

Steering Committee for the
Review of Government
Service Provision

Final responses to the recommendations
of the review of the *Overcoming
Indigenous Disadvantage* report 2013

Final responses to recommendations of the review of the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report

This paper

This paper outlines the Steering Committee's responses to the recommendations contained in the independent review by the Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd (ACER) on the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) report.

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More information

The following information can be found on the Steering Committee's website:

- the full report of the independent review of the OID
- the summary consultation paper
- previous editions of the OID report
- previous consultation reports.

Website www.pc.gov.au/gsp/indigenous

Why are we proposing changes to the OID report?

The OID report, commissioned by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), is published by a Steering Committee made up of senior representatives from all Australian governments, with the chairman and secretariat provided by the Productivity Commission. The Steering Committee is advised by a working group made up of representatives from all Australian governments, the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Five editions of the OID report have been published (the latest in 2011). In 2012, the Steering Committee agreed to an independent review of the report. The review found that most users considered the report to be a useful compendium of information on the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. However, several areas for improvement were identified.

Responding to recommendations in the ACER review

Process

Following the release of the ACER review on 30 August 2012, the Steering Committee developed a set of proposed responses to the recommendations from the review. The proposed responses and associated consultation paper were placed on the Productivity Commission website (<http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/indigenous/oid-review-2012>) and comments sought from interested stakeholders.

Consultations were conducted in all jurisdictions from June to September 2013, with government and non-government organisations (both Indigenous and mainstream) and academics. The Steering Committee considered this feedback in finalising the responses in this document.

The Steering Committee acknowledges the valuable contributions of those who participated in the consultations.

Key principles

The responses are based on the following key principles, drawn from the review findings, previous Steering Committee consultations and the OID report's terms of reference.

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- The OID report’s terms of reference identify two core objectives for the report:
 - to inform Australian governments about whether policies and programs are achieving improved outcomes for Indigenous people
 - to be meaningful to Indigenous people themselves.
 - The OID report is distinguished from other reports by its strategic framework and breadth of reporting. Its key ‘value add’ is as a convenient compendium of the evidence base and relevant data.

This paper

This paper provides summaries of relevant review recommendations¹ and the Steering Committee’s responses under seven broad headings:

1. Disadvantage versus strengths based reporting
2. Improving Indigenous engagement
3. Performance reporting, policy advice and analysis
4. Report outputs
5. Case studies
6. Data quality
7. OID and other reports.

Consideration of some recommendations has been split across relevant headings.

An eighth heading has been added to include the Steering Committee’s responses to additional points that were made during consultations in 2013.

Best practice principles identified by the ACER review have been included where they could result in a change to current practice.

¹ Best practice principles identified by the ACER review have been included where they could result in a change to current practice.

Steering Committee responses to ACER review recommendations

Table 1 **Disadvantage versus strengths-based reporting**

Recommendation 1:

Consider changing the title to one suggestive of Indigenous strengths, incorporate information about Indigenous strengths and shift to a more positive focus on overcoming disadvantage

<i>Steering Committee response</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
<p>The report title should only be changed in response to significant changes to the framework, and subject to consultation with key stakeholders, and potential COAG endorsement.</p>	<p>Although there was broad support for a more strengths-based approach to reporting, there was general acceptance that the current title reflected reality, the terms of reference and had a degree of 'brand recognition' among users.</p>
<p>Adopt an appropriate acknowledgment of strength as well as continuing to report objectively on disadvantage. Examples discussed below include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expressing existing 'negative' indicators in the positive • where relevant, noting positive outcomes for the majority of Indigenous people before discussing the gap <p>including additional 'positive' indicators that reflect Indigenous peoples' conception of wellbeing.</p>	<p>The current OID includes several strengths-based indicators, spread across the framework. Giving greater emphasis to the currently reported strengths-based indicators (including indicators of culture), and the inclusion of additional strengths based indicators would be one way of improving the report's usefulness to Indigenous people.</p> <p>An appropriate acknowledgment of strength as well as objective reporting on disadvantage received wide support. However, it was emphasised that the report's credibility should not be damaged by attempting to 'spin' the reported information.</p> <p>Strengths-based approaches have been adopted in other high profile reports, such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (released 23 July 2013), which '... adopts a strengths-based approach to ensure policies and programs improve health, social and emotional wellbeing and resilience, and promote positive health behaviours. It emphasises the centrality of culture in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rights of individuals to a safe, healthy and empowered life.'</p>

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Table 1 (Continued)

Governance and leadership strategic area to be renamed 'Governance, leadership and culture'	The Steering Committee's preliminary response was to rename the Governance and Leadership area to focus on Indigenous strengths and culture. There was persuasive feedback that 'governance and leadership' should continue to be referenced in the title of the strategic area. Any diminution in this vital area would be a mistake.
Make 'Governance, leadership and culture' the 'first' strategic area (on left of framework) rather than the 'last'.	There was strong support for emphasising that 'Governance, leadership and culture' is necessary to achieve the other outcomes in the framework. Although the current framework is not intended to imply any relative importance, there was a general view that placing 'Governance, leadership and culture' first gave it more priority.
Consider additional 'governance' indicators. The Secretariat, in consultation with the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Working Group (OIDWG), to provide final recommendations on potential additional indicators for the December 2 013 Steering Committee meeting.	Consultations raised a number of potential additional 'governance' indicators for further investigation.
Group current 'cultural' indicators under the renamed 'Governance, Leadership and culture' strategic area.	<p>The most significant Indigenous-specific conceptions of wellbeing are around 'culture' (so the relevant addition to the title is 'culture').</p> <p>There was general support for grouping the 'cultural' indicators together, to increase their prominence and allow for a discussion about the connections between culture and other outcomes.</p> <p>There were different views on where the grouped cultural indicators should sit in the framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A few people argued strongly that culture is a foundation stone for all areas and should be an additional overarching (or underpinning) layer of the framework. This would be a major change to the framework.• Some people questioned the relationship between 'governance' and 'culture'. However, others acknowledged that there are important cultural aspects to Indigenous governance.
Consider additional 'positive' indicators. The Secretariat, in consultation with the OIDWG, to provide final recommendations on potential additional indicators for the December 2 013 Steering Committee meeting.	Consultations raised a number of potential indicators for further investigation.
Modify the tone of reporting to emphasise good outcomes for the majority of Indigenous Australians, before raising the importance of improving outcomes for the minority.	Generally supported where appropriate, but strong advice to avoid 'spin' — one of the OID's key strengths is its objective reporting of facts.

Table 2 Improving Indigenous engagement

Recommendations 1, 6 and 9:

Further investigate reasons for the apparently low level of use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to better accommodate their needs

Better adjust report to accommodate Indigenous Australian's policy and research needs

Increase or promote Indigenous input into the report (including on the OIDWG)

<i>Steering Committee response</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
<p>The Secretariat and the OIDWG will develop a communications strategy to improve engagement with Indigenous people and organisations. Subject to resources, examples (some discussed below in more detail) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the OID's online presence • Reviewing the Overview and Fact Sheets to improve usefulness to Indigenous stakeholders • Engagement with the Indigenous media, including considering production of an output geared to electronic media <p>Broad ranging information sessions following the release of the next OID report</p>	<p>Consultations suggested low levels of awareness of the OID among some senior Indigenous advisory and advocacy groups, which could have been considered key users of the report.</p>
<p>Given the nature of the OIDWG (primarily representatives of Australian governments), additional Indigenous membership (beyond the current National Congress membership) is not proposed.</p>	<p>Involvement of National Congress was supported but feedback noted the importance of continuing wider engagement with Indigenous people and organisations.</p>
<p>Subject to agreement on governance issues, the single Indigenous academic referee could be replaced by a small number of separate Indigenous expert bodies or academics. The Secretariat, in consultation with OIDWG, to develop formal criteria to guide selection of Indigenous referees.</p>	<p>Feedback suggested this could improve the quality of the report and engagement with Indigenous people. Caution was suggested, as some bodies may have potential conflicts of interest. In some cases, individual academics may be service deliverers. Formal criteria would help guide the selection of relevant referees.</p>
<p>Revise the sections of the report on the role of the OID Working Group, and highlight the involvement of the National Congress and Indigenous expert referees.</p>	<p>The referees will play a role in providing expert advice to the Steering Committee.</p>
<p>Subject to agreement on involvement of Indigenous expert bodies (discussed above):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the overview and introductory chapters to highlight the consultation processes and groups consulted • relevant sections of the OID report to acknowledge the input of Indigenous expert referees consulted on specific issues. 	<p>Amended to reflect that Indigenous expert referees may be peak bodies or individual academics. Feedback supported explicitly noting those who had been consulted during production of each edition of the OID.</p>

Table 3 Performance reporting, policy advice and analysis

Recommendations 5, 6 and 7:

Include more disaggregation of data for remoteness; Indigenous people living in an urban context; communities; and sub-groups within the Indigenous population (e.g., homeless, highly mobile)

Adjust report to accommodate Indigenous Australian’s policy and research needs

Include more analyses that reflect the complexity of disadvantage, particularly in regard to the linkages between indicators

Include more rigorous statistical analyses, in particular when comparing trends and outcomes in administrative data

Best practice principles (recommendation 2)

Include more connections between the information reported and policy implications

Include a stronger sense of vision, ‘next steps’ and ‘where we go from here’

<i>Steering Committee response</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
<p>Overview and introductory chapters to clarify the role of the OID report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a policy relevant performance reporting exercise that does not extend to program evaluation or policy advice • with no explicit targets apart from the COAG targets. 	<p>Many of those consulted wanted the OID to provide more explicit policy advice, highlighting the importance of clarifying what the OID does and does not do.</p>
<p>Subject to available resources, the Steering Committee will explore opportunities for further analysis of links between indicators using Census, survey and administrative data.</p>	<p>The consultations identified several groups that were happy for the OID to draw on their work on links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) • Telethon Institute
<p>The Steering Committee will continue to work with data providers to include time series data for all indicators.</p> <p>Where relevant, narrative’ information about longer term trends will be included where formal time series are limited.</p>	<p>There was broad recognition of the value of time series data — including ‘narrative’ information about longer term trends where formal time series are limited.</p>
<p>The Steering Committee will continue to work with data providers on the availability of data disaggregated by remoteness and explore the potential to report on alternative remoteness concepts (such as Indigenous regions or structural setting).</p>	<p>There was general support for the importance of data disaggregated by geographic location and interest in the potential to report on alternative geographies, but acknowledgment of data and resource limitations.</p>
<p>The Steering Committee will investigate opportunities for reporting on sub-groups within the Indigenous population in the OID report, balancing the additional benefit of disaggregated reporting against the additional length and complexity of reporting.</p> <p>Subject to resources, the Steering Committee will produce Fact Sheets on sub-groups of interest following the release of the OID.</p>	<p>There was general acknowledgment of data limitations and the trade-off between additional disaggregation and report size.</p> <p>There was particular interest in reporting at a regional or community level, but general acceptance that this was beyond the scope of the OID.</p> <p>The current Fact Sheets were suggested as a model for reporting on other sub-groups of interest.</p>

Table 4 Report outputs

Recommendation 8:

Investigate the possibility of:

- a series of smaller reports in between publication of the biennial report that would highlight particular indicators, outcomes, themes or linkages
- separate tailored reports for each State and Territory.

<i>Steering Committee response</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
<p>Subject to resources, the Steering Committee will produce additional Fact Sheets following the release of the OID, drawing on the OID, Indigenous Expenditure Report (IER), Report on Government Services (RoGS) and the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.</p> <p>The Secretariat will work to improve accessibility of report outputs to assist users to access data of interest (including data by State and Territory), for endorsement by the Steering Committee.</p>	<p>As the primary value of the OID report lies in its 'concise encyclopaedic' nature, any 'in between' OID reports should not come at the expense of the 'core' OID report.</p> <p>Each OID report should remain a compilation of latest available data at the time of publication. Any 'in between' reports should draw largely on existing material in the OID report (and potentially from other reports).</p> <p>It was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional Fact Sheets on topics of interest could be produced 'in between' OID reports (this could help the OID retain relevance post-release) • such Fact Sheets could draw on the OID, IER, RoGS and Clearinghouse to demonstrate how the various reports could be brought together to inform areas of policy interest <p>There was strong support for improving access to the underlying data. In practical terms, this work will have to be carried out within the resource constraints of the Secretariat.</p>
<p>Assess the practicality of achieving consensus on a broad 'scene setting' narrative section, based on the approach of the Canadian Aboriginal Benchmarking report. This section would emphasise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the impact of the past on contemporary outcomes.</p> <p>The Secretariat, in consultation with the OIDWG, to prepare a draft based on existing sources for the December 2 013 Steering Committee meeting, with no further investment of resources if consensus cannot be reached. Suggested resources included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconciliation Australia • Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples • Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). 	<p>Although this proposal received support from a majority of people from different backgrounds, a few people (especially some Indigenous leaders) seriously questioned its value, particularly given the likely difficulty achieving consensus. They considered it was likely to involve a lot of effort for minimal gain. One leader noted that 'if you don't know the background to disadvantage, where have you been?'</p>

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Table 4 (Continued)

<p>Within resource constraints, the Secretariat will review the Overview and factsheets, with the aim of improving the content, layout and design (for endorsement by the Steering Committee).</p>	<p>Several people praised the current suite of outputs, but others noted scope for improvement — particular to target community members.</p> <p>In practical terms, this work will have to be carried out within the resource constraints of the Secretariat.</p>
<p>The OID report will draw on papers prepared by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse and other sources to provide contextual policy information. References to sources of relevant policy information will be included where appropriate.</p>	<p>The inclusion of limited contextual policy information was generally supported, particularly if it assisted in the interpretation of results (eg, where significant lags could be expected between implementation and measured results). However, notes of caution included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The OID should not extend to program evaluation or policy advice• Strong advice to avoid ‘spin’ — one of the OID’s key strengths is its objective reporting of facts, not government announcements
<p>The Secretariat will examine options to improve the accessibility and useability of OID report material, with a particular focus on improving the web presence of the report, for endorsement by the Steering Committee.</p>	<p>In practical terms, this work will have to be carried out within the resource constraints of the Secretariat.</p>

Table 5 Case studies

Recommendation 4:

Retain case studies, but improve quality.

<i>Steering Committee response</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
The OID report will continue to include Things That Work case studies. Wherever possible, Things That Work case studies will be drawn from the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse assessed collection. The selection of other case studies will continue to be based on rigorous application of the agreed criteria. Case studies may include innovative reforms that appear worthwhile, but which have not been evaluated. In such cases, the presentation will explicitly note the desirability of formal evaluation.	There was strong support for the Things That Work case studies, particularly from Indigenous people. However, there was a widespread desire for greater rigour.
The Steering Committee will work with the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse to identify how the OID report can best contribute to communicating information about the key success factors in Indigenous programs.	The inclusion of additional information on key success factors was generally supported, but it was noted that the OID should not extend to program evaluation or policy advice.

Table 6 Data quality

Recommendation 7:

Include more rigorous statistical analyses, in particular when comparing trends and outcomes in administrative data.

<i>Steering Committee response</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
The Steering Committee will publish confidence bands for administrative data whenever they are available and use them as tools in analysing changes and differences in results. A summary discussion of data limitations will be included in the overview.	<p>Although respondents to the review acknowledged that data quality was not the responsibility of the Steering Committee, some respondents sought 'more contextual information to help users better interpret and understand the strengths and limitations of the data.'</p> <p>Some respondents to the review suggested that the OID report contain more rigorous statistical analysis of administrative data. The report has included confidence bands for administrative data where these have been available from data providers; for example NAPLAN learning outcomes data and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) life expectancy data. However, confidence bands have not been available for most administrative data. In the absence of bands for administrative data, the OID report has included long time series for data whenever possible, to demonstrate the natural variation in data from year to year. The report has avoided drawing conclusions about small differences and variations in the data.</p>

Table 7 OID and other reports

Recommendation 3:

Investigate the feasibility of bringing together key representatives of organisations that produce relevant reports to review the role and purpose of each report.

Best practice principles (Recommendation 2):

Reporting against explicit targets set out in plans

Linking performance to broader government priorities

Using performance measures consistently but flexibly for continuous improvement

Making clear its relationship to other similar reports

<i>Steering Committee response</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
The Steering Committee, in consultation with producers of other key national Indigenous reports, will develop a summary fact sheet explaining the different purposes, audiences and reporting accountabilities of the reports.	The summary fact sheet was strongly supported and will be an early feature of the OID report to provide context.
The introduction to each indicator will include a box setting out the indicator definition, key data source/s, the reasons for any differences to other commonly reported measures and any significant issues in data quality and/or interpretation of the indicator.	<p>The review also noted a best practice principle relating to consistent use of performance indicators. Indicators in the OID report are aligned with indicators in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) as far as possible (meaning that consistent definitions and data sources are used whenever possible). For OID indicators that are not included in the NIRA, the Steering Committee seeks to align as far as possible with other major reporting exercises with similar indicators.</p> <p>However, it is not always possible to maintain strict consistency. Sometimes different indicator definitions are used, because of different reporting purposes. Sometimes, different report release dates means that more recent data will be reported.</p> <p>In the 2 011 OID report, the introduction to each indicator included a section that identified the main measure for that indicator, and any supplementary measures reported. This section could be expanded to note the key specifications for the measure and the data source, the reasons for any differences to other commonly reported measures, and any data quality issues.</p>

Table 8 Other issues raised during consultations

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Steering Committee response</i>
Develop a consistent key message to underpin communications	<p>Proposed key message: ‘The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report measures the wellbeing of Australia’s Indigenous peoples.’</p> <p>The draft key message was generally endorsed, as reflecting the new strengths-based approach. However, critical comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The term ‘wellbeing’ has particular connotations for Indigenous people — it is important that the report addresses Indigenous peoples’ views of wellbeing. • There is a potential disconnect between ‘disadvantage’ in the report title and ‘wellbeing’ in the descriptor, although they can be seen as the inverse of each other.
Use of the term ‘Indigenous’	<p>Use of the term Indigenous will be explained in the introductory sections of the report and overview.</p> <p>OID text will endeavour to use the terms ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ and ‘other Australians’ as relevant. The terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ will continue to be used in tables and charts as relevant.</p> <p>Several participants disliked the use of the term ‘Indigenous’ (and preferred ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’).</p> <p>The Steering Committee has previously agreed to use the term Indigenous, explaining in each report that the term includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p>