

Prioritise self-determination, community agency and self-governance

Empowerment Principle

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination and to be encouraged and empowered in decision-making processes. Evaluators must listen and advise to the benefit of communities above all else.

Application

- This involves time, ongoing negotiation, consultation and informing custodians about the implications of participating in the evaluation.
- Seek what is important and what needs to be evaluated from the community – take a ground up perspective to understand community priorities. Even top down projects should include community-led evaluation, together with what funders want to know.
- Ensure you have an established relationship with a community before you commence the evaluation. If you do not have an established relationship, consider partnering with someone who does.
- Before commencing the evaluation, ensure communities have a full understanding of the intent of the evaluation and that their input is valued and welcomed. Discuss and identify how the evaluation will benefit them, including the ownership of data.
- Include community members in the co-design phase of the evaluation. Accept that you may need to return to the evaluation commissioner with a revised approach.
- In consultation with community members, choose the most appropriate method(s) to collect and/or retrieve data. For a list of examples refer to the BE Rainbow Framework [[link here](#)].
- Include community members in the collection and retrieval of data and analysis of numeric and textual data patterns.
- Build community capacity and if needed capability to engage in data collection in ways that are meaningful to the community.

Diversity Principle

Recognise the diversity and uniqueness of First Nations Cultures, Peoples and Individuals.

Application

- Recognise the unique cultural identities of each Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander community and their unique practices and processes. Take the time to look, listen and learn about the specific cultural context you are entering before commencing any evaluation.

- Recognition of individual communities requires explicitly sharing and explaining individual Indigenous cultural materials rather than perpetuating a homogenous view of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Stereotypes and quietly held beliefs require unpacking. Put aside assumptions about communities and their governance structures before and during the evaluation. Be aware that your cultural lens will impact on your understanding.
- Understand that there are different governance structures and roles within a community. At the outset of, and throughout the evaluation, make sure you are talking to the right person or people.
- When synthesising data from other evaluations, be aware that findings from other communities may not be relevant. Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander communities represent over 300 different nations. This includes differences in language, culture and societal structure. Homogenising data can skew results.
- If utilising findings from different communities, validate this first with the community that is central to the evaluation.
- There may be opportunities to generalise findings across programs or sites within the community that is central to the evaluation. Ensure you test and validate this approach with the community. There may be different language groups and cultures represented within one site.

Inclusion Principle

Involve Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people in all levels of the evaluation, from design phase right through to analysis and communicating findings.

Application

- Build trust with participants by demonstrating to them the value and benefit of the information they will share as part of the evaluation.
- Prioritise the use of participatory methods as they have benefits to achieving a higher ethical standard on inclusion and can allow you to build relationships and trust with community members, particularly where multiple monitoring points provide an ongoing connection.
- Consider if there are alternative explanations for causes and ensure causal questions are directed to community members. They are the experts of their communities and may see something you have missed.
- When understanding what may have happened without the program being evaluated, ensure that the community can critique any assumptions you have made. Do not use the word 'intervention' when questioning causal attribution. The word 'intervention' can have other connotations for community.

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