



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Draft

May 2020



Foreword

It is a stark reality that despite decades of new policies and programs aimed at improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we know very little about their impact.

Regrettably, the evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has often been, at best, an afterthought or not done at all. It is sometimes a box to be ticked, and seldom has input been sought from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on what, or how to evaluate, or what evaluation results mean. Such an approach to evaluation rarely delivers useful findings to inform future policy. And even where evidence is available, wide gaps remain.

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This draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy sets out a more systematic approach aimed at improving the quality and usefulness of evaluation. It embeds evaluation into the policy cycle so it is thought about when policies and programs are first designed, when they are being delivered, as well as at the end. It calls for a government-wide approach, not just attention at the agency level. It covers all policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, not just those that are Indigenous specific.

The Strategy's overarching principle is centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges. Given that policies and programs aim to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives, it follows that their objectives, what is evaluated, and how evaluations are conducted, should align with what is important for Indigenous people.

There are no simple formulas. Different contexts will call for different types of evaluations, approaches and techniques. Genuine engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is fundamental to lifting the quality of evaluations, as is good quality data and applying rigour to both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

I want to thank Commissioner Romlie Mokak for his outstanding leadership of this project, and the team, led by Rosalie McLachlan, which has combined strong intellect with new perspectives to tackle a unique set of policy challenges.



Michael Brennan

**Chair, Productivity Commission
May 2020**

The Productivity Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to their Cultures, Country and Elders past and present.



The artwork used in this publication is adapted from *River of Knowledge* by Luke Penrith

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The Productivity Commission

The Productivity Commission is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians. Its role, expressed most simply, is to help governments make better policies, in the long term interest of the Australian community.

The Commission's independence is underpinned by an Act of Parliament. Its processes and outputs are open to public scrutiny and are driven by concern for the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

Further information on the Productivity Commission can be obtained from the Commission's website (www.pc.gov.au).

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Background

The Australian Government has asked the Productivity Commission to develop a whole-of-government evaluation strategy for Australian Government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (the Strategy) provides principles-based guidance for Australian Government agencies on what good quality looks like for all stages of evaluation, including what to evaluate, planning, conducting, reporting and evaluation use. It should be read in conjunction with:

- *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, Draft Background Paper* – this paper describes the Commission's approach to developing the Strategy and provides further detail on governance arrangements and actions outlined in the Strategy
- *A Guide to Evaluation under the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy* – the guide provides additional guidance for Australian Government agencies on what applying the Strategy's principles means in practice.

The Commission engaged widely on the Strategy, including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations, all levels of government, non-Indigenous organisations, academics and individuals responsible for administering and delivering policies and programs.

We're seeking your feedback

The Strategy is a draft and the Commission is seeking feedback on the Strategy from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, government agencies, evaluators and others who will be affected by the Strategy. Further information on some key elements of the Strategy is also sought in information requests in the *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, Draft Background Paper*.

The feedback provided will be considered in developing the proposed final Strategy that the Commission will give to the Australian Government in October 2020.

Submissions on the draft Strategy are due by 3 August 2020. Details on how to make a submission are on our website, www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/indigenous-evaluation.



Introduction

We need to know what is working and if policy and programs which apply to Indigenous individuals, families and communities are having an impact. We also want greater insight into why policy or program implementation is not effective, and we need early opportunities for correction or reinvestment of funds and effort to ensure that funding is directed to where it is needed most.

Empowered Communities (2019, p. 5)



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The Strategy provides a unique opportunity for the Australian Government to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to better evaluate policies and programs and achieve the shared goal of improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

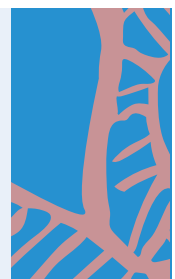
The Strategy provides a whole-of-government framework for Australian Government agencies to use when selecting, planning, conducting and using evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Strategy puts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at its centre, and recognises that governments need to draw on the perspectives, priorities and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people if outcomes are to improve.

The Strategy has been developed at a time when relationships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are changing.

The historic Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives sitting at the table with ministers from all Australian governments. The Agreement 'embodies the belief of all its signatories that shared decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled representatives in the design, implementation and monitoring of the Closing the Gap framework is essential to achieve their shared goal to close the gap in life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (JCOCTG 2019, p. 2).

It's time that all governments took better steps to empower individuals and communities, and work in partnership to develop practical and long lasting programmes and policies that both address the needs of Indigenous Australians and ensure that Indigenous voices are heard as equally as any other Australian voice.

Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians (2019)



What is evaluation and why evaluate?

Evaluation is the systematic process of making a judgment about the merit or worth of a policy or program.

It is about assessing the effectiveness of policies and programs and identifying the factors that drive or undermine their effectiveness. It answers questions such as – how was the policy or program delivered, what difference did the policy or program make, what would have happened without the policy or program in place, and do the benefits of the policy or program justify the costs?

Evaluation is undertaken to:

- better understand what policies and programs work and why (and when and for whom) – to support **evidence-informed policy** development, program design and implementation
- inform improvements in policies and programs – to support **learning by doing**
- support **accountability** to funders and the community – shedding light on how best to use taxpayers' money, including whether policy and program funds are properly spent, are delivering value for money and are meeting recipients' needs.

Evaluation can also help to build trust in government, particularly if the findings are used to support 'learning by doing' and those affected by the policy or program are able to work with government to find ways to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Trust between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations is particularly important in light of Australia's colonial history and its ongoing impacts.

Why an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy?

There are many policies and programs designed to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. But after decades of developing new policies and programs and modifying existing ones, we still know very little about the impact, or how outcomes could be improved, for many of these policies and programs.

While evaluation can provide answers on the effectiveness of policies, the quality of evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is variable (and in some cases lacking). And while policy makers agree that evidence is critical for good policies, many admit that in practice they do not rely heavily on evidence, or past experience, when formulating or modifying policies and programs.

There is also no government-wide approach to priority setting for evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and there has been limited engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on evaluation selection, planning, conduct and reporting.



There are four reasons for an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy:

- to centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges in evaluations of policies and programs that affect them
- to 'lift the bar' on the quality of evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- to enhance the use of evaluations to inform policy and program design and implementation by supporting a culture of evaluation and building a body of evidence and data on the effectiveness of policies and programs
- to promote a whole-of-government approach to priority setting and evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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The objective of the Strategy

The objective of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by having policy and program decisions informed by high quality and relevant evaluation evidence (figure 1).

The clear objective of all government action that impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be to improve wellbeing, to ensure that Indigenous people have the capabilities and opportunities to live the life they value, in a society that values and affirms Indigenous peoples' identities, cultures and contributions to Australian nationhood.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2019, p. 3)



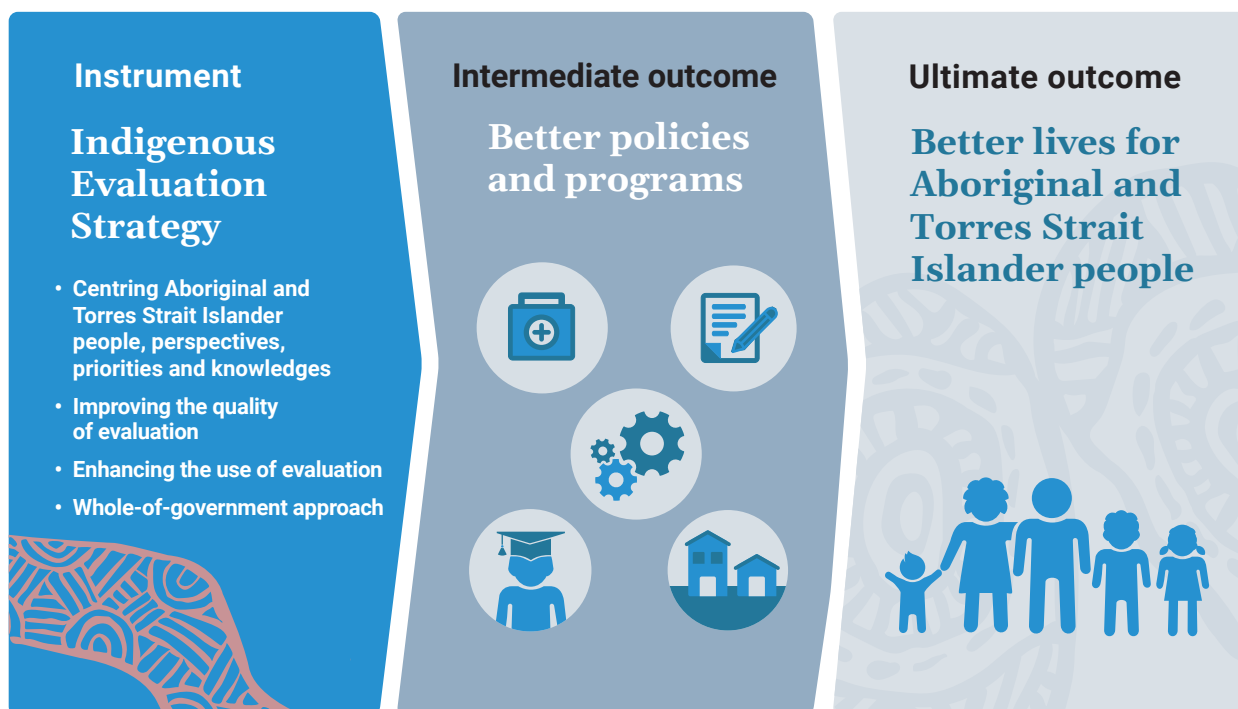
To improve policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, evaluations must contribute to a high quality, useful and accessible body of evidence that government and other decision makers have confidence to use when designing, modifying and implementing policies and programs. Better evaluation practices, which put Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the centre, will also improve the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are engaged in evaluations conducted by Australian Government agencies.

Who does the Strategy apply to?

The Strategy applies to all Australian Government agencies with responsibility for designing and/or implementing policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Strategy covers Indigenous-specific policies and programs as well as mainstream policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Figure 1. The objective of the Strategy is to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



While the Strategy is intended to guide Australian Government agencies when they are selecting, planning, commissioning, conducting and using evaluation, in practice it applies to everyone involved in the evaluation of Australian Government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including:

- individuals and communities who are recipients of the policies and programs being evaluated who may participate in interviews and/or surveys as part of the evaluation
- external evaluators who are commissioned to conduct evaluations
- service providers who deliver policies and programs who may be involved in collecting data, identifying evaluation participants, participating in, and implementing recommendations from, evaluations
- peak bodies and community representatives who may contribute to evaluation planning and design or provide input to evaluations
- users of evaluation including ministers, policy and program administrators and other individuals and groups that make decisions about policy and program design and implementation.

The Strategy could also have implications for state, territory and local governments given the significant crossover between Australian and state and territory government responsibility. State and territory agencies, and non-government organisations, could also adopt elements of the Strategy and the guidance material when assessing their own policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles for the Strategy set out what high-quality practice looks like and what agencies should consider when undertaking evaluations, while also allowing flexibility for evaluations to be tailored to the particular circumstances of policies, programs and communities. The principles are to guide what agencies and evaluators do when they are planning, conducting, reporting and using evaluation. They should also guide priority setting, knowledge sharing and translation, building evaluation capability, monitoring and review.

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The power of principles for policy development, program delivery and evaluation is that they are adaptable to different contexts. ... Principles allow both the local-level experts and high-level abstract managers to have a shared understanding of how 'good' can be judged. Thus, principles can be framed in a way that can guide decisions, operations and evaluation across all levels...

Bond et al. (2019, p. 11)



The overarching principle of the Strategy is **centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges** (figure 2). This principle is about recognising the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, knowledges and cultures. It is also about building genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to define policy and program outcomes, decide on evaluation questions, how evaluations will be conducted and how evaluation findings will be interpreted. This will improve the quality and use of evaluations and better align policies and programs with the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

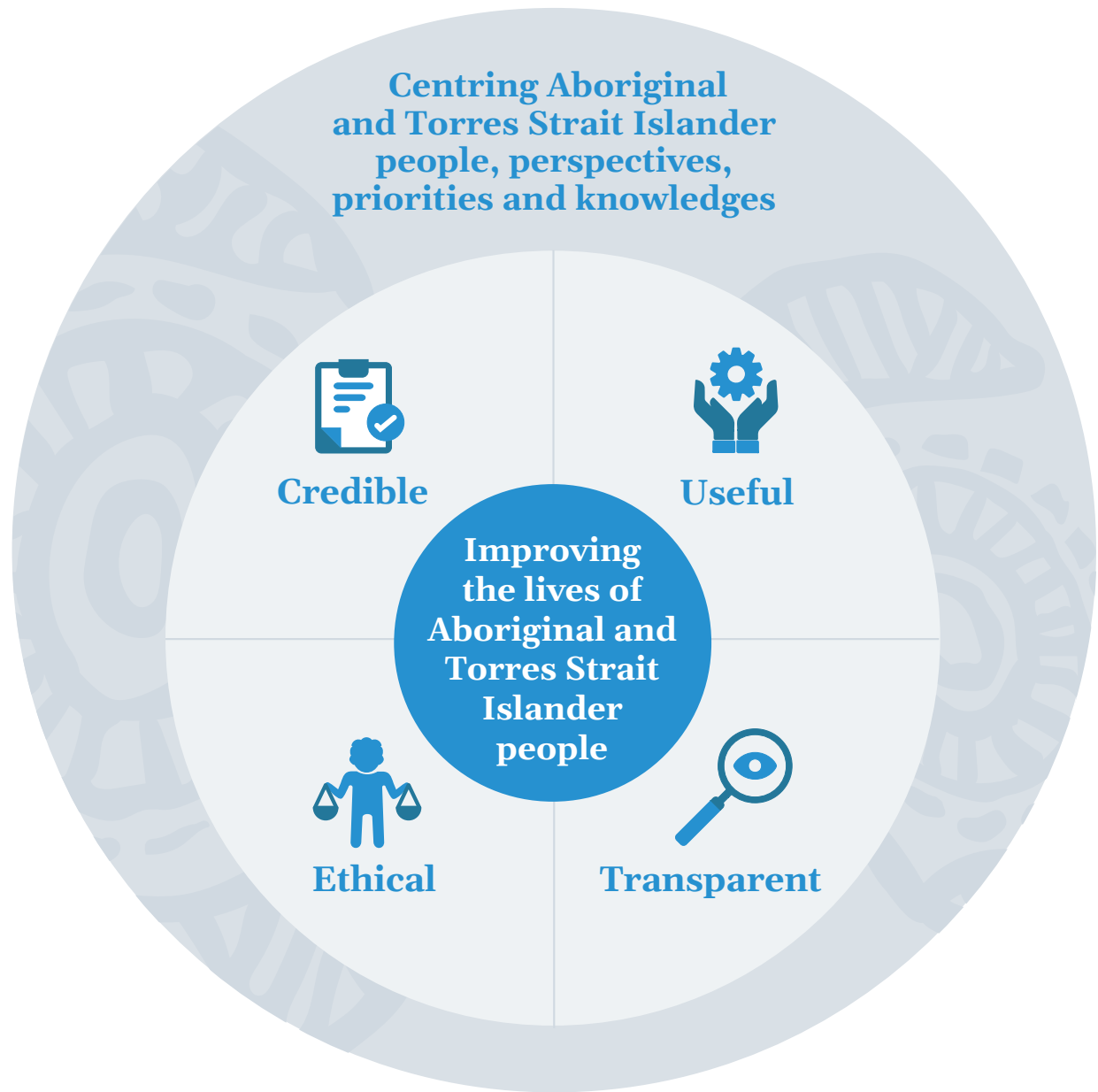
The overarching principle is also the lens through which the Strategy's other principles — **credible, useful, ethical** and **transparent** — are interpreted. These principles frame how agencies should plan and conduct evaluation and how evaluations will be assessed. Together, the principles aim to enhance the relevance of evaluation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the quality of evaluations and the use of their findings, as well as guiding the implementation, governance and review of the Strategy itself.

The Strategy does not replace, but rather complements and builds on, Australian Government agencies' evaluation processes and frameworks. It provides an overarching whole-of-government framework and consistent accountabilities for all Australian Government agencies developing and implementing policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The four principles — credible, useful, ethical and transparent — are common to evaluation frameworks used by Australian Government agencies and reflect international good practice principles for evaluation.

Further guidance to agencies on implementing the principles of the Strategy is available in *A Guide to Evaluation under the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*.



Figure 2. Guiding principles of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy



An overarching principle: Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges



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In order to be effective, the evaluation strategy must honour and adopt Aboriginal perspectives and approaches to health, wellbeing and policy development. ... Aboriginal Communities are well positioned to inform policy changes as they are at the forefront of issues in their Communities.

In order to achieve effective evaluation and long term outcomes, we must place Aboriginal people and leadership at the centre of an [Indigenous Evaluation Strategy].

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (2019, p. 11)

This principle is at the core of the Strategy. Evaluations of policies and programs that seek to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to engage effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people if they are to be credible, useful, ethical and transparent.

Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges involves a meaningful partnership between agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the evaluation process. This is important for two reasons.

- The evaluations undertaken should be in the areas that are valued most highly by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is fundamental to achieving the objective of the Strategy of improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Governments in Australia are changing the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with an increased emphasis on genuine engagement and partnership. This is evidenced in the Australian Government's policy of shared decision making, strengthening the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the Joint Council on Closing the Gap, and needs to be reflected in the way Australian Government agencies select, plan, conduct and use evaluations under the Strategy.



Table 1. Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges in practice

What to evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are engaged to decide what policies and programs achieve the greatest impact on their lives and should be subject to rigorous evaluation.
Evaluation planning, design and conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the option of being partners in all stages of evaluation. This includes engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on evaluation questions, evaluation approaches and methods, and the interpretation of evaluation findings. – Sufficient time and resources are allowed for meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during evaluation. – Engagement between commissioners, evaluators, participants and users is respectful of differences, mutually beneficial and undertaken in culturally safe ways. – Evaluators have the necessary skills and experience working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to undertake the evaluation. – Evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are responsive to the perspectives, priorities and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. – Mainstream policies and programs routinely consider impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – and evaluate those where the impact is considered significant. – Evaluation design and reporting reflect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their priorities and experiences.
Reporting evaluation findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are engaged in translating evaluation findings to ensure they are meaningful, accessible and useful for communities and decision makers. – Evaluation reports describe how evaluators engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during the evaluation process. – Evaluators and commissioners ensure that evaluation findings are communicated back to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations that participated.
Building capability and a culture of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation teams have the capability to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges into their evaluative thinking, including by asking questions that matter for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and collecting and using evidence in culturally safe ways. – Evaluation processes seek to build capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluators, organisations and communities. – Agencies provide opportunities or encourage staff to pursue opportunities to strengthen their cultural capability. – Agencies are open to review and feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations about their evaluation practices.



Principle: Credible



Quality analysis needs to be repeatable, independent, grounded in reality, objective, have understood and managed uncertainty, and the results should address the initial question robustly. ... It is important to establish how much we can rely upon the analysis for a given problem.

HM Treasury (2015, p. 6)

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Evaluation approaches, methods and processes must be credible if policy and program design and implementation decisions are to be based on evaluation findings. Evaluations should be conducted by evaluators who are technically and culturally capable.

Evaluation users should have confidence that evaluation findings are robust and any limitations to the analysis are clearly identified. Program participants (in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), and the broader Australian community, should also have confidence that policies and programs are being assessed objectively and independently.

Mixed methods (combining qualitative and quantitative methods) can maximise the strengths and compensate for limitations of any single method or approach.

Credibility is grounded on rigorous methodology. The Strategy does not endorse particular evaluation approaches or methods. Agencies and evaluators should adopt methods that:

- are rigorous and fit-for-purpose
- answer the questions that policy makers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people alike need answered
- suit the context in which the policy or program is operating, the size and importance of the policy or program, and the timeframe and resources available for evaluation.

The credibility of evaluation practices and findings can be enhanced by providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to respond to and interpret findings, the use of peer review, and by providing sufficient data to allow evaluation results to be replicated by external researchers.

A Guide to Evaluation under the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy provides information on how to undertake evaluations in a systematic way, covering evaluation design and data collection. It also covers the different approaches and methods that can be used to evaluate policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how to ensure the approach and method is appropriate for the context and the questions the evaluation is seeking to answer.

Table 2. Credible evaluation in practice

What to evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation priorities are identified in a systematic way based on what is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the impact of the policy or program, its risk profile, strategic significance and budget.
Evaluation planning, design and conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other stakeholders, can engage in all stages of the evaluation process. – Evaluations draw on the perspectives, priorities and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. – Evaluation is conducted by the best combination of internal and external evaluators (for independence, objectivity and policy or program knowledge). – The resources available for evaluation are proportionate to the size and importance of the policy or program being evaluated. – Evaluation is planned early before policies and programs are implemented so that the right data can be collected to undertake rigorous analysis. – Evaluations employ the best methodology given the evaluation questions being asked, data, time and resource constraints. – Data collected through monitoring and evaluation are of high quality and are collected in a culturally safe manner. – Evaluations have clear quality assurance processes, including peer and community review.
Reporting evaluation findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation methods and data are described in detail in evaluation reports. – The limitations of evaluation analysis, data and results are clearly documented in evaluation reports.
Building capability and a culture of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agencies provide opportunities for staff to improve their capability in planning, commissioning, conducting and using evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. – Evaluation teams have the capacity, cultural and technical capability and experience to deliver high-quality evaluation. – Evaluative thinking and high-quality evaluation is valued by agencies.



Principle: Useful



Simply put, evaluations that are not used represent missed opportunities for learning and accountability.

OECD (2020, p. 63)

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Evaluation needs to be useful. Evaluations that do not provide useful results are a waste of resources. When Australian Government agencies plan, commission or conduct an evaluation, the intention should always be to use the evaluation's findings to inform policy and program decisions.

Usefulness is also important when deciding which policies and programs to evaluate. What is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be an explicit consideration when deciding what to evaluate.

Evaluations are most useful when they are of high quality (the results are credible) and they are timed to contribute to policy-making decisions. For high-quality evaluations this means the right questions are asked (evaluators are clear about the purpose of the evaluation and how the information will be used), evaluators have engaged with those affected by the policy or program (including to help define the evaluation questions, the evaluation approach and methods and interpretation of evaluation results) and evaluations are rigorous and impartial.

Evaluations should be embedded in the policy cycle. This will improve the quality of evaluations by ensuring that adequate resources are devoted to evaluation, baseline and monitoring data are fit-for-purpose, and evaluation questions are linked closely to policy and program goals. It will also mean that evaluation findings are available at key decision points during implementation, and to support continuous quality improvement. High-quality evaluations will also contribute valuable knowledge to the policy evidence base, which can feed into future policy development.

Table 3. Useful evaluation in practice

What to evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The policies, programs and outcomes most relevant for improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are evaluated. – Evaluations fill knowledge gaps about what works, why, for whom and in what circumstances.
Evaluation planning, design and conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation is embedded in the policy and program design and delivery cycle and is planned for early. – Evaluations are planned and conducted with the intention that the findings will be available at key decision points and used to inform decision making. – Evaluation questions address issues that are of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other stakeholders. – Evaluation findings and lessons feed into planning cycles, policy formation and agencies' learning processes.
Reporting evaluation findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluations are written and communicated in ways that are useful to evaluation users, including policy makers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and policy and program providers.
Building capability and a culture of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation is core business for agencies. – Agencies understand the benefits of evaluation as well as how to ask questions that will inform decision making. – Agencies are open to receiving negative or unexpected evaluation findings and recognise that they are an opportunity to learn and improve policies or programs. – Agencies have processes that allow the findings of evaluations to be incorporated into policy or program changes. – When developing new policies or programs, agencies have processes to consider the existing evaluation evidence base. – Agencies build their capability to use and respond to evaluation findings.



Principle: Ethical



For me, [engaging ethically] is yindyamarra, a Wiradjuri concept which means to act with honour and respect, wisdom, to go slowly and act responsibly, be gentle and polite and honest with each other, be careful of the words and actions you put out to the world and understand the impact they have.

Michael McDaniel, AIATSIS Council Chairperson (AIATSIS, 2018)

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All stages of evaluation — planning, commissioning, conduct, reporting and use — should be conducted in an ethical way. Applying ethical standards improves the quality and consistency of evaluation and ensures that evaluation has a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Ethical practice during evaluation should be guided by existing ethical guidelines for research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including those developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2019a) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (2018).

Formal review by an ethics committee will be required for some, but not all, evaluations conducted under the Strategy. For example, where evaluation relies exclusively on existing or de-identified data, formal ethical review may not be necessary. However, all evaluation projects should include systematic and well-documented assessments of ethical risks. In cases where an evaluation does not require formal review by an ethics committee, agencies and evaluators should still follow ethical practices. Research quality will be improved by getting feedback from an ethics committee with experience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research during the ethics review process.

Agencies should ensure that evaluation budgets and timeframes are sufficient for evaluators to fulfil ethical requirements. This means allowing enough time for ethics risk assessment and formal ethical review, if required, as well as for evaluators to undertake meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, capacity building and report back to evaluation participants.

Table 4. Ethical evaluation in practice

What to evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are engaged on priorities in an ethical way.
Evaluation planning, design and conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluations are conducted according to the values and ethics identified in established guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities. – The evaluation plan allows sufficient time and resources for evaluators to meet ethical requirements. – Evaluations include a systematic, risk-based assessment of ethical risk to determine whether evaluations need to be subject to formal review by an ethics committee. – When evaluations are subject to formal ethical review, this should be done by an ethics committee with expertise in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Reporting evaluation findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ethical conduct during evaluations is clearly documented in evaluation reports. – Publication practices do not impede the ability of evaluators to engage in ethical practices, including sharing findings with evaluation participants. – Evaluation participants' contributions are recognised in evaluation reports.
Building capability and a culture of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agencies develop processes for systematically assessing ethical risks associated with evaluation. – Agency staff understand what is required to uphold ethical practice when evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. – Agencies provide opportunities for staff to improve their capabilities in addressing ethical issues during evaluation.

Principle: Transparent



The transparency of the evaluation process is crucial to its credibility and legitimacy. It can facilitate consensus-building and ownership of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations among stakeholders.

Independent Evaluation Group (2007, p. 27)

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Transparency increases accountability of agencies and government to the community. It also allows evaluation users to judge the credibility and rigour of evaluation techniques used, and provides incentives for agencies to commission and conduct high-quality evaluations.

Publishing evaluation reports allows a range of users — not just the commissioning agency or program area — to learn from the insights from evaluation. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities, and other government agencies — including from state, territory and local government — or non-government organisations that may be considering similar policy issues.



Table 5. Transparent evaluation in practice

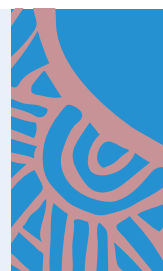
What to evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agencies publish evaluation forward work plans that detail the process and criteria for deciding what policies and programs are high priority for evaluation.
Evaluation planning, design and conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agencies' evaluation frameworks, strategies and policies are publicly available. – Evaluation teams are selected through an open and transparent process. When commissioning evaluations, the process and criteria used to make tender decisions are transparent. – Evaluation participants receive information about the purpose and conduct of the evaluation, what participating in the evaluation means for them, procedures for the collection and use of data and other information, before seeking their consent. – There are clear processes in place for access to, and release of, data (including for peer review, participants and communities).
Reporting evaluation findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation reports are published and easy to find. – Appropriate attention is given to concerns about privacy, confidentiality and culturally sensitive information, while at the same time making evaluation findings public. – Evaluation reports include clear documentation of methods, data, ethical practices and the limitations of an evaluation and its results. – The basis for evaluation findings are transparent. – Any conflicts of interest, and how such conflicts were managed during the evaluation, are disclosed. – Agencies publish a response to evaluation findings. – Agencies share evaluation reports on a central clearinghouse of evaluations.
Building capability and a culture of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agencies have processes for sharing the lessons from evaluation internally and with stakeholders. – Where planned evaluation activities have not commenced or been completed on schedule, agencies explain why and provide revised plans.



A maturity approach to evaluation

Culture change is difficult to achieve. ... Sometimes aspects of culture change can occur quickly, while others take years of investment and reinforcing. It will be important for agencies to adopt indicators of success, so they can know they are moving in the right direction.

Te Arawhiti (Office for Māori Crown Relations) (2019, p. 1)



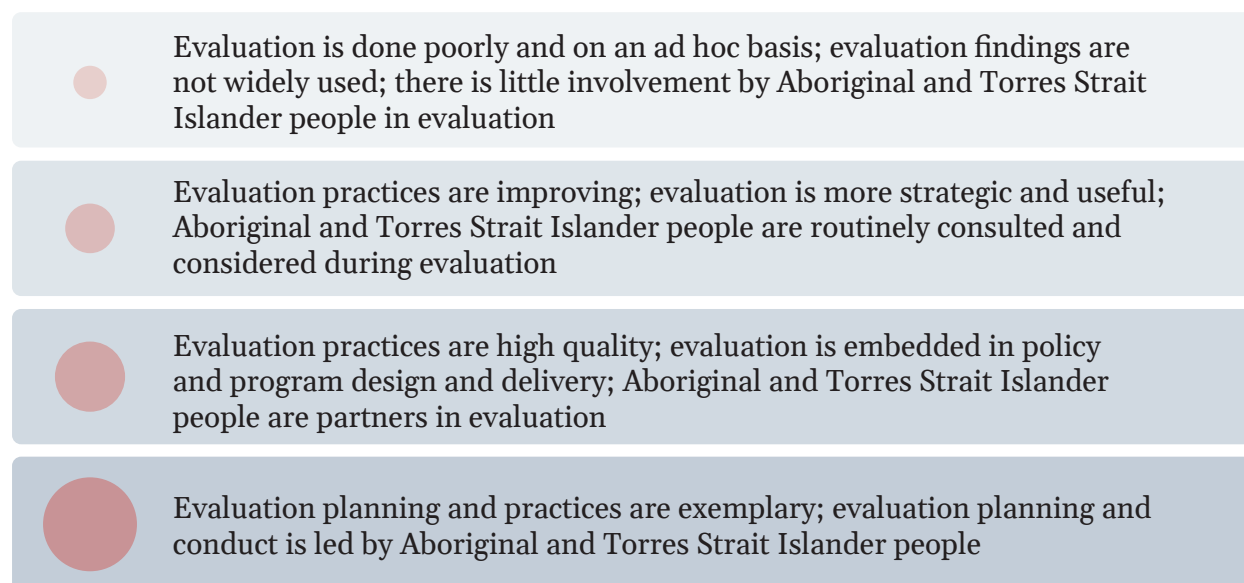
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A 'maturity' approach recognises progressive improvement in evaluation planning, practices and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (figure 3). When implementing the Strategy, agencies should assess their current evaluation and engagement practices and look for areas where improvements can be made. Learning from the successes of other agencies will also be important for supporting better evaluation practice and cultural change.

While agencies will initially be placed differently in terms of evaluation and engagement maturity, those agencies responsible for policies and programs that have a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or that are focused on outcomes that are of high priority to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, should seek to move quickly towards improving the maturity of their practices.

The maturity model will be developed in more detail between the draft and final Strategy.

Figure 3. Increasing maturity of evaluation and engagement



Sources: Adapted from Department of Industry, Innovation and Science (2019, pp. 37–39); Hudson (2010); Te Arawhiti (Office for Māori Crown Relations) (2019).

Roles and responsibilities

Primary responsibility for conducting evaluations under the Strategy should continue to be with Australian Government agencies. This emphasises the need for evaluation to be embedded in the policy cycle and places accountability for the conduct and use of evaluation with the agencies that have primary responsibility for developing and delivering policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Independence and objectivity can be promoted by commissioning an external evaluator or having a central evaluation unit manage and conduct evaluations.

However, centralised leadership, support, coordination and oversight – as well as mechanisms to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s engagement in the implementation of the Strategy – are also needed if the Strategy is to make a difference to evaluation processes and practice.

An evaluation champion to oversee the Strategy

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A new Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation (OIPE) is proposed. The Office would oversee the implementation of the Strategy and coordinate a whole-of-government approach to evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is proposed that the Office would sit within an existing independent statutory authority of the Australian Government. The functions of the Office would be to:

- have stewardship of the Strategy
- champion the value of evaluation and identify areas for evaluations or systematic reviews on cross-cutting topics
- advise Australian Government agencies on what the Strategy means in practice
- identify evaluation priorities for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- oversee agencies’ evaluation forward work plans
- coordinate with the Head of Evaluation Profession on capability-building opportunities
- monitor and publicly report on Australian Government agencies’ performance against the Strategy, and on how effective the Strategy has been in improving the quality and usefulness of evaluations affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Indigenous governance for the Strategy

Oversight of the Strategy should also include governance arrangements that ensure effective engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To facilitate this, it is proposed that an Indigenous Evaluation Council (the Council), with a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, be established to work with the OIPE. The functions of the Council would be to:

Provide strategic guidance to the OIPE on:

- evaluation planning, commissioning, conduct, publication and use, capability-building and cultural safety
- the translation, dissemination and synthesis of evaluation findings
- agencies’ compliance with the Strategy
- engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations to facilitate their input into the above functions
- OIPE’s stewardship and monitoring of the Strategy.

In partnership with the OIPE:

- recommend an Australian Government-wide set of evaluation priorities for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- report on the state of Indigenous policy evaluation across the Australian Public Service (APS).



Government-wide evaluation priorities

Government-wide evaluation priorities will help guide agencies’ decisions about what to evaluate. The priority-setting process should centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges.

It is proposed that the task of establishing (and maintaining) a formal set of government-wide evaluation priorities sit with the OIPE. While these governance arrangements are being established, the Commission proposes that the interim set of government-wide priority areas for evaluation under the Strategy be based on the initial outcomes from the Joint Council on Closing the Gap (table 6). Between the draft and final Strategy, there will be further engagement to refine the interim priority areas.

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Table 6. Proposed interim government-wide evaluation priority areas

Based on draft priorities established by the Council of Australian Governments and the Joint Council on Closing the Gap

Priority Policy Areas	
Priority 1: Families, children and youth	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe
Priority 2: Health	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong
Priority 3: Education	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: succeed at school; stay in school; and reach their full potential through further education pathways
Priority 4: Economic Development	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education, and strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce participation
Priority 5: Housing	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives
Priority 6: Justice, including youth justice	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
Priority 7: Land and waters	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ land, water and cultural rights are realised
Cross System Priority	
Addressing racism, discrimination and social inclusion, healing and trauma, and the promotion of culture and language for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	
Priority Reform Areas	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Developing and strengthening structures to ensure full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in shared decision making– Growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services– Improving mainstream service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people– Improving access to local data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (proposed)	

Actions to support an evaluation culture

Behavioural change only comes when people have skin in the game through some measure of accountability or responsibility for the outcomes of their actions. There is no shortage of goodwill in departments but that is not enough. The public service needs a reason to move beyond what it is doing now, to consider and include evaluation in a more comprehensive sense, which will only come with greater incentivisation.

Maggie Walter (2019, p. 1)



The Strategy will be most effective in an environment where evaluation is valued for accountability, learning and evidence-based decision making. This is where agencies want to know about the performance of their policies and programs, are prepared to experiment, share learnings, and use evaluation results in policy making.

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The Strategy supports a culture of evaluation through a number of actions. The actions will ensure that:

- the policies and programs that are most important to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are evaluated through a systematic and transparent process of setting priorities at the agency level
- evaluation is planned early
- agencies build their capability – including skills and data – to support high-quality evaluation practices
- evaluation findings are accessible and used to improve policies and programs
- agencies are accountable for implementing the Strategy, and lessons on good practice are highlighted and shared.



Ensuring the most important policies and programs are evaluated

Central to achieving the Strategy's objective of improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and ensuring evaluations are more useful, is to conduct evaluations in the areas that are most important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and where there are gaps in the evidence base.

Action 1: Agencies should systematically identify evaluation priorities and publish evaluation forward work plans

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Australian Government agencies should assess all new policies and programs, and undertake a stocktake of existing policies and programs, to determine which contribute to the government-wide evaluation priorities identified under the Strategy.

Each agency should adopt a criteria-based priority setting process to determine the extent to which the policies and programs within scope of the Strategy should be prioritised for evaluation (and the extent to which they should be evaluated). The criteria should include the program's impact, risk profile, strategic significance, expenditure, and the perspectives, priorities and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Australian Government departments and large agencies should release, on an annual basis, a rolling Three Year Evaluation Forward Work Plan, which details:

- how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges were centred as part of the prioritisation process
- policies and programs within their portfolio that contribute to government-wide evaluation priorities aimed at improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- the methodology for how the agency categorised the high priority policies and programs (based on the above criteria)
- a plan for how/when over the next three years the agency's identified policies and programs will be evaluated (or how they will become ready for evaluation).



Planning early for evaluation

Evaluations should be planned early — ideally during policy and program development — to ensure that the right evaluation questions are asked, useful baseline and monitoring data are collected, opportunities for engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the evaluation are identified, and adequate resources are available to undertake high-quality evaluation.

Action 2: New policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be subject to an Indigenous Evaluation Threshold Assessment

All new policies or programs that are assessed as having a significant and/or differential effect on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should include a threshold assessment of evaluation need.

An Indigenous Evaluation Threshold Assessment (IETA) should be undertaken when the policy or program is being developed. An IETA should include an evaluation plan with details on:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities that will be affected by the proposed initiative
- a proposed engagement plan (including timeframes and cultural safety considerations)
- a proposed approach (including the scale of evaluation required)
- the data required to assess the policy or program's impact and how they will be collected
- an estimated evaluation budget.



Building capability to conduct and manage high-quality evaluations

High-quality evaluations produce evidence that decision makers can rely on to improve policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Good data and access to evaluators with technical and cultural capability are essential to support good evaluation practice.

Action 3: The Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation should provide guidance to agencies on conducting evaluation in line with the principles of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

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The OIPE should provide guidance to agencies to ensure that evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are designed, conducted and managed in line with the principles set out in this Strategy. *A Guide to Evaluation under the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy* provides initial guidance on how the principles should be applied in practice, as well as questions that agencies and evaluators should consider at each stage of the evaluation process. The *Guide* should be reviewed and updated by the OIPE on an ongoing basis.

Action 4: Agencies, supported by the Head of Evaluation Profession, should ensure they have access to the skills they require to undertake or commission evaluations that are consistent with the Strategy

To undertake high-quality evaluations in line with the Strategy, agencies need to ensure that those designing, commissioning, managing and conducting evaluations that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the skills to comply with the Strategy.

The Head of Evaluation Profession — agreed to by the Australian Government as part of its response to the Independent Review of the APS — should provide support and resources that agencies can access as part of their efforts to build and maintain their evaluation capability. The supports should include:

- providing training for commissioning, conducting and using evaluations of policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- facilitating an APS-wide community of practice for people who are involved in evaluating policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- establishing processes through which evaluators can seek secondments or other mobility opportunities, with a view to broadening or deepening their experience evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Head of Evaluation Profession should develop a strategy to build a cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluators within the APS, which may include structured training, networking, mentoring and secondment opportunities.



Action 5: Agencies should ensure that they have access to, or are able to collect, the data they need to effectively undertake evaluations under the Strategy

Good data are essential for high-quality evaluation. Agencies should plan early to identify data needs for an evaluation. Data planning should consider:

- what data are needed to answer evaluation questions
- what data are needed to produce credible results (including the use of quantitative and/or qualitative data, and sampling methods)
- what existing data are available and suitable for the evaluation and what additional data should be collected


To ensure data used for evaluation are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and collected and managed in a culturally safe manner, agencies should develop and/or use:

- appropriate Indigenous data governance arrangements, including partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development, collection, use and management of data
- appropriate data standards
- appropriate data sharing and release protocols
- ethical and culturally safe data collection processes.

Action 6: A data dictionary should be developed to guide agencies on collecting and using data on core outcomes that are important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare should work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop and validate core indicators relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that agencies can use when collecting data for monitoring and evaluation.

There should also be data collection guidance for agencies that outlines ethical and cultural good practice.



Enhancing the use of evaluations

The use of evaluation evidence will be improved by having high-quality, timely and credible evaluations that answer questions that are relevant to policy makers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Policy makers and other users of evaluation evidence also need to be able to access evaluation findings in useful formats.

Action 7: All evaluation reports should be published

All evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertaken or commissioned by Australian Government agencies should be published and made available on agencies' websites within three months of being completed, unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise (such as where publishing the report will compromise confidentiality or privacy, or where there is culturally sensitive information).

Where there are reasons for not publishing an evaluation report, a summary of the findings of the evaluation should be published. The summary report should include an explanation for why the full evaluation report could not be published. Where the concerns only apply to part of the evaluation, the rest of the evaluation should be made public.

Published evaluations and summaries should also be made available to the central evaluation clearinghouse (action 9) for evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Action 8: Agencies should publish an accessible evaluation report summary

All evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertaken or commissioned by Australian Government agencies should include a short plain English summary of the evaluation report. Other ways of sharing evaluation findings, such as verbal feedback or information sessions, should be agreed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities at the evaluation planning stage.

Evaluation reports and summaries should also document how the planning, commissioning and conduct of the evaluation adhered to the principles of the Strategy.

Action 9: A central evaluation clearinghouse should be established

Good knowledge management is critical for the systematic use of evaluation findings across Australian Government agencies.

An online evaluation evidence clearinghouse – the Indigenous Evaluation Clearinghouse – should be established and maintained for the reports of evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Clearinghouse should sit within an existing independent statutory authority and be responsible for coordinating the synthesis of new evaluation evidence into the existing evidence base, and for translating the knowledge into forms that are accessible to different audiences.

Action 10: Agencies should publish a response to evaluation findings

All evaluation reports of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should include a management response and action plan by the responsible Australian Government agency.



Monitoring and reviewing the Strategy

Action 11: Agencies' performance against the Strategy should be monitored by the Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation

Monitoring arrangements for the Strategy have two important functions: to monitor the performance of Australian Government agencies against the Strategy, and to monitor how effective the Strategy is in encouraging high-quality and useful evaluations.

We are proposing that one of the roles of the OIPE be to monitor the performance of agencies against the Strategy (noting that the Australian Government has asked the Productivity Commission to review the performance of agencies against the Strategy and to set out its approach to monitoring).

The OIPE should also publish biennial reports that:

- assess agencies' compliance with the Strategy
- identify leading practices in the evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- assess the extent to which the Strategy has been effective in encouraging high-quality and useful evaluations
- formalise evaluation priorities, including identifying areas for cross-agency evaluations
- provide recommendations to the Australian Government on how the Strategy could be improved.

The first monitoring report should be released two years after the Strategy is endorsed by the Australian Government, then biennially thereafter.

Action 12: The Strategy should be subject to independent review after five years

It is important that the Strategy be reviewed. A review is an opportunity to assess:

- whether the Strategy's principles remain fit-for-purpose, and if not, in what ways they should be updated
- the extent to which the Strategy has been effective in encouraging higher quality and more useful evaluations of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the extent to which the Strategy actions have been effective
- the performance of those tasked with overseeing the Strategy and whether changes to the policy environment require changes to oversight arrangements.

Ideally, an independent review of oversight arrangements for the Strategy should occur five years after the Strategy is endorsed by the Australian Government.



Implementation timeline

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	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Government-wide evaluation priorities					
	Interim government-wide evaluation priorities identified	Government-wide evaluation priorities reviewed and formalised			
Ensuring the most important policies and programs are evaluated					
Action 1	Agencies should systematically identify evaluation priorities and publish evaluation forward work plans				
Planning early for evaluation					
Action 2	New policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be subject to an Indigenous Evaluation Threshold Assessment				
Building capability to conduct and manage high-quality evaluations					
Action 3	The Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation should provide guidance to agencies on conducting evaluation in line with the principles of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy				
Action 4	Agencies, supported by the Head of Evaluation Profession, should ensure they have access to the skills they require to undertake or commission evaluations that are consistent with the Strategy				
Action 5	Agencies should ensure that they have access to, or are able to collect, the data they need to effectively undertake evaluations under the Strategy				
Action 6	Develop a data dictionary				
Enhancing the use of evaluations					
Action 7	All evaluation reports should be published				
Action 8	Agencies should publish an accessible evaluation report summary				
Action 9	Establish an evaluation clearinghouse				
Action 10	Agencies should publish a response to evaluation findings				
Monitoring and reviewing the Strategy					
Action 11		First State of Evaluation report published		Second State of Evaluation report published	
Action 12					Independent review of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

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About the artist



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River of Knowledge by Luke Penrith



Luke Penrith's ancestry is connected through the Wiradjuri, Wotjobaluk, the Yuin and the Gumbaynggirr Nation. His passion is mentoring and nurturing Indigenous Australian job seekers and supporting Aboriginal Businesses. Lore, culture and heritage are paramount to Luke. His art reflects what he sees, hears and can smell and touch; he is a modern contemporary Aboriginal Artist living in Brungle NSW. Luke's bloodlines are connected through the rivers, the mountains, the coastline and the plains.

The image features a solid blue background. In the top-right and bottom-left corners, there are decorative elements consisting of intricate, stylized Aboriginal art patterns. These patterns include concentric circles, wavy lines, and various geometric shapes, rendered in a lighter blue and a reddish-brown color. The central text is white and reads:

www.pc.gov.au/ies