



Indigenous Evaluation Strategy
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SUBMISSION TO THE INDIGENOUS EVALUATION STRATEGY ON BEHALF OF GENERATION ONE; MINDEROO FOUNDATION

BACKGROUND:

Generation One is an initiative of Andrew and Nicola Forrest's Minderoo Foundation, committed to creating parity for Indigenous Australians. Although creating parity is an audacious, challenging, and at times overwhelming goal, we strive for it because allowing disparity to continue is not an option.

Generation One works in partnership with Indigenous Australians to co-design practical, scalable solutions. For the last ten years, Generation One has championed evidence-based practices and initiatives in education, employment and other priority areas including research, policy and evaluation.

We advocate for policy reform and we are currently working with government, business and community to support a series of innovative employment programs.

We gain insight into what works by trialing new ideas, partnering projects with community and developing a robust evaluation framework for each initiative with highly skilled research organisations.

Baseline data collection, monitoring and evaluation is critical to building a body of evidence which underpins our platform for change. Too often we see high levels of investment in Indigenous Affairs with poor return in closing the gap in education engagement and attainment, employment and health.

DELIVERING BETTER OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE:

Accountability and results:

The 2014 Creating Parity report calls on governments to be accountable to the public for the effectiveness of their strategies and the merit of individual programs by meeting robust performance measures.

The report states "Critical to sound implementation are accountability milestones where a pre-agreed performance schedule is measured and if found lacking immediately corrected."¹

The report also calls for a CreatingParity website where service and program quarterly and annual reports are provided to a central repository. Currently, there is no consolidated mapping of funding in Indigenous Affairs whether targeted, mainstream, non-government or philanthropic and without baseline data an evaluation framework will be ineffectual in gaining a clearer picture of policy and programmatic effectiveness. The website suggested in the report would provide "clear evidence of the

¹ The Forrest Review: Creating Parity: 2014; p5



beneficial impact as government shifts investment from reactive spending to preventative services such as early childhood.”²

Service System Failure:

Governments have historically allocated funding on an ad hoc basis without a whole of government strategy. A strong Indigenous evaluation strategy must be built, co-designed with Indigenous people at the policy and service delivery level to drive a better funding system.

Whilst the Creating Parity Report calls on the withdrawal of funding from all but the most successful results- oriented initiatives we believe we will continue to set services up to fail if we do not embed evaluation frameworks in all service contracts and use relevant measurable performance measures that can be independently evaluated. Consistency of performance evaluation measures, approaches and principles is the key to holding all to account and driving real change for Indigenous Australians.

The Creating Parity Report also calls for mainstream education and employment services to Indigenous Australians to be evaluated more effectively given the failure of those systems in closing the gap. It calls on State and Commonwealth Governments to work together to improve results. The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy must have sign off at COAG by all jurisdictions to create consistent expectations about the outcomes of policy and program initiatives.

Key Drivers for Change (Principles):

Specific principles underlying the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy must be embedded if real and long-term change is to be achieved.

They must include:

- Working with Indigenous Australians to design and deliver services and give them decision making powers based on trust and robust evaluation. Incorporating Indigenous perspectives into evaluation through a consultation process is essential from the ground up.
- Combining traditional evaluation methods with Indigenous perspectives and adapting metrics to measure effectiveness of funding initiatives needs to occur. Changes in terminology (e.g. what do we mean by health and how we measure impacts) by being cognizant of Indigenous cultural and language context must be considered. Let’s ask community people what a healthy person or community looks like and bring that into our evaluation framework for instance and then we can work out how to measure in partnership with community.
- We need to work with community to develop services and understand the outcomes they are seeking to ensure we place resources that are needed and represent value for money.
- There is currently a gap in how many Service Providers assess their performance compared to how intended service recipients view the effectiveness of those services. Hearing the voices of local people must be integral to the new evaluation framework. Currently, there is little cross checking. This view was confirmed by many community members on our recent trip to the Kimberley.

² The Forrest Review op cit: p 5



- Openness and transparency which allows the broader Australian Community the opportunity to view results and access publicly available information is essential.
- Acting on the results of evaluation to address poor performing initiatives and reward those who do well is a key component to an effective evaluation strategy. This can be done at a service, program or strategic policy level and may mean changing funding levels, de-funding ineffective programs and services or developing new ones. It could even lead to the consideration of new funding arrangements such as social impact investment, demand driven employment initiatives among others.
- Central to the evaluation strategy must be an assessment of how funded services create not just entry level jobs for Indigenous people but real career development for Indigenous staff. We know that when Indigenous people reach tertiary levels of education the gap is closed.
- A culture of evaluation needs to be embedded in all Indigenous funding areas with clear criteria and agreed goals.
- Indigenous people should be trained and involved in evaluation activities at the service, program and strategic policy levels.
- Flexibility of evaluation methodologies must be considered given the remoteness and diversity of Indigenous communities across the country.
- Funding models must consider the cost of evaluation. An agreed percentage of funding should be allocated to evaluation in addition to service delivery dollars.
- Considerable thought needs to occur to build an evaluation framework from the ground up to ensure there is no disconnect between the policy and service delivery system.
- Regular evaluation forums could act as a key central point to present thematic, programmatic evaluation reports and allowing for input and feedback. Rather than a static report this process provides an agreed action plan to provide a continuous improvement culture.

DELIVERING AN EFFECTIVE EVALUATION STRATEGY OF EXISTING INDIGENOUS POLICIES AND SERVICES:

Understanding the current funding landscape:

- There is general confusion around the Indigenous funding landscape in particularly what is funded, by whom and how funds are allocated. Without having a clearer picture of the current funding landscape, it is hard to evaluate effectiveness our efforts as a whole; we can only evaluate disparate parts.
- Consideration should be made for the establishment of a comprehensive funding instrument or dashboard which maps investment and consolidates data in the funding landscape.
- The National Indigenous Evaluation Strategy must have capacity to identify gaps, duplications, and effectiveness of all services, programs and strategies whether mainstream or targeted by drawing on consolidated information about what exists, where and cost.



Mapping and understanding the service system (baseline data):

- Without baseline data which gives us a picture of the current service system the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy runs the risk of being limited by program, jurisdiction or Department. A baseline data set would allow for thematic, programmatic or individualized service evaluation.
- There is no consistent gathering of information about Indigenous spending Australia wide.
- Prior to the implementation of a National Indigenous Evaluation Strategy we must have a clearer picture of what we want to include under the strategy. The development of an Indigenous Funding Dashboard would help us to this.

Funding Dashboard as a commencement point:

- A funding dashboard (instrument) could map existing Indigenous funding initiatives by location, service provider, funding source and funding level. It would provide baseline data which would be the starting point for any successful Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.
- A funding dashboard would allow grouping of funding initiatives by value, service type and intended outcomes. It could be pivotal in ending the siloed approach to Indigenous Funding.
- The dashboard could lead to the development of a tool of efficiency index in Indigenous funding which could be a key component of the National Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.
- It will lead to better targeting of services and enable a holistic, inter-sectorial evaluation framework to be developed by pulling together disparate program evaluation findings.

Co-designing place based, and community led initiatives:

- Given that State and Commonwealth Governments are committed to place-based community led funding initiatives the following should be considered in the development of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy:
- The National Indigenous Evaluation Strategy must require regular input at the strategic and local level from Indigenous community members. This could be the development of an evaluation reference group that informs the strategy.
- Strengthening the role of the Empowered Communities network can play in assessing new funding applications to ensure a culture of evaluation becomes embedded in new funding initiatives.
- Part of the co-design process must have provision for agreed principles and methodologies for undertaking evaluation.
- Independent evaluators must meet criteria relating to Indigenous engagement and understanding. Preference should be given to Indigenous Evaluators.
- Expressions of interest and funding applications must add an evaluation criterion that panel assessors can provide a rating on. All panel members need to be trained in evaluation as a minimum in participating in the decision-making process.



Re-thinking the contract management process:

- Locally developed evaluation strategies driven by key community representatives who know the community needs and aspiration should be involved in service level evaluation at every step of the contracting process.
- Evaluators should come from the community where the services are being delivered or at least be strategic partners.
- Programmatic key performance indicators, project evaluation methods should be linked to policy goals. It is not good enough to measure performance based on numbers of participants, frequency of activities etc. We must measure the impact of programs in the long-term benefit of people for whom we are providing services.
- Service Providers bidding for Government Business must demonstrate how they have co-designed their evaluation process with their local community prior to being awarded a contract.
- Monitoring and evaluation of service performance reports by Government must link directly to a National Indigenous Framework and lead to actions and improved performance strategies. It must address underperformance in a timely and definitive manner to reduce the wastage of resources on failing programs.
- The National Indigenous Evaluation Strategy must provide an obligation for reporting good and bad performance to enable its agility and avoid same old funding for funding sake.
- The National Indigenous Evaluation Strategy must allow for program cessation or changes where these are proving ineffective.
- Resourcing additional funding to allow for evaluation.
- Effective strategies must be developed to share evaluation information.
- Evaluation priorities should be set in the key areas of education, employment and suicide prevention.
- Every evaluation conducted should be supported by an Indigenous Cultural Adviser.
- Training for service providers, program leaders and policy development leaders is critical to embed an effective Indigenous Evaluation Strategy at all levels. Training must be comprehensive and ongoing and ensure solid learning in the principles and application of rigorous evaluation.



CONCLUSION:

An effective Indigenous Evaluation Strategy will be a key component in ensuring that investment in Indigenous Affairs is demonstrably effective, good value for money and open and transparent. It goes hand in hand with a more visible funding landscape which allows the broader community to measure, analyze and understand what works and what is not working in our efforts to Close the Gap.

We need to link evaluation and performance measure to policy and ensure we are all held account for the part we can play in Creating Parity for and with Indigenous Australians. We need a clearer picture so that we can be confident that our investment in Indigenous Affairs represents value for money and leads to real outcomes in employment and education.