

Productivity Commission inquiry: draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

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For further information or questions about this submission

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Background

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.

About Social Ventures Australia (SVA)

SVA is a not-for-profit organisation that works with partners towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. We believe that this will be achieved when all Australians are empowered, have a voice in decisions that impact them, have a sense of belonging and experience social inclusion. SVA believes that belonging for all Australians requires, and is enabled through, specific recognition and respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge and cultures. We acknowledge and support the expression of self-determination that is outlined in the Uluru Statement of the Heart.

SVA is not a traditional service delivery organisation. We work at the intersection of the government, social purpose and business sectors. We provide advice on strategy and evaluation, funding and make investments in partner organisations to significantly increase their social impact.

Context for this submission

In making this submission we acknowledge that self-determination, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), is the foundational driver of better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We understand that self-determination requires that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have autonomy, self-governance, voice and participation in all elements of government policy, program and service design.

As a non-Indigenous organisation, we aim to share our perspective in this submission as a contribution to thinking and debate. This perspective is informed by the recommendations and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations with whom we have worked as evaluators. However we believe that, consistent with the principles of self-determination, the views and perspectives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations must be prioritised in this inquiry and should drive outcomes from this review.

Our response

SVA commends the valuable thought and consideration incorporated in the draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (IES), particularly the emphasis on *centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges* and the proposed establishment of an Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation (OIPE) to oversee and guide the implementation of the IES.

As stated in our first submission, we recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to self-determination must inform all aspects of an IES. We understand that a critical component of self-determination is data sovereignty, defined as "the right of a nation to govern the collection, ownership, and application of its own data".¹ This means that attention needs to be paid both to what information and evidence is collected, as well as the lens through which the evidence is interpreted and understood.

¹ The University of Arizona, Native Nations Institute on Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance

Based on our expertise we make the following observations and recommendations in the finalisation of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy:

1. Adequate resourcing of the Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation (OIPE) and the Indigenous Evaluation Council (IEC)

To ensure the successful implementation of the IES, and a 'maturing' of practice as outlined in the strategy, the role of the Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation (OIPE) is essential.

We note that the capacity for the OIPE to execute the proposed functions will be dependent on the provision of adequate and long term resourcing. The OIPE must have sufficient funding, scale and longevity to allow for a continued focus on mission (instead of on funding protection) and to signal to all actors in the sector that the commitment to change in evaluation practice is valued.

There are a range of functions that will require careful consideration around resourcing, and we note in particular the need for adequate resourcing for both the OIPE and the IEC to enact the proposed function of *engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations to facilitate their input into the above functions*. The ability for the IEC to be an effective and legitimate governance mechanism will be dependent on having time and resources to invest in building relationships and partnerships with a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, community controlled organisations, representative councils, communities and individuals. Navigating complex community dynamics and building trust around a new strategy and approach will take time, but without this the IES will face significant risk of not meeting the primary principle of *centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges*.

2. An expanded set of functions for the Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation (OIPE)

We recommend that further consideration on the role of the OIPE is made, including:

- The capacity of the OIPE to build evidence (by commissioning, not conducting) outside of proposed policy or program evaluation plans where there remain gaps relevant to the agreed set of evaluation priorities.
- The role of the OIPE in advising in the development of indicators for success and wellbeing, particularly to support Action 6 proposed in the draft strategy. We note the recommendation made in our first submission:
 - *Delivering better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people requires a sophisticated and informed understanding on the appropriate measures and indicators of success. This is only possible with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples voice and participation in the design of, and decision making on, indicators of success. Specific emphasis is required to ensure that culture and cultural practices are understood by governments to be integral to informing better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

3. Building the capability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as evaluation practitioners

Investment is required to build and develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluation and community researcher workforce, with specific consideration for the capacity for

procurement policies to be levers for increasing employment pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We note the recommendation within the strategy that: *The Head of Evaluation Profession should develop a strategy to build a cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluators within the APS, which may include structured training, networking, mentoring and secondment opportunities.* We recommend that a comprehensive workforce strategy is considered to ensure that there is support and pathways for an increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access training and professional pathways in evaluation practice.

4. Building evaluation capability within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to catalyse further Indigenous led evaluation

Beyond a workforce strategy, it is critical that there is recognition within the strategy of the importance of building the evaluation capability within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Building this capability requires enabling organisations, particularly where they are in receipt of Commonwealth funding, to engage in all phases of the evidence cycle including evaluation design, implementation and ongoing monitoring. Investment in Indigenous led evaluation processes has the potential to bridge significant gaps in evidence behind current policy and practice.