competency should be at the forefront in creating a culture of change when building capability and a culture of evaluation.

Issue: Building internal capacity and culture of evaluation within organisations and agencies will be critical to improving lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which is central to driving this Strategy. Imbedding evaluation into the workflow includes reflective learning processes and development practices.

Rationale: Co-design and participatory monitoring and evaluation practices should be foremost in the thinking and doing when working with First Nation peoples. Evaluation should be flexible and adaptive to meet needs within communities. It will be essential to improving the way organisations and agencies work to develop what is good. Shared learning should become a common place through community of practice approaches and other means. Agencies and organisations should adopt an approach that is more aligned with a learning organisation and strong leadership is required to lead change that ultimately improves the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Recommendation 2: The strategy needs a strong accountability mechanism to ensure application of Indigenous evaluation findings to Indigenous policy, planning and design of program and services.

Issue: There is variable/limited use of evidence (including evaluation) when formulating or modifying policies and programs with respect to Indigenous peoples (p. 5 Draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy).

Rationale: Without a strong requirement or imperative to use and apply evaluation findings to influence and shape Indigenous policy and planning, the extent to which evaluation can influence decision-makers and make a positive difference for Indigenous peoples is negligible. There is a risk that the Strategy will raise expectations of real change, however without a strong accountability mechanism, the Strategy will fail to be implemented in practice.

Irrespective of the framing, design, quality and conduct of Indigenous evaluation or evaluation with Indigenous peoples; the evaluations come to nothing if the findings do not consistently inform Indigenous policy and planning processes – locally, regionally and nationally.

Recommendation 3: Indigenous evaluation needs to be understood as distinct from evaluation of Indigenous peoples and communities

Issue: Indigenous evaluation is led by Indigenous people, informed by Indigenous values, views, cultures, knowledges, ways of knowing and ways of being.

Rationale: Indigenous leadership and control is critical to Indigenous Evaluation. If evaluations are to capture the evidence of progress, achievement and what works in Indigenous contexts and settings, then Indigenous peoples as experts in their lived experience, their community and country, need to be valued, affirmed and privileged.

Indigenous peoples are vital to unlocking insights and generating understanding for use in policy and planning. Indigenous evaluation leadership and control is vital if Indigenous views and values are to hold sway.

Recommendation 4: Create opportunities to affirm and value local Indigenous knowledge and expertise and to utilise and bring this capability to evaluation.

Issue: There is an acknowledged lack of Indigenous peoples with research and evaluation qualifications and experience; and building an Indigenous evaluation community will take a

long time. In addition, many Indigenous peoples do not want to be evaluators or researchers but do want to serve their communities.

Rationale: A non-deficit approach Indigenous evaluation capacity building starts at a different place. It values the cultural knowledge and expertise that resides within Indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples are experts in their culture, community and peoples. A non-deficit approach – in the first instance – seeks to bring this expertise to an Indigenous evaluation capacity building approach; as a critical part of an overall approach.

Recommendation 5: Consider the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 as a basis for building ‘culture at the centre’ of the Strategy; and conduct workshops about the Strategy with a committee of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

Issue: A strong Indigenous perspective or ‘voice’ is not clear within the draft Strategy in its present form.

Rationale: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 is based on work informed by Lowitja Institute which places culture at the centre of health, within the national health policy, as well as describing how that works. Adopting a similar approach to the Strategy would strengthen and more strongly reflect the importance of culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Input into the Strategy from a committee of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives will help improve the integration of culture into the Strategy and bring a stronger Indigenous voice.

Recommendation 6: Consider including Healing and Social and Emotional Wellbeing as a core principle of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

Issue: The principle of ‘healing and social and emotional wellbeing’ should be a clear principle underpinning the Strategy and its implementation. It would recognise and help to address the history of colonisation, racism, trauma and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

According to the Healing Foundation, community healing is a holistic process which addresses mental, physical, emotional and spiritual needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and involves connections to culture, family and land. Healing works best when solutions are culturally strong, developed and driven at a local level, and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (<https://healingfoundation.org.au/community-healing/>). Social and emotional wellbeing encompasses a range of broad concepts relating to a wholeness of Indigenous belief

systems and to belonging to an interconnected world of family, kinship, language, culture and country.

Rationale: Healing and social and emotional wellbeing as a core principle of the Strategy would reflect a holistic approach to achieving the overall objective of the Strategy. Evaluation practice which is healing informed and trauma aware, and adopted at every level of evaluation, or action, under the Strategy, would promote cultural safety and empowerment of Indigenous peoples and communities; and reinforce a co-design approach to dealing with the impact of intergenerational trauma.

In addition, the principle of Healing and Social and Emotional Wellbeing aligns strongly with the other recommendations suggested in this response.

Recommendation 7: In relation to the principle of Ethics within the draft Strategy, consider how to support more effective and friendly ethics approval processes for the conduct of Indigenous evaluation.

Issue: One of the core principles of the draft Strategy is ethical Indigenous evaluation practice. Ethics is an important principle for Indigenous evaluation. Current NHMRC and AIASTIS ethical guidelines that promote appropriate ethical practice is important to protect Indigenous peoples and communities from unethical and culturally inappropriate evaluation practice. It is also important for improving the quality of evaluation. However, some of the requirements in relation to ethical submissions can place an undue or unwieldy burden on evaluation practitioners who are working on evaluation projects in Indigenous communities.

Rationale: Practical action to improve, streamline and support more effective ethical processes will enable this principle to be implementable in the real world, while still respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and communities, and promoting better quality in Indigenous evaluation.

Recommendation 8: A whole of government approach under the Strategy needs to provide strong accountability for evaluation across Australian Government, State and Territory and Local Governments.

Issue: The objective of the Strategy is to ‘improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by having policy and program decisions informed by high quality and relevant evaluation evidence’. While a whole of government approach at the Australian Government level in the draft Strategy is welcome, policy and program responsibility for Indigenous peoples and communities, rests with Australian, State and Territory and Local Governments.

Rationale: For policy and program decisions to be informed by high quality and relevant evaluation evidence requires accountability in evaluation practice across all levels of

government. A whole of government approach which provides strong accountability for Indigenous evaluation across all levels of government is therefore required for the Strategy to meet its overall objective of improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ATTACHMENT A

Strategies the AES has adopted to support, strengthen and build Indigenous and non-Indigenous capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use include:

AES Indigenous Cultural and Diversity Committee

The Indigenous Cultural and Diversity Committee (ICDC) is one of four advisory committees that underpin AES governance. The purpose of the committee is to contribute to building a society of evaluators with an appreciation for, understanding of, and capacity to undertake, high quality Indigenous evaluation.

The committee's purpose is:

To strengthen and build Indigenous and non-Indigenous capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use by:

- Guiding and advising the AES Board on the importance of cultural competence in evaluation theory and practice to ensure quality evaluation and best practice;
- Advising the AES on the importance of supporting Indigenous evaluators, senior and emerging evaluators; and
- Ensuring the work of the Indigenous Culture and Diversity Committee incorporates, and is responsive to, the work of the Pathways, Vitality and Relationships committees.

(<https://www.aes.asn.au/aes-governance.html>)

The current members of the ICDC include:

Sharon Clarke (SA)
Kevin Dolman (WA)
Tony Kiessler (QLD)
Doreen Mandari (PNG)
Kiri Parata (QLD)
Doyen Radcliffe (WA)
Marica Tabualevu (FIJI)
Nicole Tujague (QLD)
Min Vette (NZ)
Nan Wehipeihana (NZ)

AES focus on culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use

The AES has a strong strategic and operational focus on diverse communities, inclusiveness and representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and other Indigenous members in the AES community.

This includes strengthening and building Indigenous and non-Indigenous capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use.

The AES Constitution (2018) which was formally adopted by a Special General Meeting of Members in August 2018 provides a statement of inclusiveness of Indigenous peoples in the preamble:

The AES aims to be inclusive of the diverse communities that make up its membership. It aims to be inclusive of members' nations, backgrounds, genders and abilities. One way that this inclusiveness is implemented is that the AES board at any given time, shall include, to the extent available, representatives of the groups that make up the AES community and have representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and other Indigenous members.

The AES recognises the unique position and contribution of Indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand and the many nation-states of the wider Australasian-Pacific region. To that end, as a society, and in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect, the AES supports and affirms the rights of Indigenous peoples as outlined United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

AES Strategic Plan 2019-2022

The Board formally adopted the (current) 2019-2022 Strategic Plan at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September 2019. The core domains include:

- *Cultural capacity:* Indigenous and non-Indigenous capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use.
- *Relationships:* Collaboration and partnerships to strengthen the field of evaluation
- *Pathways:* Clear professional and career pathways
- *Vitality:* An organisation meeting diverse member needs today and tomorrow

(https://www.aes.asn.au/images/aes_strategicPlan2019_22_finalWeb.pdf)

AES Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

The Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was the result of more than a year of collaborative work by the former Cultural Capacity and Diversity Committee (CCDC) and the Board. The AES RAP 2018-2019 comprises four pillars and ten actions relating to:

1. Relationships
2. Respect
3. Opportunities
4. Governance and Tracking

The next stage of the AES RAP Action Plan, Innovate will be developed over the next twelve months with Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the AES.

AES Indigenous Conference Supports Grants

The Indigenous conference support grants are awarded each year to new and emerging Indigenous evaluators to attend the AES International Conference. The 2019 AES conference and workshop program were held in Sydney from 15-19 September 2019, 14 support grants were awarded in 2019. The 2020 AES conference has been postponed to September 2021 due to COVID19 restrictions. A professional mentoring network pilot program focussing on emergent Indigenous evaluators will be trialled later in 2020.

Awards for Excellence in Indigenous evaluation practice

The AES Awards for Excellence in Evaluation are awarded annually and recognise exemplary evaluation practice, evaluation systems or evaluation capacity building and provide significant peer recognition for leading evaluators, leading evaluations and evaluation best practice. The award recipients represent best-in-class for each award category.