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**Reconciling tensions between principle and practice in indigenous evaluation**

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The expectations placed on an evaluator working in an Indigenous setting can be great. The ideal is to build trusting relationships, employ culturally sensitive methods, foster broad community participation, transfer skills, contribute to positive social change and empower. There is a very real danger that the 'bar' may be set higher than any evaluator can realistically be expected to 'jump'.

The hard reality is that evaluators are often cultural outsiders with limited resources and precious little time to spend in the field. They may lack first hand knowledge of the local people, their culture, the place and the program. A short time frame and a need to work across many project sites may preclude the possibility of bonding with participants or developing a deep understanding of the context. The evaluator may struggle to 'hear' correctly and elicit information from Indigenous people due to cultural barriers and poor rapport. The prevailing social environment may not be conducive to easy change. Perhaps only a handful of local people will choose to become involved. Furthermore there can be a contradiction between the evaluator as 'program judge' and the right of Indigenous peoples to make their own decisions about their future directions.

All of this can give rise to tensions between evaluation principle and practice. This paper draws on recent work to identify pragmatic strategies that practitioners might employ in Indigenous contexts to address these tensions.