

Productivity Commission Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Project

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Submission provided by: Anonymous

This is an oral submission to the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy project. The information contained therein was provided by phone by the individual for Commission staff to assist in documenting in written form. The submitter has agreed that this is as a correct reflection of their views and has approved it for publication on the Productivity Commission website.

1. This submission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the language groups' lands of Australia and pays respects to our Elders past and present. In making this submission, those who have gone before us are acknowledged—their courage, their strivings and their great works and successes in achievements.
2. "The family clans – each individual families are identified of the group as attached to their land – their connectedness and meanings in the broader picture of the earth and of life" "Because of the structure of a circle our ancestors were responsible to look after their own special areas, within their own individual families. And the respect of culture is understood as a system of rules governing behaviour – then it needs to engage itself with that system"¹.

Introduction

3. I am a proud Gomeri/Gamilaraay woman and I have had a long career in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and programs, in government and non-government organisations (NGOs). I am pleased and privileged to have the opportunity to provide input into what I consider to be an important inquiry, with the potential to make a real difference for our peoples, which is something that is on my heart—a better future for our children and families.
4. In preparation for this submission, I have spoken with widely recognised and respected Elders, who carry a range of experience, knowledge and connections. They regard this Evaluation and Inquiry as significant. Some of these Elders have advised Ministers and Prime Ministers. Some are part of one of the largest Aboriginal families in Australia. They are all Traditional Owners and some were raised in remote areas. I have their agreement and blessing with the points that I am going to make, and we have agreed the basic bottom lines, which I will discuss in this submission.

Core principles

5. Evaluation is a wonderful thing and a point from which you can really make a difference. The most important objective for the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be at the centre of the process. To this end, the overarching principles of the Strategy should align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples².

¹ **THEODORA NANDU, please be advised Ms Nandu is now passed her words live on.** From the Port Keats Wadeye area, a Traditional Landowner belonging to the Kardu Diminin tribe.

I am sure all Australians have some kind of a dream. I will be talking about my dreams—that is the land, the centre of my heart. I have a history for it. I say on behalf of the ownership is that it is really the life and the way of our people live in with that spirit, related to the land. parlinfo.aph.gov.au

² <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>

6. A priority must be the empowerment of Indigenous people. Approaches enshrining true empowerment are contained in the AMSANT NGO Partnership Principles³ and the ACFID Effective Development Principles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People⁴, which closely align with the UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Problems with a “programmed” model of funding and blanket approaches

7. The current blanket approach of delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – whereby block funding is paid to organisations in a “programmed” model – does not work. It results in funds going into administration and it is difficult for the money and the benefit to trickle down to the people it is meant to assist.
8. In some remote communities there may be 1,500 people, of which around 1,000 people are in need of services. For of those 1,000 people, large amounts of money are being pushed into programs delivered through government organisations and NGOs, which go to paying for administration, staff training, wages, cultural capability building, and airfares for travel. In some cases, that same amount of money would have paid for a house for every person in the community, and home ownership is a key Australian wealth platform.
9. We need to do something different because none of the current approach seems to be doing any good. The COAG targets are not on track, the rates of incarceration and removal are alarming, and more and more money is being spent on so many programs, the money is being (poured down the drain).
10. The programmed approach is inefficient and duplicative. In one of my previous jobs, I was part of a regional committee attended by program staff involved in a community trial, and our role was to work on service mapping and integration. We sat there and went around the room each introducing ourselves and our programs. One person would say they delivered services for a child aged 0 to 2, and another would say they provided the same service for a child aged 0 to 6, and so on. In this small community, a lot of money was being paid to different organisations for targeted cohorts essentially delivering the same or very similar services. This is inefficient. This is duplication. There are other ways of doing things. It is also very confusing for community. We are a holistic culture, characterized by the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.
11. Currently what happens is Governments come up with a wonderful new program and try to roll it out to an entire cohort, with no reference to what it means for a person’s life, future, priorities or happiness. Surely, we must want, as Australians, the best for our First Nations people. Otherwise, why would we be spending so much money? But the money is being channelled into blanket approaches that we all know will not work. They are rolled out, then they don’t work, and we then spend even more money trying to get it right.

Focusing on services for individuals

12. The concept of the *program* is the problem. My elders feel it is very important to get rid of the administration and place the focus onto the individual. Instead of a situation where money goes to an organisation to deliver a program, that same money should be earmarked for services to individuals and families. This individual or family approach would

³ <http://www.amsant.org.au/apont/background-ngo-partnership-principles-2/>

⁴ [ACFID Effective-Development-Practice Aboriginal & Torres-Strait-Islander-Communities.pdf](#)

involve a case plan with agreed goals. The family or individual must be central to formulating these goals, and resources provided to enact them. Funding should not be paid to individuals directly but delivered through accredited providers that deliver services to the individual. This is something very different from the old block-funding model.

13. Individuals and families must be central to developing a case plan around their own goals, which could reference the broader Closing the Gap targets. A single plan should deliver a whole range of services. For example, a family may need assistance with domestic violence, trauma and unemployment. A case plan may involve trauma counselling alongside family healing, help with getting the kids to school, qualifications attainment and employment assistance for uncles and aunts, mothers and fathers, and housing support. Case plans should be flexible but still operate within certain parameters (e.g. limited to health, family safety, employment or education). Indigenous people and Indigenous accredited organisations must deliver these services, alongside mainstream services.
14. An example of this type of model is the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), where an amount of funding is allocated to an individual, and where the individual makes decisions about where their funding goes as part of their case plan. This is a user-targeted system that seems to be working. Services are priced and based on SMART goals with agreement from the individual who is the user. The approach is a Whole of Government and Whole of Community approach.
15. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have choice about which services to use, and services must be delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A footprint already exists for this approach, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), as well as peak organisations like the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), largely know who the clients are, and are already delivering excellent quality services, substantially via people who identify.
16. Resistance to an individually focused service model could be borne out of self-interest. There are a number of people employed in government and in NGOs specifically to work in this area that may stand to lose their jobs. However, the focus of our actions must be on the best possible futures of children not loyalty to people employed in programs jobs.

Evaluation and review

17. Evaluation then becomes about the outcomes for families. Once a case plan is in place it should be periodically reviewed—*did it work? Were the goals achieved? At what price? Was the provider paid in a timely manner? Did the provider provide the service? Did I achieve my goals, which ultimately lead to a fruitful future for me and my family?* For example, if the case plan allows \$20,000 for a family to send their kids to school for a year, it is easy when the case plan is reviewed to determine whether this has happened or not. This type of data can be easily tracked. As a core principle, the user needs to be at the centre of the evaluation—*I get the service and I am involved in the review.*
18. Under a programmed approach, a lot of funding goes to doing evaluation. Those things cost a lot of money in real life. Evaluators get a real job, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed in quasi roles, often without pay to participate in evaluation. Public servants fly in and out en masse to a community to find out whether this or that is working while the local people are living below the poverty line. This approach is ineffective because trust is important when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They know whether people are being genuine or not. If you are not trusted by Indigenous people, they will not talk to you. Or they will answer “yes” and nod their heads, or say what you want them to say. Ask yourself how you feel being paid while the poorest are not?

19. This type of evaluation also imposes a huge burden on communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over being evaluated all the time. They do not want to be evaluated any more. We are continuing to build the capacity of organisations, not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that just perpetuates the problem.
20. I was involved in reviews of the Australian Government's Basics Card. We found the Basics Card program is very disadvantaging, and that Aboriginal people were absolutely, overwhelmingly sad about that card and to be treated in that way. It was a punitive and ineffective measure and created a lot of shame for people. It does not teach financial literacy, and to get on in life, people do need to know that. In the end, the review did not change the program and the program endures—possibly because it saves the Government money. A better alternative would be to stop that program and replace it with individual case plans, reviewed every six months, if necessary. Teach people, and future generations financial literacy, instead of limiting their money supply.

Putting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the centre

21. A priority for the Indigenous Evaluation Framework should be that it enacts empowerment. Policies may include blanket, overarching target areas for attaining a good life, but the people who are targeted by a policy should also be the ones driving it, instead of it being driven by others' considerations or ideas. In the end, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is good for them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be in the driver's seat for the services being delivered to them for their benefit.

Conclusions and bottom line

22. The bottom line, agreed by my Elders for this submission, is **no more administration**. Instead, we need jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We need to keep their families together and stop children, young people, and fathers from being removed. Young men need their fathers to be role models, we cannot keep removing key people in families as this is creating an absent parents' paradigm—neglect. We need to acknowledge the need for healing. We have to make sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are supported to jobs, kids are off the street, going to school, and are right for the future. We can round all this off by saying that there should be **no more administration**, and that resources should go directly to helping families.
23. This submission process is an opportunity to do something different. Something that is innovative—even if it is a trial. If government wants to reduce the alarming COAG indicators of Indigenous disadvantage and reduce spending, then here is an opportunity. The current arrangement of blanket funding to organisations to deliver programs to cohorts of people is fundamentally wrong and does not work. Funding intended to build the capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is instead building capacity in organisations. Individualised and family-level case plans delivered wherever possible by Indigenous people working for accredited Indigenous organisations can build capacity, save money and deliver lasting change for the better for our peoples. We need to build Indigenous capacity to do this work and recognise Indigenous culture as key knowledge.
24. This is a real opportunity to make a difference and an important evaluation, we want to congratulate government on leading this initiative. There has to be a different way, we are *not the problem*⁵, we are a First Nations peoples and real peoples not just numbers.

⁵ Rosalie Kunoth-Monks (*I am not the problem*)

25. It would be so wonderful for Australia to stand up at the United Nations forums and proudly declare our First Nations children are among the most cherished and are justly having an equitable start to a prosperous life, along with all Australian children.

gaga-li (to call out⁶)

⁶ <https://www.dnathan.com/language/gamilaraay/dictionary/GAMDICTF.HTM>