



"It's about involving Aboriginal people in every aspect of decision making": Understanding the enablers and drivers of evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia.

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# Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Palawa people, upon whose land we meet today. We pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging, and we extend this acknowledgement to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here with us today.





# Overview

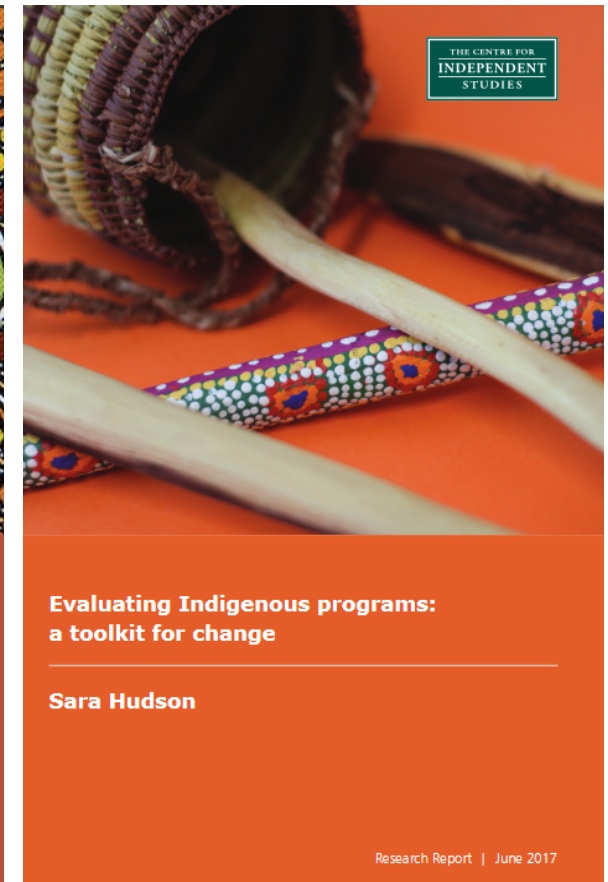
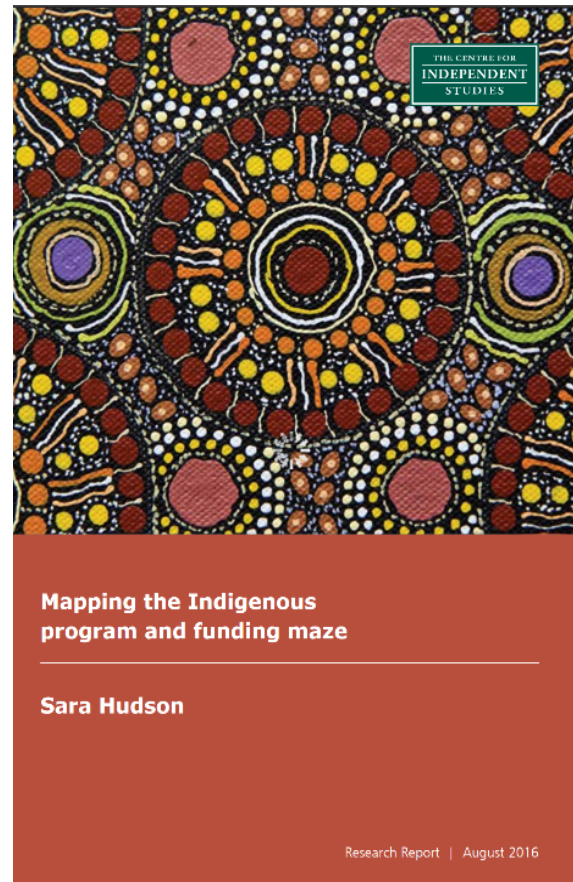
- What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous (higher education) contexts? And Why Is This Important?
- 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship (and Participant Pool)
- Key themes x 3
- Levers for change x 14
- Domains of control x 3
- Recommendations
- Follow Up Workshop (see handout)
- Conclusion
- Contact Details



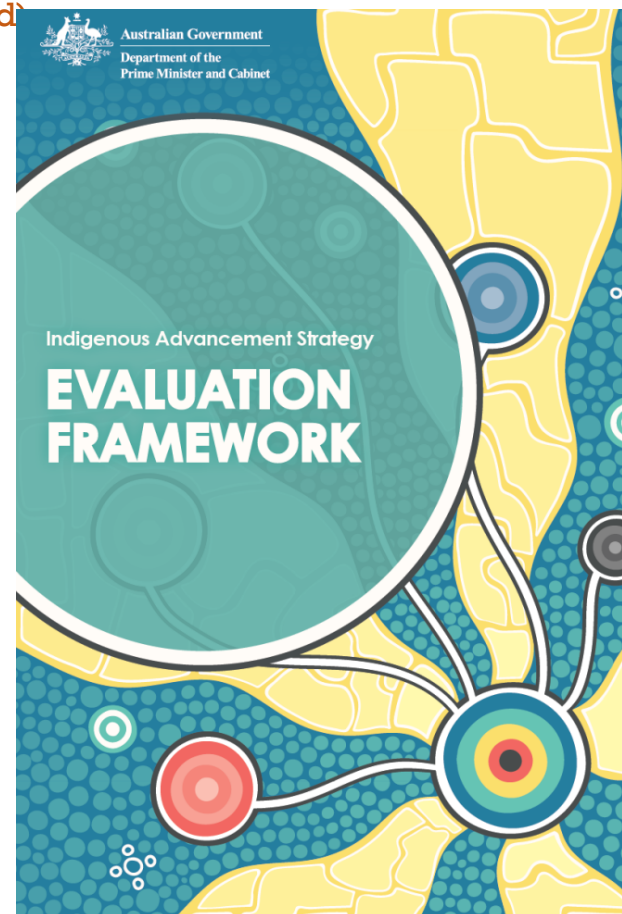
# What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous contexts?

- There have been calls for more innovative approaches to be used in Indigenous evaluation contexts, including the application of decolonising evaluation methods that are more closely aligned with Indigenous knowledge systems

(LaFrance & Nichols 2010; Morelli & Mataira 2010; Hurworth & Harvey 2012; Hudson 2016, 2017).



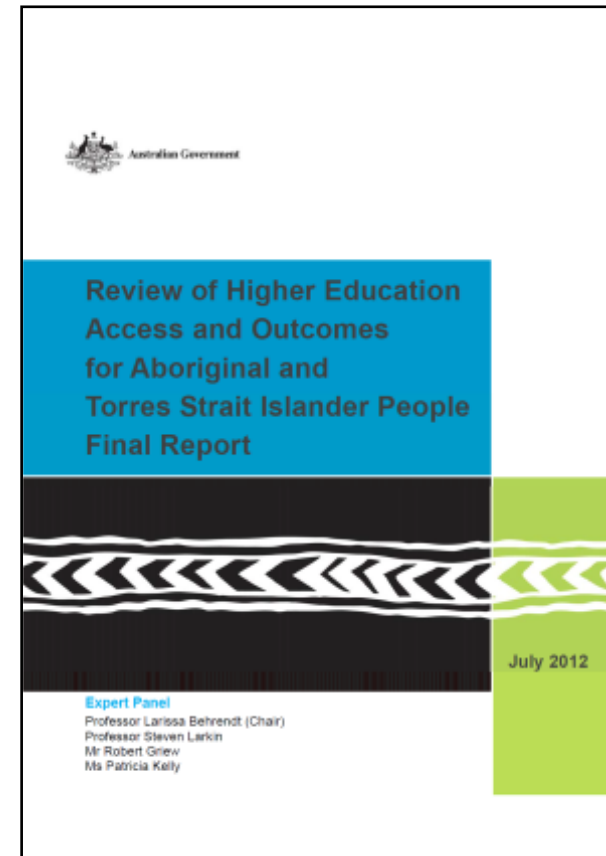
# What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous contexts? (continued)



# What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education?

*“While considerable data was available through departmental program-based reporting to monitor progress, there was not always sufficient evidence to assess the overall success or otherwise of specific programs. In some cases, there were no independent evaluations of programs for the Panel to draw on.”*

(Behrendt et al 2012, p154)





# Why is this important?

There are unique considerations in the Indigenous HE space:

- *On Stony Ground* – emphasised importance of Indigenous governance and participation in Australian universities (Moreton-Robinson et al 2011)
- Behrendt Review (2012) – recommended the development of an Indigenous HE monitoring and evaluation framework
- HEPPP 2014 NPP Grant – ‘building an evidence base about Indigenous pathways and transitions into HE’
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (2016) – recommended development of an Indigenous HE Performance Framework
- Release of the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*



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## VIEWPOINT

### What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?

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Indigenous participation and achievement in education is an issue of international significance. Within Australia, the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012) provided a clear mandate for investing in policies and programs that support Indigenous pathways, participation and achievement in higher education. While there have been notable investments and significant national reforms in Indigenous higher education over the past few years, the recommendation within this report to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework is yet to be actioned. Similarly, in 2015 prior to its abolishment, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council recommended the development of a ‘performance framework’, which also appears to have been ignored. In parallel, the Productivity Commission, Australian National Audit Office and subsequently the Australian Government have emphasised the importance of strengthening evaluation in Indigenous program and policy contexts across Australia. The release of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework in 2017 is one recent example. Bringing these two national conversations together, and drawing on current scholarship in this space, this paper describes what we currently know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. We point towards key areas for action to move this agenda forward as a means to better support Indigenous participation and achievement in higher education.

**Keywords:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; Indigenous; evaluation; education; higher education; policy

# 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship

## Aim

To investigate ways of strengthening the evaluation of Indigenous Higher Education (HE) programs and policies in Australia

## Project Team

- James Smith
- Kellie Pollard
- Kim Robertson
- Fiona Shalley



# 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship (continued)

- CDU Human Research Ethics Committee approval (HE17005)
- Data Collection:
  - 15 interviews with policy-makers working in Indigenous and/or equity policy and program contexts in DPMC and DET.
  - **24 interviews with Indigenous scholars/thinkers in HE education across Australia.**
- Thematic Analysis:
  - privileged Indigenous voices;
  - maintained a strengths-based position

# Participant Pool – Indigenous Scholars

- 24 participants
- Two inclusion criteria - identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; work in a senior Indigenous focused role within a HE institution in Australia.
- Range of roles (DVC, PVC, Director, Manager, Strategist, Researcher, Lecturer).
- Average time working in the higher education sector = 17 Yrs (n=17).
- Participants from ALL States and Territories across Australia.
- Diversity in preferences to remain anonymous vs attribution.





# Participant Pool – Indigenous Scholars

(continued)

Multiple language groups and regions across Australia including but not limited to:

- Worimi
- Palawa
- Ngugi
- Birapai
- Wakka Wakka
- Noongar
- Kungarakung
- Tharwal
- Kurna
- Gurindji
- Narungga Ngarrindjeri
- Kabi Kabi
- Anaiwan
- Far North Queensland
- Boigu Island
- Pertame (Southern Arrernte)
- Tugga-Gah Wiradjuri
- Stolen Generation.



# Thematic Analysis

## 3 Key Overarching Themes

- Conceptualising 'evaluation' as a broad term
- Towards a greater appreciation of qualitative evidence
- Towards a greater accountability



# Thematic Analysis – Enablers/Drivers

1. Incentivising cultural competence;
2. Growing Indigenous leadership;
3. Addressing white privilege and power;
4. Valuing Indigenous knowledges and prioritising Indigenous epistemologies;
5. Embracing political challenges as opportunities;
6. Recognising sovereign rights;
7. Increasing funding and resources;
8. Leading innovative policy development, implementation & reform;
9. Investing in strategy development;
10. Investing in cultural transformation, change and quality improvement;
11. Improving Indigenous student outcomes;
12. Promoting cultural standards and accreditation;
13. Reframing curricula to explicitly incorporate Indigenous knowledges and practices; and
14. Investing in an Indigenous workforce.



National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous  
Cultural Competency in Australian Universities

October 2011

# 1. Incentivising cultural competence



*You can't offer people a culturally safe study and work environment and then expect them to compromise something about their cultural integrity to such a degree that it has no relevance at all to our people. So that's why this whole concept of cultural competency is very critical to research, to teaching, to student supports, to engagement, to partnerships and pathways ... (Grace)*





## 2. Growing Indigenous Leadership

*Aboriginal people leading evaluation. Actually being at the front of the evaluation process and leading it, not just being a stakeholder or being a small part of it...we could be leading it. We could be leading the evaluation.*  
(Jacqui)

***It's about involving Aboriginal people in every aspect of decision making....in its original form, it meant[s] that Aboriginal people were engaged at every level of the university.*** (Eric)



### 3. Addressing White Privilege & Power

*“When you are surrounded and immersed in a system that is not your own, it is very hard to get a footing, be able to build. Of course, in the neoliberalist world, which has impacted upon the university with its madness for compliance, you can actually end up being punished because you don't get that footing. (Tracey Bunda)*

*...Indigenous people have probably come to try and better understand and appreciate the non-Indigenous one [ontology] because they've had to... I don't think there's been that sort of interest necessarily from the other way (Steve Larkin)*



## 4. Valuing Indigenous knowledges and prioritising Indigenous epistemologies



*One of my colleagues just recently...criticised Indigenous standpoints to me because he said well, as a whitefella I can't criticise {cthat because I just can't comment on it.*  
(Brian)

*Aboriginal people, when they go into a university, they want Indigenous courses about health and education to be laden with content about Aboriginal peoples, they want university services to be Indigenised, they want to see Aboriginal staff inside universities.* (Lester-Irabinna Rigney)



## 5. Embracing political challenges as opportunities

*You know you've got a change in government every four years. They need to make their mark and stamp on particular things. So things come and go. A lot of times, there's no reference back to what's been done previously... 'Oh, here, we'll try something new' which is really something old that has just got a new name.*  
(Ursula)

*If you actually look at things like the Closing the Gap report, which, let's face it, it's been - that report shows that the government's failed dismally in almost every area. Right? Now higher ed was not in the Closing the Gap report and yet we have sustained, we have sustained or increased levels of Indigenous higher education participation over that time without a national priority focus on it. So imagine what we could do if there was one? (Amber Collins)*





## 6. Recognising sovereign rights



*...We're not a part of the equity community, our rights and freedoms stem on our sovereignty, which is something totally different than the notion of trying to create a more equitable society. (David)*

*As a First Nations person, as a sovereign person, it should be at the centre rather than within equity...the simple locating of Aboriginal business in equity means we're not equal...[yet] it's a fundamental human right... (Zac)*



## 7. Increasing funding and resources

*“Most claim that they’re underfunded and that the evaluation mechanisms come from the Aboriginal dollar coming in from the Commonwealth. The universities are happy about equity if somebody else is funding it. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney)*

*The university data collection in relation to Indigenous students is often as a result of the need to report and acquit to Commonwealth funds rather than necessarily as a mechanism for accurate reporting and evaluation for our own purposes... (Amber Collins)*



## 8. Leading innovative policy development, implementation and reform

*...KPIs for those evaluations need to be set in place in consultation with our people so that the evaluation has some meaning for the people that it's supposed to be relevant to, otherwise you've just got bureaucrats sitting in Canberra. And I think the whole IAS has been an absolute prime example of how sometimes great intentions can go incredibly wrong. (Grace)*

*“When there is a fundamental policy shift - which there recently has been with the ISSP - and the fact that we're now shifting to a completions-based target, that is fundamentally altering where we are investing our time, energy and effort... So when you start to put it into practice, naturally that's where the gaps, the issues and the flaws start to appear. (Cheryl Godwell)*



## 9. Investing in strategy development

*We set up a traffic light system...they [university executive] really like it because they can quite easily see we're travelling well with our student numbers and we are increasing, so it's easy to see the stats ...(Leslie)*

*When I first arrived, in the first week I was here, they launched a 10 year Indigenous strategy and my first year we developed a suite of plans that sit underneath that strategy...I believe that the plans are important to provide a foundation of what needs to be done, but then how we're going to evaluate [that] as well.*

*(Leanne Holt)*





# 10. Investing in cultural transformation, change and quality improvement

*When the new [ISSP] guidelines and the new process I suppose started at the beginning of this year, we put a lot of thought into what are the things that we need to keep hold of until we get a better picture on things...*

*What do we change? What are we required to change because the guidelines no longer allow it. With the change in guidelines, one of the other possibilities for things that we could do differently and now there's that opportunity. So we actually gave it a really good go.*

*...so you're kind of constantly making the changes rather than having the time to evaluate how effective the changes have been. So it can be a little bit of a treadmill. (Colleen Hayward AM)*



# 11. Improving Indigenous student outcomes

*Like someone can come to uni and we sort of Westernise their failures because they quit after a year or so. But you know, then their nephew comes the following year and he graduates. Do you know what I mean? So then in and of itself that person who came for the year, you know, it doesn't matter to their family whether they passed or failed, they actually came and made it seem possible, you know? So that can be conceived as a success. (Brad)*

*...So we screen students when they come into our system, across a number of dimensions, both academic and non-academic; and financial as well.. We're cataloguing support across the university so that we can map or track how students interact with the university...These students are going to come to our university if we offer the right conditions for them.(Paul)*



## 12. Promoting cultural standards and accreditation



*In terms of the WINHEC evaluation and accreditation...it involves site visits by three academics, from - they usually get one from the Pacific, North-America, one from Europe, and one from your home [country]. So you get three different perspectives in terms of the evaluation. It's quite rigorous in what they do...(Zac)*

*There are elements of the [cultural] standards that you would say that - the whole institution – the university should be part of cultural competency as well. (Kathy)*



# 13. Reframing curricula to explicitly incorporate Indigenous knowledges and practices

*We've done stuff here at this university where we've mapped how many courses use Indigenous information or incorporate Indigenous information. We've talked with people, we've had training courses to help them, but actually I would like some real reporting lines on how the universities take that up. (Stephanie Gilbert)*

*If you just look at those universities who run units around Indigenous related issues, some of them can look quite good. But it depends what sort of rubbish, or not rubbish, they're teaching. The evaluation of those, which has traditionally never been done by Aboriginal people, so some of the courses, we know, are very-very poor quality because Aboriginal students all over Australia, complain about them; and the Indigenous content is very poor. (Maggie Walter)*





# 14. Investing in an Indigenous workforce

*I think employing the indigenous people at that higher level, the manager level, the executive level. That's a huge thing that we find and I know that that's where the government are moving towards anyway, especially in the ISSP guidelines. (AK)*

*...we're raising Indigenous employment outcomes...that cultural competency issue, I think, comes back to that institutional commitment and change, which will drive great employment outcomes and retention... (Kathy)*



# Three Domains of Control



# Recommendations

- Prioritise the development of a National Indigenous HE Performance and Evaluation Strategy
- A suite of Indigenous HE targets as part of the Closing the Gap refresh
- Stories and narratives explicitly incorporated into reporting and evaluation processes examining the impact and outcome of Indigenous HE
- Development of innovative qualitative evaluation strategies aligned with Indigenous methodologies and methods
- Accountability in Indigenous HE contexts must be viewed as a shared responsibility



# Recommendations (continued)

- Performance measures relating to WOU approaches to Indigenous HE should be embedded into senior exec contracts and regularly reviewed
- Expand scope of Indigenous-focused HE accreditation standards
- Parallel capacity building – evaluation knowledge/skill development; and Indigenous leadership and governance
- Invest in enablers and drivers of evaluation, with preference given to those relating to the domain of Indigenous control
- Indigenous HE units established in Aust Gov (separate to equity units)





# Follow-up workshop

- NCSEHE organised a national workshop in April 2018
- Co-facilitated by JS and KR
- 16 attendees (9 Indigenous)
- Reps from Aust Gov, NATSIHEC, TEQSA, Universities Australia
- Report here:
  - [https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WS3\\_-\\_CompleteReport\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WS3_-_CompleteReport_FINAL.pdf)







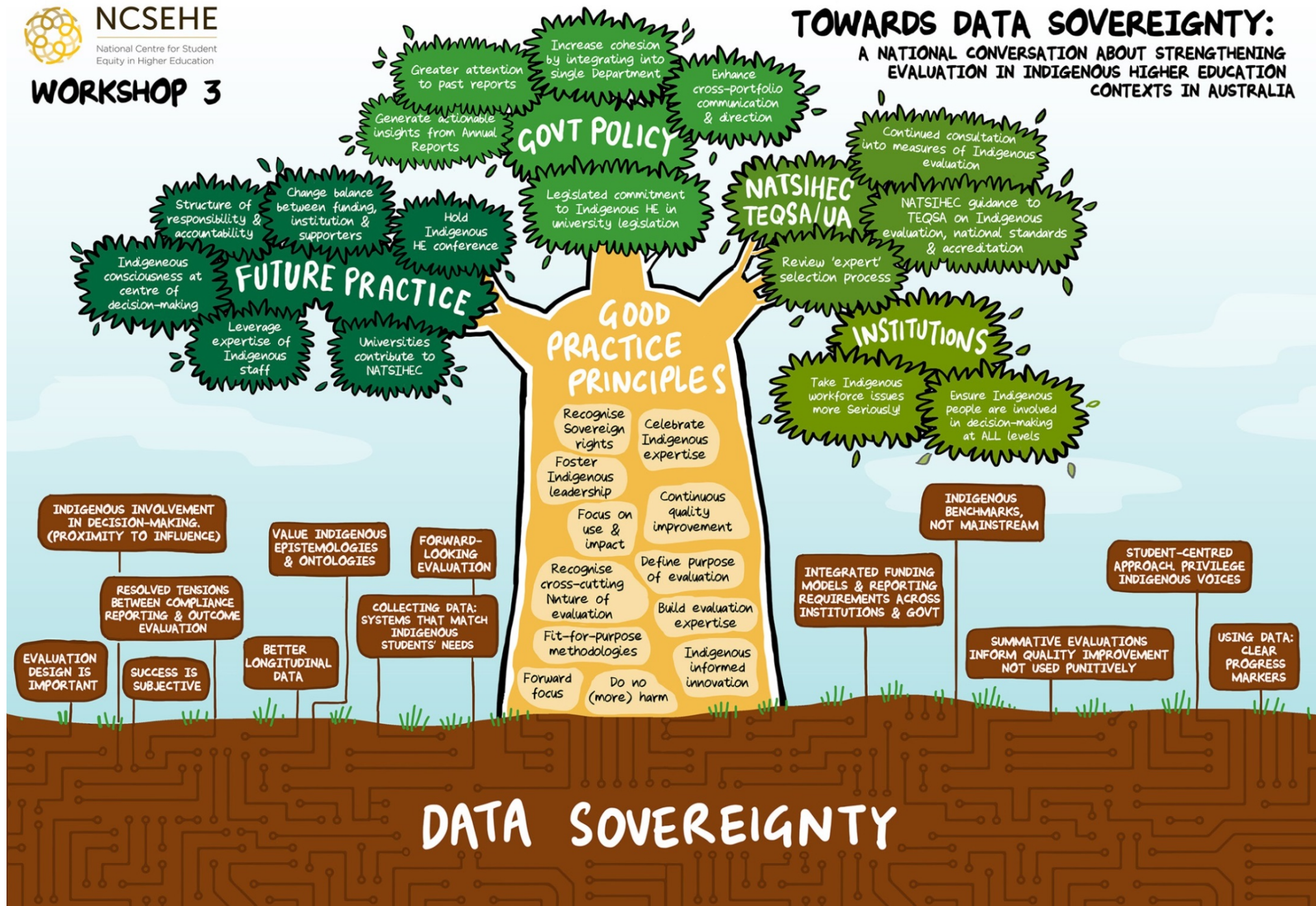
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National Centre for Student  
Equity in Higher Education

## WORKSHOP 3

## TOWARDS DATA SOVEREIGNTY:

A NATIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT STRENGTHENING  
EVALUATION IN INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION  
CONTEXTS IN AUSTRALIA



# Conclusion

- Evaluation in Indigenous HE contexts has been in a state of flux for decades
- Evaluation is currently defined broadly by the sector; qualitative evidence (stories/narratives) are under valued; and accountability is poor
- Indigenous data sovereignty is a central feature of what is required, including an appreciation of decolonising and/or Indigenous methodologies/practices
- 14 enablers/drivers of change have been identified – with three domains of control
- 17 recommendations were made
- Full Report: [https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/JamesSmith\\_FellowshipReport\\_FINAL\\_Small.pdf](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/JamesSmith_FellowshipReport_FINAL_Small.pdf)





# Acknowledgements

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- Universities Australia
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- Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet





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# CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF POTENTIAL PERFORMANCE PARAMETERS TO STRENGTHEN INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN AUSTRALIA

