

Submission to the **Productivity Commission** for the proposed **Indigenous Evaluation Strategy**

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I would just like to highlight some key points.

The number of programs per capita in remote Indigenous communities, and the causal density arising from the combined effects of these programs, are so great that current evaluation methods struggle to deal with attribution. It can be very difficult to find a valid control, given all communities have a history of receiving similar programs. There is a compelling need to look beyond the currently favoured public finance modality - the 'program' with its ubiquitous KPIs – to more decentralised grant funding mechanisms to Indigenous organisations.

Grant funding to Indigenous organisations is a viable alternative to administering programs, as Indigenous organisations are a sensible coordinating node to serve local jurisdictions, and they have the most 'skin in the game' when it comes to achieving outcomes. Performance management frameworks can then be built around evolving learning 'organisations', instead of designing more technically sophisticated 'programs'.

To achieve this, Indigenous organisations need additional resources to engage their own Monitoring Evaluation Research and Learning (MERL) expertise. A parallel can be made with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). They maintain a high standard of medical care, while enabling the benefits of improved access, local employment and cultural competency that comes from being an Indigenous controlled organisation.

The complex array of programs that constitute Indigenous affairs is largely a public administration construct that has grown out of Canberra and capital cities. The political economy of these public finances are such that Indigenous organisations struggle to wield them to their advantage. They can partner/employ/embed the necessary MERL expertise (as ACCHOs do with medical practitioners), but at the same time, control the environment that this expertise operates within, so that it serves their needs.

When an Indigenous organisation is able to report and assert its own 'whole of its organisation' performance data, then it can counter the demands of reporting against multiple programs. To achieve this, Indigenous organisations need not be limited to existing approaches. They can innovate and drive new performance benchmarks, including place-based qualitative and quantitative mixed methods, as well as measures of cultural effectiveness and empowerment. By banding together, they can also set new standards in evaluation data and science in Indigenous affairs, and thereby legitimate and lead much needed reforms.

I attach a number of papers that make these points in more detail.

Good luck for what I hope to be a critically important Inquiry.

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Staines, Z. and M. Moran. 2019. Complexity and Hybrid Effects in the Delivery and Evaluation of Youth Programmes in a Remote Indigenous community. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* (in press, online first, accepted 7/1/2019).

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Moran, M., D. Porter and J. Curth. 2014. Funding Indigenous Organisations: Improving Governance Performance through Innovations in Public Finance Management in Remote Australia. Issues paper no 11. Canberra: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Government. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications/>.