



# WEAVING KNOWLEDGES

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Knowledge exchange, co-design and  
community-based participatory research  
and evaluation in Aboriginal communities

Literature Review, Case Study and Practical Tips

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2018



Aboriginal  
Affairs



AANSW acknowledges Bundjalung Country in northern New South Wales (NSW). The front cover of this paper shows a basket woven from Bangalow palm on Bundjalung Country. The basket has appeared in the National Museum of Australia (NMA) and the image appears on the website of NMA.<sup>1</sup> This image was also referred to in a report by the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) to the NSW Government. NCARA noted the significance of weaving within Aboriginal culture in both historical and contemporary senses. NCARA (2018, p.7) stated that the:

First Nations of NSW have been weaving for tens of thousands of years. This [weaving] provides a powerful metaphor for how government and community can weave Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing together with Western knowledge threads to ensure that policies, programs, and services are co-owned and co-produced by communities and that such threads possess both cultural integrity and public confidence....co-design and co-production need to be seen as a process toward community wellbeing and empowerment, underpinned by data (both statistical and narrative) that can be truth-tested by communities through data sovereignty. That is, qualitative and quantitative data are co-produced, monitored and owned by community, and are truth-tested against one another.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nma.gov.au/encounters\\_education/community/richmond\\_river](http://www.nma.gov.au/encounters_education/community/richmond_river)

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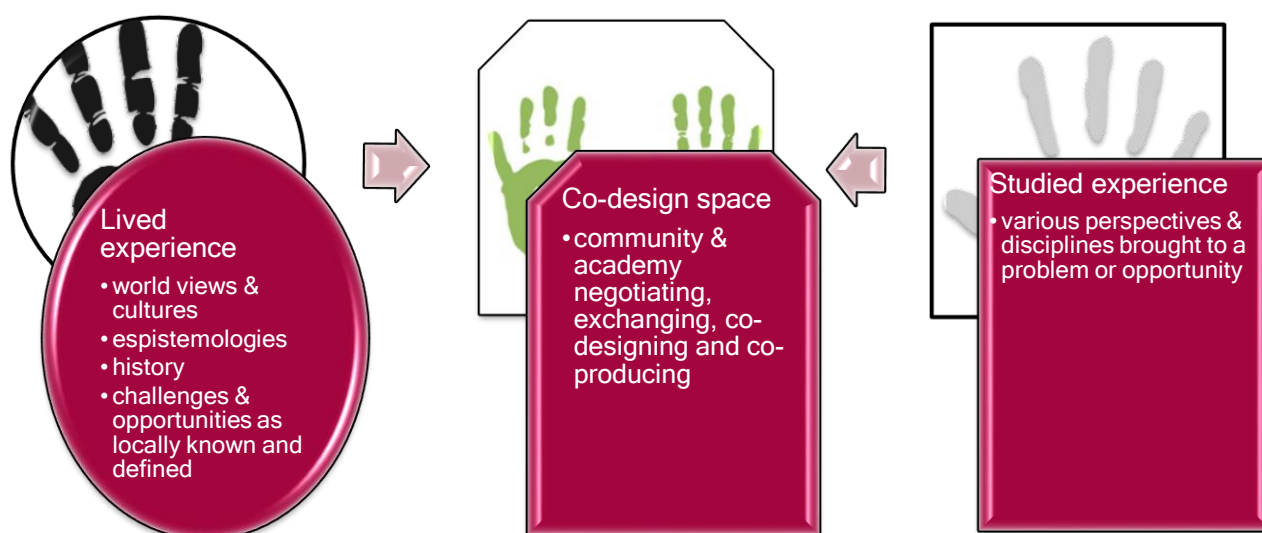
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<sup>2</sup> *OCHRE* is the name of the NSW Government's Plan for Aboriginal affairs and stands for 'Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment'

# Introduction, background and context

Working from the inspiration provided by the New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) on page 2, this paper explores the 'threads' of co-design and community-based participatory research (CBPR) as they relate to evaluation and research in Aboriginal contexts. Figure 1 below illustrates the weaving and convergence of lived and studied experiences that should ideally feature in co-designed and co-produced Aboriginal social research:

Figure 1: Co-design through exchanges of lived and studied experiences



Aboriginal affairs policy is a complex public administration undertaking. Its complexity is due to a combination of historical, colonial, cross-cultural, ideological, political, racial, geographical, and socio-economic factors. Against this backdrop, the NSW Government has invested over recent years in its plan for Aboriginal affairs called *OCHRE*, standing for opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility and empowerment.

In 2018, the first stage of the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*, conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW, has been completed. Aboriginal Affairs NSW (AANSW), the lead agency for *OCHRE*, intends future stages of the evaluation to involve greater 'collaboration between those responsible for the conduct of the evaluation and local Aboriginal communities'.<sup>3</sup> AANSW expects that co-design processes will allow local communities to tailor *OCHRE* in their community to suit their unique context. AANSW has outlined the fundamental approach:

The evaluation is carried out with and by local people rather than on them with the evaluation questions, how the initiative's impact is measured and the methods for achieving this, and the nature and delivery of the initiative co-designed. The approach requires evaluation processes that are purposefully designed to create an environment where co-design can flourish including developing the evaluation capacity of local communities and building trust. Collaborative partnerships inevitably bring complexities including negotiating logistics, competing priorities, competing values and interest, and challenges to research governance, flexibility and timeframes.<sup>4</sup>

In Aboriginal contexts, co-design plays a vital role: it reminds service providers and governments that they should do things *with*, and not *to* Aboriginal communities. The Government is publicly committed to involving Aboriginal people in *OCHRE*'s planning, design and evaluation. Initiatives within *OCHRE* were designed after extensive consultation with Aboriginal people, and in line with the principles of co-design and CBPR. Like all Government programs, *OCHRE* initiatives are being externally and independently evaluated. It naturally follows that co-design will be used throughout this evaluation.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/new-knowledge/whats-happening-now/projects-underway>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

# The contents of this report

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The purpose of this report is to assist Aboriginal, research and policy communities in considering and implementing co-design in evaluation and CBPR into the future.

The paper has three parts:

Part A: What the literature says about CBPR and co-design

Part B: Case study: Co-designing OCHRE to this point.

Part C: How communities and researchers can co-design evaluation and implementation – some practical tips

# The authors of this paper

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# PART A:

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What the literature says about CBPR and  
co-design

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## What, why, where?

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This literature review seeks to answer the following questions:

- **What** is co-design of evaluation and research, and what is CBPR?
- **Why** are co-design and CBPR approaches important in Aboriginal research and evaluation contexts?
- **Where** have co-design and CBPR been applied in Aboriginal contexts?

The review adopts a translational approach. That is, it intends the findings to be easily understood by a diverse audience, which will include in particular Aboriginal community, public sector and academic readers.

## What is co-design of evaluation and research?

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As the word suggests, co-design is a design principle or planning process which is jointly developed and is collaborative in nature. In the context of research and evaluation, the term co-design has come to mean the active engagement of research participants, end-users of services, and beneficiaries of intended programs in designing, implementing and evaluating services and products. In the case of evaluation and research in Aboriginal contexts, co-design requires the close and ongoing involvement of communities in designing and carrying out evaluation and research work that is both meaningful and engenders respect, empowerment and ownership.

Co-design has its origins in the desire of developers of products and services (in technology, infrastructure, etc.) to engage with end-users in shaping the product or service. In social services, co-design generally involves the agencies which deliver programs or services working together with the recipients of those programs or services to develop and refine them (NCOSS, 2017). Bradwell and Marr (2008) described co-design as a collaboration, a developmental process, which 'shifts power to the process', creating a framework which defines and maintains the balance of rights and powers among participants, and which is outcomes-based. In co-design the recipients of a program or service work in partnership with the service delivery agency (government, non-government or private enterprise) to tailor the program or service to its target audience. The principles of co-design can apply not only within design and delivery, but also more broadly to include evaluation. In Aboriginal contexts specifically, Abbott, Taylor and Allen (2015) highlighted the importance of investing in the capacity of local First Nations people to co-design and work on research projects in their communities, as such approaches can ensure 'the quality of the research and its impacts'.

## What is community based participatory research (CBPR)?

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As with co-design, CBPR, community participatory research (CPR) or participatory action research (PAR) are broadly defined as processes which involve the community (as end-users, intended beneficiaries, or stakeholders) in the planning, design and management of research and evaluation projects. Mooney-Somers and Maher (2009, p.112) defined CBPR as:

... an approach that allows researchers to work with communities to generate knowledge about and solutions to problems the community is facing. This framework repositions the people who would usually be the object of the research as participants in the research process; 'the researched become the researchers'. CBPR involves more than consultation; it focuses on developing community capacity to participate as co-investigators in developing, conducting and disseminating the research. It encompasses approaches such as participatory action research, action research, partnership research and collaborative inquiry, and is characterised by an emphasis on communities as co-researchers.

In their analysis of collaborative and participatory research methods, Henry, Dunbar, Arnott, Scrimgeour, and Murakami-Gold (2004) highlighted the importance of 'bottom-up participatory approaches' (as opposed to top-down approaches) for 'deliver[ing] sustainable improvement to the lives of people who have been the subjects of research'. Henry *et al.* (2004) drew upon Stillitoe (1998) in arguing for greater collaborative approaches to research in First Nations communities. Stillitoe (1998, p.22) argued 20 years ago that:



It is now generally agreed that understanding the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and practices central to local ecological and social systems is essential if we are to achieve sustainable development ... The shortfall in achieving the goals of many thousands of government, non-government, and donor-funded projects aiming at poverty alleviation and agricultural development has been ascribed to the lack of participation of the target populations or beneficiary stakeholders.

Henry *et al.* (2004) also reflected on the frustration felt by Aboriginal groups about the efficacy and usefulness of academic research generally in First Nations affairs. Such frustrations have some academic researchers who work in Indigenous fields to use more PAR approaches. Henry *et al.* (2004, p.14) noted three central features in PAR:

- shared ownership of research projects
- community-based analysis of social problems
- an orientation towards community action.

## Why co-design and participatory approaches are important in Aboriginal contexts

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This section of the literature review discusses the importance of participatory research and co-design both in the context of Aboriginal affairs specifically, and public policy more broadly. As earlier noted, First Nations affairs policy is complex, due to a multitude of factors including history, colonisation, ideology, politics, race relations, geography, and socio-economic marginalisation. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that Western science and academic research are unlikely, by themselves, to provide a holistic picture or a complete understanding of this inherent complexity or of the pathways necessary to turn Aboriginal marginalisation around. The Healing Foundation (2017) in Australia has recently reflected on this complexity and on sensitivity in research into Aboriginal trauma and healing:

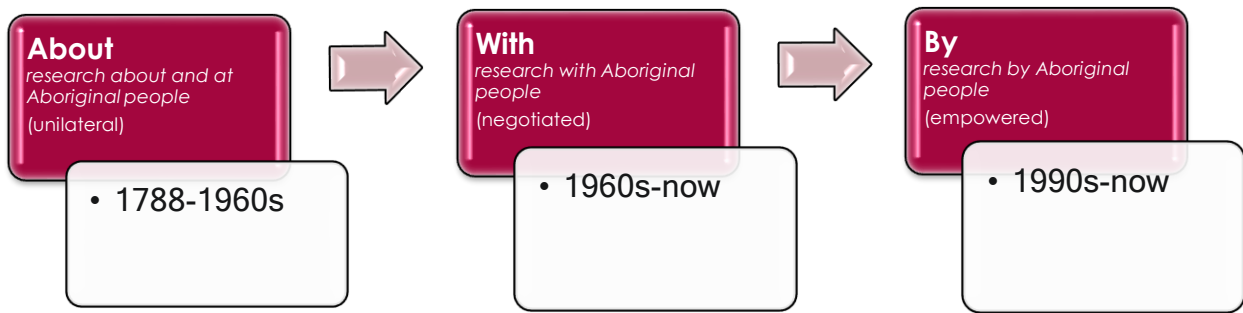
Western empirical research practice poses a particular challenge for evaluating healing and programs... This is because healing can impact on a number of domains and therefore outcomes rarely align to simple or siloed quantitative performance measures.

The foundation goes on to argue that research relationships with First Nations need to be need to be reset so that research methods respect Indigenous knowledge systems, and findings are culturally valid as a result. The Healing Foundation also offers an example of Indigenous evaluation methods using co-design at the Murri School in Queensland (which will be discussed later in this paper).

It is critically important to reflect upon the wider historical relationship between research and Aboriginal communities when considering the advent of co-design and CBPR in First Nations contexts. The relationship between First Nations communities and the research and evaluation sectors has passed through various stages of development and contention. More often than not it has been a one-sided affair which favoured the colonist. From the start of colonisation Aboriginal people were the subjects and subjected to research (Dreise, 2018). Later periods would see 'researchers' (see Arthur & Morphy, 2005) who were not necessarily qualified in the academic sense that we now know it, but who would nonetheless engage in activity that sought to understand (though not always appreciate) First Nations people.

Research was often *about* and directed *at* Aboriginal peoples, cultures and communities. In more recent decades, the relationship between First Nations and the academy has moved towards research relationships *with* and *by* Aboriginal people, as set out in Figure 2. Where research was once unilateral (that is, conducted by non-Aboriginal about Aboriginal people), recent decades have seen Aboriginal people in a position to negotiate with researchers, or to undertake research directly themselves.

Figure 2: Research and Aboriginal people



The years from the 1960s to the 1990s saw the emergence of Aboriginal academics, starting with the first university graduates, Charles Perkins and Margaret Valadian, in the 1960s, then postgraduate scholars such as the first Aboriginal PhD, Bill Jonas, in 1980 and the first Torres Strait Islander PhD, Martin Nakata, in 1998. Aboriginal people have steadily gained a stronger foothold in the academic sector that once excluded them.

From the 1990s, Aboriginal Australian academics such as Rigney (1997), Martin (2003) and Moreton-Robinson (2004) have reflected upon and actively challenged the colonised nature of research and its lack of regard for Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies. Such Australian First Nations academics have sought to decolonise Western methodologies in research as it relates to Aboriginal people.

In recent decades, Aboriginal community participatory models in research have also emerged, along with the principle of co-design in research and evaluation. While these concepts do not have their origins specifically in First Nations contexts, academics and communities alike have seized on them as a way to recalibrate the relationship between First Nations and researchers. However, the parties involved are encouraged to proceed with caution and with eyes open. Cochran, Marshall, Garcia-Downing, Kendall, Cook, McCubbin and Gover (2008), for instance, highlighted the collective reflection required in participatory research. They argue (p.22):

Why are researchers viewed with scepticism by many indigenous peoples? Participatory research has often been proposed as a solution to this scepticism because it engages participants in the research process at all stages. Participatory research has been described as a collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve . . . their own social practices. Thus, participatory research simultaneously contributes to basic knowledge in social science and social action in everyday life. ... even this [participatory] model of research, as it is typically practised, does not prevent the risk that indigenous ways of knowing are marginalised by the scientific and academic community. Participatory researchers need to consider the power that indigenous methods can bring to research design and to the entire research process.

Cochran *et al.* (2008) also railed against the 'colonial control' that has permeated politics, policy and research as it relates to Aboriginal people, by arguing (p.23):

Given the negative impact of inappropriate research with indigenous communities, there is an urgent need for an ethical research approach based on consultation, strong community participation, and methods that acknowledge indigenous ways of knowing.

Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, and Matthews (2011) also argued that research has to be recalibrated to reflect the needs of First Nations people, including respect for Aboriginal ways of knowing. Against the historical backdrop in which research was something done to Aboriginal people, Kendall *et al.* (2011) found that it 'is not surprising that Indigenous people in Australia generally view researchers with scepticism, and share an understandable reluctance to participate in research'.

It is equally unsurprising that Aboriginal communities have called for greater control of research as it relates to First Nations. Clapham (2011, p.40) described Aboriginal- (or Indigenous-) led research as 'research which is controlled and driven by Indigenous communities.' Clapham explained that the movement towards greater control of research had been fuelled by decades of 'negative impacts of past research practices on Indigenous communities', which meant that Aboriginal communities were increasingly determined to shape 'future research directions, questions and methodologies.' (p.40) Clapham (2011) also asserted that research which is most highly valued by Aboriginal communities is community-controlled and asset- (or strengths-) based, and that leadership at both community and academic levels is critical for such research to succeed.

Clapham suggested that involving Aboriginal people as chief investigators, research team members, research assistants, and community brokers is one way to ensure Aboriginal control. Boosting opportunities for Aboriginal research students and building the capacity of Aboriginal health workers are also important measures. Clapham (2011, p.45) further argued that building cultural competence among non-Aboriginal researchers is a key challenge, which he posed this way:

At the university level, the challenge is to greatly increase the cultural capacity and competence of researchers and research teams. This can be done through peer education such as seminars and by increasing the awareness of Indigenous issues at the departmental or faculty level. Aboriginal academics often play a difficult but important role as 'brokers' between academia and community. There are a range of skills that are required to be developed and fine-tuned in working between research institutes, academia and community organisations and there is still much work to do in building and enhancing existing capacity within mainstream university departments and research institutes.

Putt (2013) also reflected on CBPR as one way to facilitate Aboriginal control in research, through collaboration teams which incorporate both academic (Western) and Indigenous community knowledge holders (p.5). In the area of criminal justice, Putt (2013, p.5) identified 'legal services, victim support services, healing and wellbeing centres, night patrols, Indigenous courts, and community justice groups' as examples of potential CBPR partners.

Kendall *et al.* (2011) argued that Aboriginal research needs to move beyond participatory research to embrace Aboriginal ways of knowing and epistemologies. Kendall *et al.* (2011, p.7) posited that:

Although considerable progress has been made toward a general acceptance that research methods need to change in Indigenous communities, we must move beyond the rhetoric of participatory research toward a model of research in which Indigenous knowledge, processes, and ways of knowing are respected and — as much as is possible — understood, felt, and acknowledged through relational ethical frameworks, appropriate epistemology, and negotiated agreements.

Kendall *et al.* (2011) also found that Aboriginal ways of knowing represent a major challenge for Western academic contexts. They suggested that they are likely to be both 'time-consuming and fundamentally life-altering' for non-Indigenous educators, researchers and practitioners (p.7). The authors further argued that Australian research needs to progress further down a path of research maturity whereby researchers actively examine the 'epistemologies that underlie their work and the ways in which they relate to entire Indigenous communities' (p.8).

The emergence of Aboriginal academics has led to a challenge and a shift towards the empowerment of Aboriginal voices in research. For Aboriginal public policy and its relationship with research and evaluation, it is important to consider the wider, generic literature on the way co-design and participatory approaches relate to public policy research. This literature urges the empowerment of citizens (including marginalised voices) in public policy research. For instance, Milani (2005), reflecting in a UNESCO paper on the relationship between the social sciences and research, presents (p.51) the following challenge concerning the inclusion and empowerment of silenced voices in public policy research:

Who participates in the definition of the policy research agenda? Whose interests are taken into account? Contrary to the common sense that may prevail in "participatory projects", it would be naive to think that a history of exclusion can be overcome by "including" individuals already identified and selected because they are disempowered by those very structures. Calling "them" empowered is not enough. If we are concerned about issues of voice and exclusion in the production of knowledge, then it is critical to recognize the situated character of the research process itself.

Milani highlights the importance of inclusion and empowerment through giving voice to the citizenry. In Australia, the head of the Victorian Premier's Department, Chris Eccles (2016), has recently reflected on co-design as a key mechanism in democratising public services. Eccles (2016, pages not numbered) issued the following challenge as it pertains to relationships between citizens and government:

Citizens are more capable and more confident. They want our democracy to be more democratic.

I say 'democratic' in the full sense of the term. They don't just want to be well governed, but increasingly they want to be self-governed. Not directly. They don't want to replace the parliament or public service, of course. But they want more of a say. They want input. They want to shape new programs and ensure those programs reflect contemporary values and contemporary social needs more closely. This is especially so when it comes to the rights

of women and children, or indigenous communities, or the future of socially disadvantaged communities suffering job loss and decline.

... [community] organisations have much more to add than just running programs. They can help us design them and get the community to buy into them and accept them – as they have been doing for many years. And now we are setting out to extend this idea of co-design further by getting the broader public involved in the process. Not just the third sector, but individual citizens.

...The reason for this emphasis on co-design is simple: we don't want to be prescriptive.

The importance of co-design and participatory research is thus clear and well documented. We now turn to examples where such approaches have been applied in First Nations contexts.

## Where have co-design approaches been applied in First Nations contexts?

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Three examples of co-design and CPR approaches in First Nations contexts are outlined here:

- the Indigenous Resiliency CBPR Project (Australia, New Zealand, Canada)
- the Intergenerational Trauma Project (Queensland)
- the Braided Rivers Approach (New Zealand).

### THE INDIGENOUS RESILIENCY PROJECT

Mooney-Somers *et al.* (2009) documented the Australian chapter of a larger international project involving First Nations communities in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. The *Indigenous Resiliency Project* explored young First Nations people's perspectives on resilience in relation to blood-borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections. The Australian leg of the project was conducted in Redfern, Townsville and Perth. Mooney-Somers *et al.* (2009, p.112) provided a case study of how 'university-based researchers and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services have used CBPR to work with young Indigenous Australians'. The paper highlighted the importance of 'developing research capacity; establishing relationships between community organisations and research institutions; and prioritising ethical and social considerations in the conduct of research' (*ibid*).

A number of key learnings emerged from the paper including that 'CBPR is a dynamic process, with the project emerging as the process proceeds' (p.113). Furthermore, the paper highlighted the importance of building capacity, skills and confidence among community, health organisations, and researchers alike. The approach adopted within the project recognised 'local methods of knowledge gathering as valid'. (p.114) The authors described practical aspects of the development process including that 'university-based researchers developed a three-day research development and training workshop covering research ethics, communication, research sampling and recruitment, individual and group interviewing, participant observation, writing field notes and analysis of qualitative data' (p. 114).

Mooney-Somers *et al.* (2009, p.115) further noted that 'research teams spend a significant amount of time in the community recruiting participants and collecting data. The peer researchers, site coordinators, and, in Redfern, the mentors, wear identification badges and introduce themselves as conducting a research project with TAIHS [Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service] or the AMS [Aboriginal Medical Service] Redfern. This is beneficial to the project as the research is vouched for by a respected community organisation'. In concluding their paper, Mooney-Somers *et al.* (2009, p.118) found that:

Until Indigenous communities have the resources or capacity to conduct their own research, partnerships with university-based researchers who bring technical expertise are inevitable. CBPR is an approach that simultaneously facilitates a research partnership and provides the training and resources that will allow the community to act on its own behalf in the future.

## THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA PROJECT

The Healing Foundation<sup>5</sup>, in a co-design partnership with the Murri School in Brisbane, has developed a method to evaluate the *Intergenerational Trauma Project*. The Healing Foundation (2017) stated that through a four-year partnership, the school and the foundation have collaborated on a 'co-design process informed by reflective practice, including engagement of school students, their families and school staff to inform the future direction of the project'. The foundation explained key aspects of the project:

This process emphasised that good practice program evaluation cannot be isolated from good practice program co-design. Genuine co-design allows community members to identify their priorities and indicators of success. Identifying clear goals and desired outcomes at the outset informs the design of the evaluation framework and measurement approaches. This was achieved through a project review process led by the Murri School staff in collaboration with the Healing Foundation.

Yarning circles, which engaged students, families and school staff, have been a central feature of the project:

Questions to guide the yarning circles were developed in partnership with Aboriginal staff from the school to ensure they were appropriate, and Aboriginal staff led the yarning circles to ensure a culturally safe environment. The circles sought community insights into what factors cause stress for kids and families, what makes families strong and healthy, and what makes us strong as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The foundation offered further details of the methods used in the project:

A reflective practice circle was also conducted with the Murri School Healing Team, allowing them to identify program strengths as well as priority areas for further focus and professional development. This was followed by a program logic workshop allowing the team to revise the project goals, outcomes, activities and outputs, drawing from their own experience and the input from students, families and the wider school staff. While program logic is a western planning concept, it is a useful tool when adapted to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of program design, goals and measures of success.

The foundation described the next phase of the program as a process of identifying 'the qualitative performance measures that will be supported by comparative quantitative analysis of a range of indicators such as social and emotional wellbeing and cultural identity. Involving community leaders in evaluation design ensures effective measurements are developed. In our experience, this has led to quality outcomes as evaluation is driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, rather than imposed outcomes that often lack cultural context'.

The Healing Foundation (2017) concluded that:

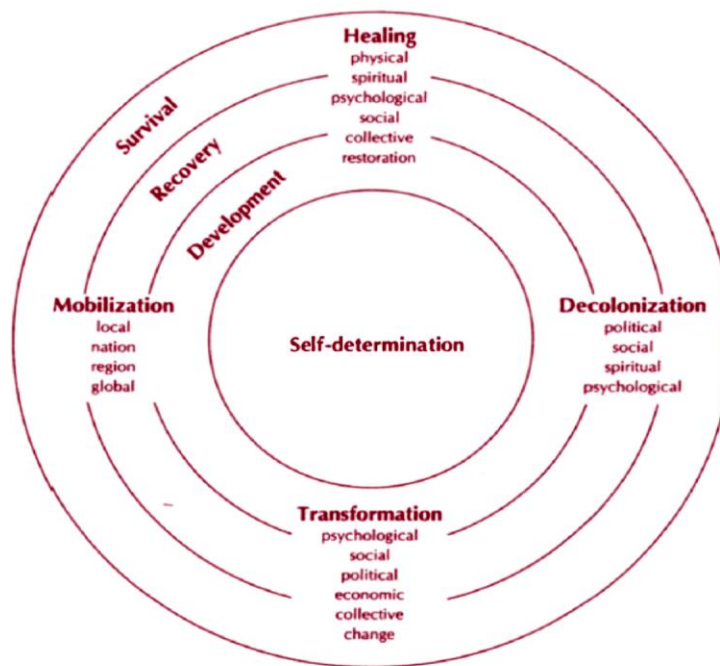
Self-determination is central to healing. Evaluation processes therefore must also enable this to support healing environments for children and young people to thrive.

This centring of self-determination at the heart of First Nations healing and progress is consistent with the view of the Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p.117), who argued that Indigenous research fundamentally has to be seen through a lens of self-determination, healing, decolonisation, and transformation of political landscapes and discourses, as reflected in her Indigenous research agenda model (see Figure 3 following):

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<sup>5</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2017/05/09/collaboration-and-co-design-when-evaluating-intergenerational-trauma-projects>

Figure 3: Indigenous research agenda by Linda Tuhiwai Smith



From Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p.117)

## THE BRAIDED RIVERS APPROACH

In New Zealand, academics over the past twenty years or more have turned their minds to a reconciliation of Western science and Kaupapa Māori perspectives. Macfarlane (2008), for instance, has written about the *He Awa Whiria* (Braided Rivers model) which Fergusson, McNaughton, Hayne, and Cunningham (2011, p.278) summarised this way.

- The Western Science and Kaupapa Māori streams are acknowledged as distinctive approaches to the development and evaluation of programmes.
- The model permits knowledge from the Kaupapa Māori stream to inform the development of Western Science programmes and knowledge from Western Science programmes to inform the development of Kaupapa Māori programmes.
- The model also permits the evaluation methodologies used in the Western Science stream to be applied by the Kaupapa Māori stream and the evaluation methodologies used by Kaupapa Māori research can be applied to the Western stream.

Importantly, Fergusson *et al.* (2011, p.278) suggest that the Braided Rivers model assumes that programs will only be accepted as effective where a consensus can be reached 'based on knowledge from both [Western and Māori] streams'. To this end, Gillon and Macfarlane (2017, p.166) provide the following graphic (Figure 4) to illustrate a coming together of both streams in the context of early reading among children.



Figure 4: Braided Rivers Model

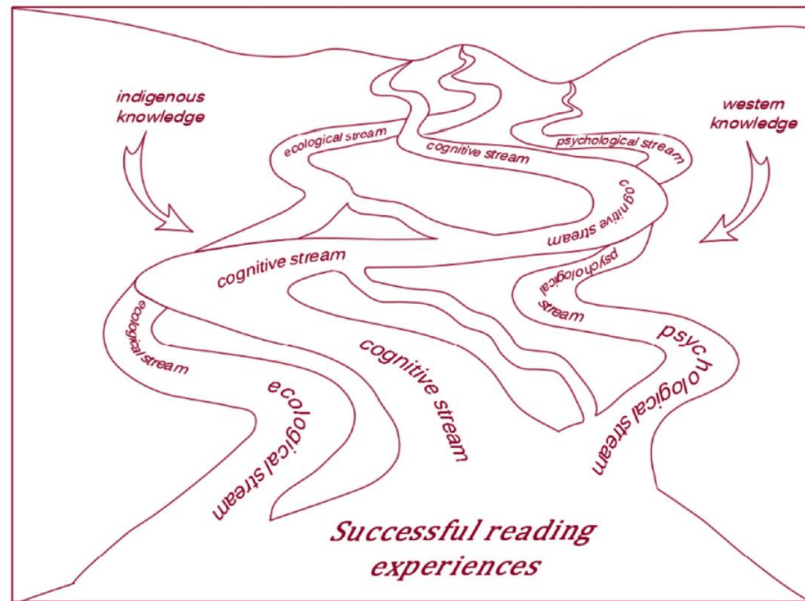


Figure 1 A Braided Rivers Approach to the integration of knowledge to facilitate children's early reading success.

From Gillon and Macfarlane, 2017, p.166

In explaining this visual image, Gillon and Macfarlane (2017, p.165) wrote that the way 'streams of a braided river merge in and out of each other as they cross the plains of a landscape is used to depict how traditional western science knowledge, assessment practices, and program content need to merge with indigenous knowledge and culturally appropriate assessment practices and program content ... The Braided Rivers Approach [depicts] how both western knowledge and indigenous knowledge need to feed into the differing streams (domains) of influence that are relevant to successful reading experiences.'

# PART B:

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**A case study: Co-designing *OCHRE* to this point**

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## Overview of this case study

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Aboriginal communities in NSW are seeking to recalibrate their relationship both with government and the research community. This means that they are generally seeking a greater say in how service delivery and evaluation are conducted. That is, Aboriginal communities want things done with and by them, not to them. Co-design and co-production of services and associated evaluations represent one way in which communities can be empowered.

OCHRE is now in its sixth year of implementation, and the first stage of its evaluation has recently been completed. The OCHRE evaluation is being conducted by The Social Policy and Research Centre (SPRC) of the University of New South Wales (UNSW). A co-design approach was used to allow Aboriginal communities participating in OCHRE to articulate their own measures of success and how such measures will be collected and analysed. The evaluation has proceeded through set stages: first community consent, then co-design of data collection, data collection itself, data analysis, and preparation of the evaluation report. This present report focuses on the co-design of the data collection, although other steps will also be discussed where necessary to provide context. The co-design phase involved the external evaluators from SPRC working with local community members to design the evaluation together. The evaluation of OCHRE is itself also being analysed. For this, the co-design phase just described was reviewed to find any problems, and to identify where the process should be modified. This was done by analysing government documents and interviewing public servants and the evaluation team.

This case study documents the three steps of co-design: informing community, conducting the co-design workshops, and confirming the agreed outcomes from the workshops. This phase of the evaluation entailed a significant amount of work by the evaluation team, supported by local Aboriginal Affairs staff and those at central office. Even with the concerted efforts of these three groups, several issues arose during these steps which the investigation has identified. We suggest some possible ways these could be addressed in any future co-design work with Aboriginal communities in New South Wales.

For example, when conducting co-design with community members it is critical that the community members understand what co-design is, and what may be expected of them as they take part in it. Community members must be well briefed in advance. This is particularly important where they represent others and may need to seek advice or input from their community before making decisions.

Community members engaged in co-designing an evaluation must be equal partners. They must be given relevant information about evaluation theory and practice, and they must be given several opportunities to co-design the evaluation – not just a one-off consultation. Increasing community members' awareness will help them prepare for and contribute to the co-design of the evaluation. Similarly, ensuring there is a thorough, shared understanding of the initiative that is being evaluated will also help make the design of its evaluation more appropriate.

The OCHRE evaluation was in fact seven smaller evaluations under one larger umbrella. From managing this process, several things became clear. First, lessons learned in one place should be passed quickly on to others and incorporated into subsequent co-design sessions. A systematic method to ensure that this can happen would be useful. Second, for each community the evaluation process should look seamless. Each phase should follow smoothly after the previous one is complete. Asking communities to participate in co-design is asking for a significant commitment. Participants must be fully advised from the outset not just of their role, but also of what that significant commitment will entail.

The experience showed that for a research team engaged in co-design, flexibility is critical. For co-design to succeed, the team must be able to work with a community according to that community's needs. The team must also become familiar with cultural protocols and be able to follow them in order to establish the community's trust in the evaluation and the staff involved. Both these factors were identified as essential for success. It is hoped that the learnings from this study can be used for the continuing evaluation of OCHRE and by other researchers when conducting co-designed activities with Aboriginal communities.

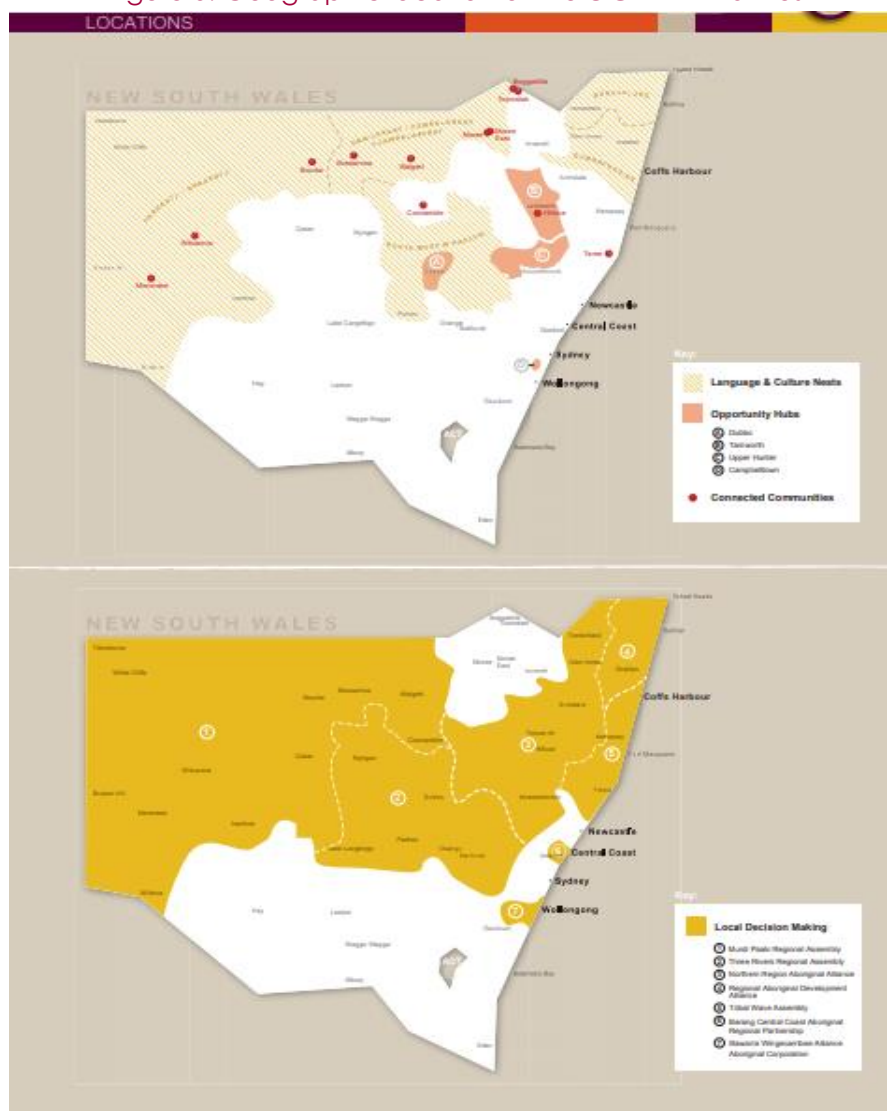
## Background and context to this case study: the OCHRE evaluation

In 2012 and 2013 some 2,700 Aboriginal people in NSW stated that Aboriginal language and culture, education and employment and accountability are important priorities for Aboriginal communities. The NSW Government responded with OCHRE. Launched in 2013, OCHRE supports:

- Connected Communities – where schools work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders in the local community to improve education outcomes for young Aboriginal people
- Opportunity Hubs – which provide young Aboriginal people with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition into employment, training or further education
- Industry-Based Agreements – partnerships with peak industry bodies to support Aboriginal employment and enterprise
- Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests – to revitalise and maintain languages as an integral part of culture and identity
- Local Decision Making – where Aboriginal communities are given a progressively bigger say in what services are delivered in their communities, and how they are delivered
- An Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework – that drives the long-term and sustainable economic prosperity of Aboriginal people and their communities across NSW
- A Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) – to provide independent oversight over Aboriginal programs.

OCHRE initiatives are located in a number of Aboriginal nations, communities and regions within NSW. The location of Connected Communities, Opportunity Hubs, Language and Culture Nests, and Local Decision Making is provided in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Geographic location of the OCHRE initiatives



The important conversation between the NSW Government and Aboriginal communities that resulted in OCHRE continues through the evaluation of the initiatives. This forms part of a robust accountability process for OCHRE to make sure that it develops as the community intended. Two Opportunity Hubs, two Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and three Local Decision Making sites were included in the evaluation.

Recognising that it will take time to reach the destination where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in NSW achieve an equal footing, the independent evaluation is planned to continue for 10 years – long enough to learn about what works and does not work and some of the outcomes that have been achieved. Further information can be found at <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/ochre-a-continuing-conversation>.

Consistent with the underlying philosophy of OCHRE that facilitates the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples in NSW, the evaluation is based on the principles of decolonising research, and adheres to the NSW Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council's (AH&MRC) five principles of research with Aboriginal communities set out in their *Guidelines for research into Aboriginal health* (2016). The AH&MRC guidelines require research to adhere to the following principles.

- *Net benefits for Aboriginal people and communities:* The research will advance scientific knowledge and result in a demonstrated net benefit for the health of Aboriginal people and communities.
- *Aboriginal community control of research:* There is Aboriginal community control over all aspects of the proposed research including research design, ownership of data, data interpretation and publication of research findings.
- *Cultural sensitivity:* The research will be conducted in a manner sensitive to the cultural principles of Aboriginal society and will recognise the historical aspects and impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people.
- *Reimbursement of costs:* Aboriginal communities and organisations will be reimbursed for all costs arising from their participation in the research process.
- *Enhancing Aboriginal skills and knowledge:* The project will utilise available opportunities to enhance the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal people, communities and organisations that are participating in the project (AH&MRC, 2016, p. 3).

The evaluation is being undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales. A literature review undertaken by SPRC to inform the approach taken to the evaluation has identified the following components of best practice:

- *Respectful relationships between the evaluation team and the communities involved in the evaluation.* Communities play a major part in designing and implementing the evaluation, and in disseminating its findings. This involves a coproduction approach: the community and the evaluation team work together on all aspects of the evaluation.
- *Giving priority to the views and beliefs of Aboriginal communities about the program, rather than relying on externally imposed criteria for evaluating success.*
- *Taking into account the context in which the program is being implemented, including the historical context of colonialism, the current context of disadvantage, and the cultural context of each community in which research is being conducted.*

These components are drawn from the *Braided Rivers* approach developed in New Zealand (Macfarlane, 2012).

## The OCHRE evaluation steps

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The evaluation plan for OCHRE has three phases:

- Preliminary planning and ethics, including engaging stakeholders, understanding the social, cultural, historical and political dimensions of each community, and applying for ethics approval and implementing ethics requirements.
- Gathering and analysing information, including co-designing the evaluation, collecting and analysing data, and overcoming challenges.
- Reporting findings, including submitting the draft report and recommendations to stakeholders, finalising the report and recommendations, and disseminating the findings (Katz, Newton and Bates, 2016).

## OBTAINING ETHICS APPROVAL

The AH&MRC Ethics Committee approved the application for the evaluation in August 2016 (ref. 1192/16) and conversations concerning community consent commenced soon after. As part of AANSW's commitment to advance evaluation knowledge and practice with Aboriginal peoples and communities, a study was commissioned to record the experiences of researchers, evaluators, and government employees with responsibility for the evaluation of OCHRE, along with a literature review on the topic of Aboriginal community consent for research. Undertaken by Dreise (2018, p. 5), the study found that for social research requiring the consent of Aboriginal communities to succeed, five factors must be present:

- community empowerment
- time
- trust
- local tailoring
- clear and constant communication.

## GATHERING AND ANALYSING INFORMATION, CO-DESIGNING THE EVALUATION

As described above, co-design followed community consent. The co-design process aimed 'to ensure that all stakeholders, and in particular Aboriginal stakeholders, have contributed to the overall design of the evaluation in their location, the questions asked, what local community view as success and how it might be assessed, the method (including analysis of data), and the reporting back of findings' (Katz et al., 2016, p.23). Co-design workshops were set up to allow the evaluation team to:

- discuss the focus of the evaluation and the most important issues that needed to be explored in more depth
- discuss what local stakeholders viewed as success after three years, and what could realistically be achieved. Were there different views of success, or differences of view between stakeholders? How might working relationships be improved – from the viewpoints of both community and government?
- what local stakeholders viewed as success within a three-year period and what could realistically be achieved. This included teasing out possibly different views of success and any differences between different stakeholders, and what improvements in the working relationships might look like from the viewpoints of both community and government
- discuss how success might be assessed within the resources of the evaluation and the community. This included a discussion of the use of existing data.
- present the draft method for the project outlined in the CIRCA evaluation plans
- discuss whether the draft method was appropriate and how it might be applied in the community
- adapt and develop ideas (or create new ideas) so that methods best reflected local needs and preferences on data collection
- identify potential participants and how they might be recruited.
- summarise the outcomes of the co-design workshop and check with the community that the evaluation team had interpreted information correctly
- discuss the best ways to report, validate and share the findings from the evaluation with Aboriginal communities
- identify next steps.

Information gathered through the co-design workshops was used to develop data collection plans to be implemented locally. The process for co-design is further described by Katz et al., (2016, p.24). AANSW ensured a staff member in each regional office was responsible for supporting Aboriginal communities to take part in the conversations and link communities and the SPRC evaluation team. This role includes preparing Aboriginal communities to engage in research processes, including co-design.

## Case study findings

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This case study documents the experiences of public servants – including Aboriginal public servants working on Country - involved in the co-design phase of the evaluation in a number of Aboriginal communities. Twelve employees from AANSW head office and regional offices were interviewed as part of this case study. Although the interviews covered seven evaluation sites, at one of these the co-design workshops were not

completed at the time of writing. Thus information about the lead-up to co-design was derived from seven sites, and information about the co-design workshop and post-workshop actions from six. The case study also draws on documents developed through the co-design phase. While the views of community members who were involved in the co-design process are not directly included, the reflections of the public servants who worked with community members and who are also Aboriginal community members are.

Co-designing the evaluation had three steps:

1. informing communities of the opportunity to co-design the evaluation
2. the co-design workshops
3. agreeing on the outcomes of co-design to develop data collection plans.

The case study describes each of these steps and considers the challenges that the public servants faced in co-designing the evaluation. Some general issues that arose across the three steps are then identified.

## **STEP ONE: INFORMING COMMUNITIES OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO CO-DESIGN THE EVALUATION**

The original vision for co-design assumed it would be open to all who knew about the initiative being evaluated in their area, with no one excluded (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017). But before a community can be informed, the community must be defined. As one respondent observed, 'One of the real challenges is: what do you mean by community?' If this is not clear, then it becomes difficult to determine whether or not all of a community has indeed been informed. The AH&MRC Guidelines provide no definition of community, nor any recommendations on how the term should be applied in any situation. For *OCHRE*, one evaluation site sometimes spanned many communities; those communities might spread across boundaries and locations, and their members might have connections to several Aboriginal Nations.

Many participants spoke of the challenge of determining who the appropriate community members were, and the best way to tell them about the opportunity to participate in co-design. Here, local knowledge of the historical, social, economic, cultural and geographical circumstances of communities proved critical. Local knowledge allowed different approaches to be used for different initiatives. For example, one regional staff member said: 'We needed to have three co-design meetings, one in each community,' where an initiative covered three distinct communities.

In support of the evaluation team, regional AANSW staff used a range of methods to tell communities how they could take part in co-design with the team. Where a governance group or an organisation with community support and trust already existed, the chairperson of the group would be alerted to the opportunity, and co-design placed on the agenda for discussion at a coming meeting. In these cases, the community members involved in co-design were familiar with both *OCHRE* and the initiative, and for the most part had also been involved in gaining community consent for the evaluation (see Dreise, 2018). The latter had provided them with basic knowledge of the evaluation.

Where no such group existed, AANSW regional staff drew on their local knowledge to decide how best to inform the Aboriginal community of the opportunity. The resulting range of methods included emails sent through existing networks, advertising flyers placed in high-traffic areas such as the Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) and Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), announcements at meetings, and word of mouth. Members recruited in these ways varied considerably in how much they knew about *OCHRE*, the initiative they were discussing, and the evaluation.

The liaison role of regional staff between community and the researchers was crucial – not only for the initial contact but throughout the co-design. As one participant said, 'I see my role basically as relationship management.' For this, their local knowledge and connections were essential. Because community members knew and trusted the regional staff, they were more willing to work with the researchers whom the regional staff vouched for. Participants in this case study offered a number of insights including the following:

Lots of things in the region are built on 'I'm trusting you because we know each other and you won't lead us down the wrong path.'



[I am] confident that the researchers are genuine but we need to build that rapport with community. ... and I can vouch for them. We put our heads on the line sometimes. Need that link with AA and the community to let the researchers come in.

You'd struggle if you didn't have a regional team supporting it and only had head office coming in saying, 'Have we got a program for you.'

Alerting community members to the opportunity to take part in co-design was just the first part of the process. Participants working locally said it could at times be difficult to explain to interested community members what the upcoming co-design workshop was for, and what would happen at it. Of necessity this had to be explained beforehand, yet ideally that explanation would be best made at the evaluation itself. Delays made things more difficult. Community members involved in discussions of community consent might gain a basic knowledge of the evaluation, but delays between those discussions and actually co-designing the evaluation affected their recall and their familiarity with the evaluation. The two stages might happen from three to 11 months apart; the average delay was nearly seven months. Many local participants said this discontinuity made it hard to engage community members in co-design. This was exacerbated when the time from scheduling a workshop to holding the workshop was short. As one participant said, 'Could have been better if a bit more time was spent on promotion.' The same interviewee said potential participants were not available for the meeting because of existing appointments. Possibly a longer lead time, or alternatives for meeting times could have avoided this. Several regional participants stressed the importance of allowing enough time to inform communities both of the opportunity and of what was required of them if they attended.

AANSW regional staff were responsible for relaying detailed information about co-design – what it was for, how it would work – from the evaluation team to the community. Some participants said they had found this difficult, mainly because they were unsure what co-design entailed. One respondent said, '... And they talked about co-design and I said, "Co-what?"' For many public servants working on OCHRE this was their first experience of co-design and they felt uncertain about what was required and how they could support the community through it. One regional staff member said: 'This has been a big learning curve for me.' Similar sentiments were provided by other staff, including one who said, 'A bit more clarity would have been useful.'

One issue raised consistently was the communities' general uncertainty about the purpose and expectations of the co-design workshops. It was thought that if community members had been made well aware ahead of the meeting about the initiative itself and what the workshop was expected to achieve, they would have been able to consult the people they represent and to consider the issues in depth well beforehand. One regional staff member said it 'could have been good to have specific questions or topics to send to the workshop people ahead of time so they knew what to think about and get input from other people too'. Another informant said there was some community reluctance about the workshops which may have been related to a lack of information about the process. One participant felt that:

For a lot of people there was a lot of unease or reluctance to do co-design. Possibly it was because they were not really sure what it was all about and didn't want people to know that they were not sure about what it was all about.

In preparing for the co-design meeting, timely information might have avoided one example of miscommunication which occurred between researchers and a community group. The community members did not know what the meeting was about or that it would be recorded. When they arrived and discovered it was to be recorded, they declined to participate. More effective communication (an agenda and advice that the meeting would be recorded if the attendees agreed) might have avoided this misunderstanding.

To help regional staff address stakeholders' lack of familiarity with co-design, general information resources, including *Frequently asked questions* (FAQs), were developed centrally and published on the AANSW website (A continuing conversation<sup>6</sup>) and as a pamphlet (AANSW, 2017a). One participant said information about co-design should be presented visually and in a way which explained its role in the evaluation: 'I'd want pictures and drawings, and include examples.'

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/conversations/ochre/faqs>

To gain more information about the process before their own workshop, some regional staff also attended co-design workshops conducted outside their own region and used this knowledge to inform interested members of their own communities.

AANSW also hosted a workshop for regional staff who were supporting co-design to address information gaps and to allow the evaluation team to discuss the co-design process. Several participants said the workshop was useful and had raised their understanding of co-design. However, though it may have been useful, the workshop was held after some co-design workshops had already finished.

It is significant that knowledge and resources were often developed only when the need for them arose. While the iterative and organic nature of the OCHRE evaluation was as important as its outcome (Dreise, 2018, p.29) many participants reported feeling that they were learning about co-design at the same time as they were trying to advise community about it. Since little was previously known about co-designing an evaluation with Aboriginal communities in NSW, co-design as originally envisaged quickly became a learning experience – a work in progress. The process proved to be both experimental and adaptive; at times details were unknown until the point when they were being implemented. As one respondent said, 'It definitely has evolved. It's one of those projects you just sort of learn as you go.'

Participants also thought it important that the planning and preparation for the workshops proceed at a pace suited to the community, not any other stakeholder. One regional participant said it was good that '[central office] was being flexible and comfortable about the speed it went. We knew when to take our foot off the accelerator a bit and put the brakes on a bit.'

The absence of a detailed plan for the lead-up to the co-design meant that no-one knew how much time and effort would be required for co-design until after it had been completed. This issue was noted by all participants, including through the reflections of the following participant:

It's very complex. It takes a lot of time and a lot of money. And so much more time and money than was anticipated at the beginning.

## STEP TWO: CO-DESIGNING

Initially envisaged, co-design was to be achieved through a half or one-day workshop held with community, covering the areas outlined in the introduction above. Four of the initiatives held one co-design workshop, whereas the others had three or four. Individual consultations with specific agencies were held where people were unable to attend the workshop or where confidentiality was an issue. Where there was more than one workshop for an initiative, each almost always had different community members attend. However, time, knowledge and understanding, local circumstances and a 'learning as you go' approach meant co-design workshops did not generally follow this formula. Further, the presence or absence of an organisation with community support and the geographic footprint of the initiative contributed to both those participating in co-design and the complexity.

Where community members who attended co-design also had some oversight role in the initiative, the issue of conflicts of interest (either real or perceived) arises. Arguably those who have responsibility for providing the program, are part of the governance structure or are employed directly or indirectly by government (through a funded agency) may experience a conflict in this situation. The records revealed that most co-design attendees were from NSW government departments, funded agencies, or members of the existing governance group of the initiative such as an Aboriginal Alliance or project reference group. The total number of people attending the co-design workshop(s) for each initiative varied from eight to 21 people. Attendees were from a variety of peak groups, NSW government departments, funded agencies, existing governance groups, LALCs, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and community Elders. Many of these people also represented more than one of these groups, making it difficult to clearly identify the proportion of attendees with each role. This is not surprising however, given that workshop attendees were, by definition, those who have some specific interest in the initiative. Additionally, as part of their roles to support Aboriginal communities to participate in the evaluation and assist the evaluation team including 'translating' community discussion, at least one staff member of AANSW was present during co-design for three of the workshops. Although not directly addressed at the time, mechanisms to deal with perceived or actual conflicts of interest would be useful where community members involved in co-design also have a stake in the initiative.

A further consideration here is the effect of the memoranda of understanding that set the relationship between government agencies and Aboriginal peak bodies such as the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) or the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). In his reflections on the impact of Aboriginal policy perspectives on policy development, Jason Ardler notes that peak bodies by their nature often represent a particular group, or particular issues, and hence do not reflect the breadth of community priorities (AANSW 2017b., p.115).

Co-design requires considerable knowledge and skill and the ability of participants to engage in its complexity, for example potential research methods and the pros and cons of different approaches. Without that, it is difficult to achieve all that is required in one session. Co-design is a complex task on its own even in optimal conditions when all members are fully aware of the initiative and the evaluation. Because the co-design phase of the evaluation was continuously evolving, those who attended could not be briefed fully about it beforehand. Many participants felt this inhibited active participation. As previously noted, many participants arrived at co-design workshops unprepared, having not had the opportunity to consider the issues to be discussed or to seek the views of others in their community. Regional public servants noted that many participants felt this inhibited active participation.

Regional staff found ways to mitigate problems that arose as the co-design workshops proceeded. One method was to help their peers in other locations by providing support material for the workshops. As one regional staff member said, 'It was good to share information with people in other regions. I sent colleagues things I used in co-design to help them if they wanted them.' As well as using each workshop to co-design the evaluation, time was also devoted to talking about the OCHRE initiative operating in the community. One informant described the importance of discussing the overall program before getting into how to evaluate it: 'People can't just walk into a discussion at 9 am on planning day about what our success criteria will be. You need to start off with where they're at.' Several participants said the evaluation team had to spend considerable time explaining OCHRE and the initiative being evaluated before the workshop could focus on co-design. Once this feedback from community was received, AANSW endeavoured to have a relevant representative from government at each session to talk about the background of the initiative. This included explaining government policy; the operation, governance and budget of the initiative; and its implementation. In cases where the public servants responsible for these initiatives were not present, it was difficult to provide community with all of the information. Although this information sharing was necessary, it further reduced the time available for co-design. This situation arose, in part, because the co-design process had been open to individuals who did not necessarily know the initiative in detail; it also demonstrates the tension between inclusive practice and efficient operation.

Time was also a limitation. In workshops which ran for between 30 minutes and two and a half hours, it was difficult to cover adequately the content required to develop local evaluation plans. As one informant said, 'Co-design is a process, not just a workshop.' When co-design was undertaken as part of a meeting scheduled for another purpose, time was limited further and the task became even more difficult. One participant said, 'Other agenda items ran over time leaving even less time for co-design.' Of the time available for the workshops, it was stated that 'near the end, some of them, we had half an hour on an agenda. It compromises what we can get through.' One participant said, 'Not all of these aims were necessarily addressed in the one opportunity for interaction with community.'

Most co-design workshops were held with two researchers and regional staff from AANSW to support and translate. This approach helped with group facilitation. Regional staff were often translating academic terminology and technical concepts for the participants. Some commented that the formality of the research team did not always match what the community members expected. These comments tended to be made about workshops earlier in the process.

A range of other factors also affected the co-design workshops. One planned meeting had to be postponed due to extreme weather. While one other planned workshop was poorly attended due to a clash with another important meeting in the community. Participants also said meetings held during work hours may have excluded some groups such as school students. Even so, the regional public servants generally felt that the relevant community groups had participated, and that a different outcome was unlikely even if additional people had been involved; as reflected in the following comment from one participant:

Probably not everyone was at the meeting who should have been there, but I think the result would have been the same anyway.



Co-designing proved to be logistically complex and labour-intensive. All participants said the regional public servants had played a critical role by linking the evaluation team with community members involved in co-design, building trust between the two groups, providing culturally safe venues and supporting those taking part. One participant said, 'Using our regional staff for advice was really good. They were integral to every step. They have the local knowledge and can tell us what issues might come up ...'

### STEP THREE: AGREEING THE OUTCOMES OF CO-DESIGN

This step involved obtaining the formal agreement of community on the decisions made in the co-design workshops including the overall design of the evaluation, what local community view as success and how it might be assessed, the method, and the reporting back of finding. To achieve this the researches prepared a summary document following completion of the co-design workshops for participants to review and approve as an accurate record.

Achieving this required attention to the historical, social and cultural differences in the various communities, differences in participant communication styles, time available to the evaluation, and decision making authority of participants needed. As with the steps discussed above, the 'learning as you go' approach presented challenges with learnings and community negotiations occurring either at the time co-design was underway or sometime after the workshop had ended.

Initially each workshop participant was provided with a summary via email and asked to indicate their agreement. This approach was modified when it became clear that obtaining the consent of all participants using email and in the timeframe provided was difficult. As one participant stated:

... I needed more time to hear back from everyone. The main issue was getting the feedback from the community. Not everyone has emails or phones to be easily contacted.

While it is difficult to be definitive about the reasons for the difficulty in achieving the agreement from all participants, the elapsed time between each co-design workshop and participants receiving the summary varied was a factor. One participant said: 'There was a really slow turnaround [many week] in getting workshop summaries back to communities. It caused problems ... feel it was a bit disrespectful to those people to take so long to come back to them.'

The change in approach created another challenge. With agreement no longer required from all participants, participants were left to answer the question: Who, of the attendees, was able to sign off on behalf of others (both those present at the workshop, and community members who had not attended)? One respondent commented:

... Hard to know who to get the sign-off from, because no one really owns it [language], and hard to say they represent everyone and can approve use of the language.

The exercise of community authority was a constant throughout co-design and the OCHRE evaluation more generally. As one respondent stated, 'co-design is a great model to use but we need to refine how it's done.'

# PART C:

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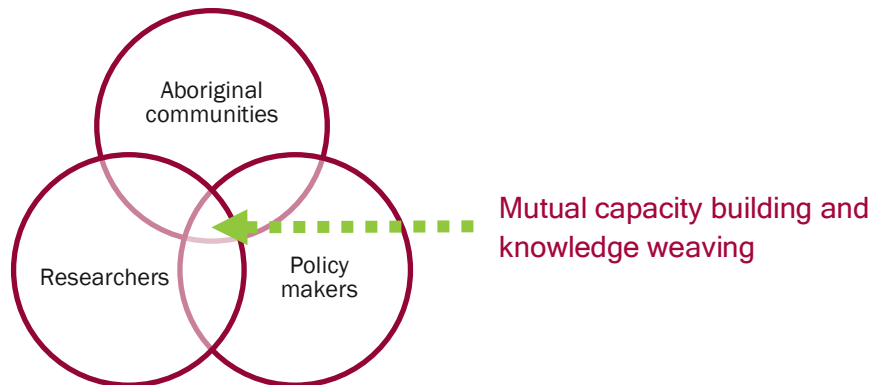
**How communities and researchers can co-design and co-produce evaluation and implementation – some practical tips**

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## Practical tips for Aboriginal, research and policy communities

The main aim of this report is to give practical advice to communities, governments and researchers to co-design evaluation and CBPR in Aboriginal contexts. The tips listed below are based on both the literature (Part A) and the case study (Part B) of this report. Those sources are the foundation for the report's central contention: that mutual capacity building and knowledge weaving among the main actors (shown in Figure 6) are required for research and evaluation to make progress towards maturity in Aboriginal contexts.

Figure 6: Knowledge weaving between Aboriginal, research and policy stakeholders



Too often, evaluation is thought about and done only after a project has been implemented. That approach is flawed. Evaluation should be an ongoing and dynamic part of the project itself. It should be designed right at the start of a project. It should be built in – not bolted on. And it should stay always in focus and review, flexible and adaptable, as the project proceeds. It should be an organic and living process.

The literature reviewed in Part A highlights factors which are keys to success in CBPR and co-design. First, parties must communicate constantly and share information. Doors, ears, and minds should stay open.

Second, co-design is an investment in our Aboriginal communities. That means researchers should be based in those communities, and their professional development, and improvements in communities' capacity to participate in co-design, should form part of the evaluation program. One aim in all this should be an ongoing maturation of academic research models in Aboriginal fields, which will bring sensitive, adaptive, and responsive approaches to research methods. Another aim should be to improve public-sector research and evaluation, by raising public servants' capacity in participatory co-design.

Third, 'long time' is central in co-design and participation. Research projects always need long lead times – for designing research, negotiating methods, and interpreting and presenting data.

Fourth, all parties and partners will need to give thought to adapting research outputs, products and services for a range of audiences, all of them important. These include Aboriginal communities, fellow researchers, and officers in the public sector.

Last, and most important, research collaborations between Aboriginal people (including their quest for self-determination, aspirations, knowledge and epistemologies) and Western academics (including their expertise and disciplines) will work only if both sides trust each other. Both parties must recognise and respect each other's positions and world views, and projects must ensure safe theatres for wisdom exchange that give equal weight to lived and studied experiences (see Figure 1 on page 5).

With those factors in mind, the following practical tips (on the next page) for co-design and co-production of CBPR are offered to Aboriginal communities, researchers and policy actors; followed by a diagram that illustrates the dynamic and ongoing nature of co-design processes.

## INVEST IN MUTUAL CAPACITY BUILDING

- Co-design is a relatively new concept for Aboriginal communities, so invest time and resources in building understanding
- The research community needs to continue to develop the mature approach which is required for understanding and adopting CBPR and co-design
- Aboriginal public sector employees require detailed knowledge of the co-design process and how it fits within a broader evaluation – they are the knowledge translators
- Project leaders will need to explain in detail how co-design works, what is expected of those taking part, and the support available to key players
- Take care, time and resources to ensure the community moves from being the researched to the researchers.

## CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

- Researchers need to ensure they understand community context, history, key players, politics, needs and aspirations
- The co-design process needs to be owned by the local community (and should be bottom up, not top down)
- Understand how existing governance structures will affect the process
- Sort out who can speak on behalf of the community
- Acknowledge the issues faced by Aboriginal public servants who are members of a local community.

## BALANCE PERSPECTIVES

- When co-designing research it is important that all views within the community are heard and that evaluation data is sought from all relevant groups
- Manage any perceived or real conflicts of interest where the stakeholders with a direct interest in an initiative are involved in planning its evaluation
- Ensure evaluation allows input from providers as well as end users.

## CO-DESIGN TAKES TIME

- Recognise that co-designing takes time and significant preparation
- Community representatives need time to fully consider what is being asked of them and to check back with their community before they make decisions
- Provide ample time ahead of meetings to allow community to prepare, including learning about the process
- Plan with community how co-design is best completed. This will allow time and budget to be negotiated
- Hold meetings at times when all those who want to attend can do so, including working parents and school students.

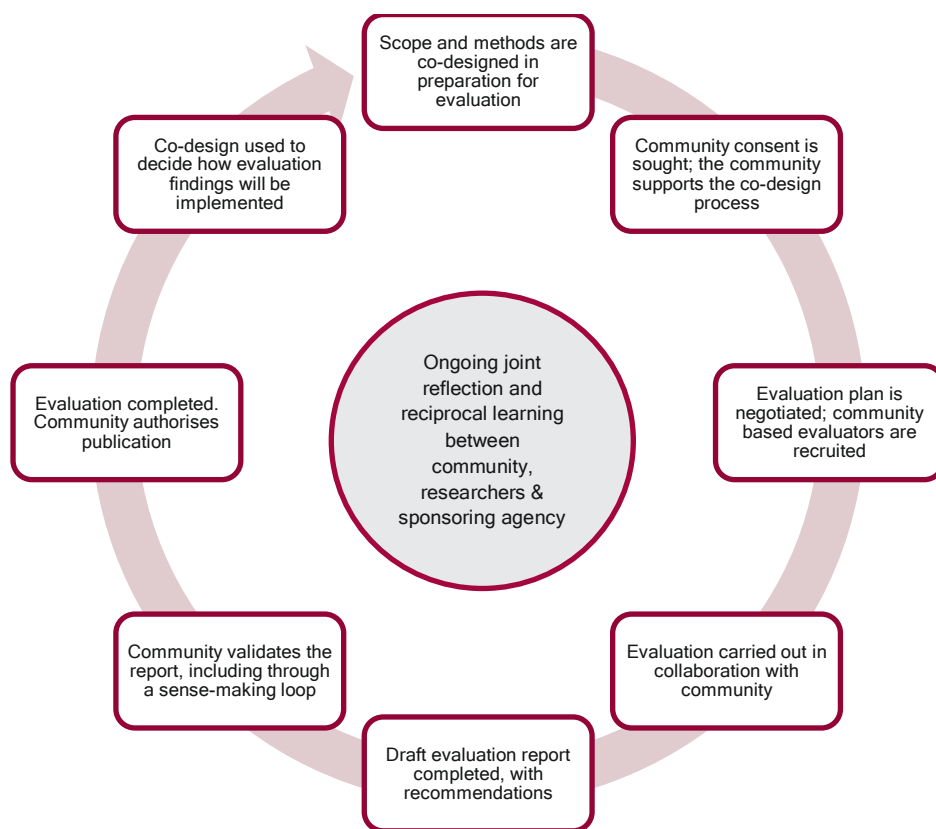
## FAIL TO PLAN, PLAN TO FAIL

- Community needs time to consider their participation including dates and times
- Co-designing evaluation in communities has many moving parts. Make sure everyone understands their role so that co-design can run smoothly
- Co-design develops and evolves over time in any given location, as does community understanding of the process.

## CO-DESIGN IS *THROUGHOUT* - NOT JUST *UPFRONT*

- As Figure 7 (next page) shows, co-design and participatory research are dynamic and ongoing processes
- At the heart of effective co-design are ongoing joint reflection and reciprocal learning.

Figure 7: Co-designing throughout the evaluation process



# References

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