Re-imagining Evaluation

A Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework for the NSW Department of Education

NSW GOVERNMENT

Acknowledgements

The Re-imagining Evaluation Framework extends on the Department of Education's vision to transform public education.

Departmental staff have partnered with a team of researchers from the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership, the Wollotuka Institute, the College of Human and Social Futures and The Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA

THE WOLLOTUKA INSTITUTE

centre of **excellence** for **equity** in higher **education**

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Project Contact:
Nathan.Towney@newcastle.edu.au

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NSW GOVERNMENT

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our students and staff live, have come from and are educated on.

Abbreviations & Terminology

AANSW	New South Wales Government, Department of Aboriginal Affairs
AIHW	Australian Institute for Health and Welfare
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
AOPD	Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships Directorate
BATSIER	Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous Education and Research
CESE	Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
CRE	Culturally Responsive Evaluation
CRIE	Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation
DoE	Department of Education
IK	Indigenous Knowledge
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Councils
NCARA	New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances
NSW	New South Wales
NSW AECG	New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
OCHRE	Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment
TQI	ACT Teacher Quality Institute
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People
UON	University of Newcastle
WINHEC	World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium

The term Aboriginal is used in this document to refer to both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and staff in NSW for brevity and readability. Where the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' are used instead, they reflect the terminology used in the cited documents and policies.

Contents

Everyone has a part to play.

Foreword

Re-imagining Evaluation: A Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework

The NSW Department of Education is committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students, their families and communities through our collective educational efforts. To achieve this, we work in partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG) and together we are proud to share this Framework with you.

Through the development of this Framework with the University of Newcastle, we highlight the importance of centring Aboriginal students, their families and communities at the heart of evaluation methodology and processes. It is only by incorporation of culturally relevant principles that we can truly understand how the delivery of education in NSW impacts Aboriginal students and their communities. To do this well requires the development of genuine and authentic relationships, achieved by yarning, asking, listening and sharing in a mutually respectful and culturally safe environment.

On our journey forward in the development and evaluation of education policies, programs and initiatives we encourage you to work together with Aboriginal students, their families and communities. We need to hear these voices to ensure we are providing culturally responsive and relevant education. These voices, at the heart of evaluation, will improve educational outcomes for our system and our Aboriginal leaders of the future, ensuring that every student achieves and exceeds their educational aspirations.

The Principles that underpin this Framework are accessible for everyone; for our public school students and staff, our families and communities, as well as our corporate staff. Embedding these Principles in evaluation and every day practice will help to support and enrich the educational journey for our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and improve our practice to define what works best.

We hope this Framework will develop and grow over time, continuously adapting and being responsive to Aboriginal students, their families, their communities and our schools.

This Framework will be utilised to amplify our voices and narrow the gap between aspiration and reality, good intent and outcomes. Together we will strengthen collaboration between communities and schools, together we will work towards common goals in Aboriginal education, and together we will celebrate the successes of our students, communities and schools.

Michele Hall Executive Director, Connected Communities
Jacky Hodges Acting Executive Director, Schools Policy and Evidence
Karen Jones Executive Director, Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships
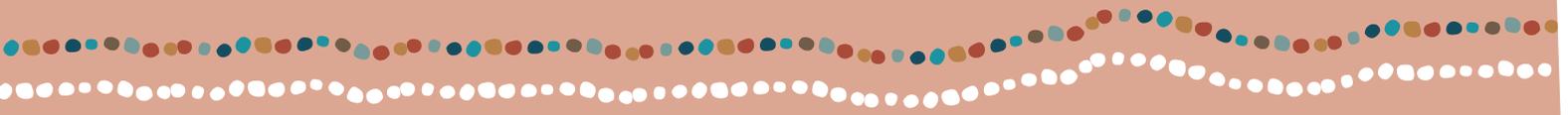
Introduction

For generations, Aboriginal people have had to fit into a system that was not designed for us or by us. As a result our histories, views of the world and lived experiences have been excluded. In its place success has been defined by the ability to fit into another culture.

The NSW Department of Education has the opportunity to change this, and extend established relationships and partnerships that value a local approach to recognising that those living our stories are the best to tell those stories.

Through listening together we all have the ability to re-define what success means in our schools and communities. However, changing a definition is not enough. This document aims to provide a process to share those stories and translate that into actions in our schools and across the department as a whole.

We encourage everyone to embrace these Principles and determine what they mean for their lives.

As we yarn we will have the opportunity to nurture and grow a shared story and new future.

Nathan Towney – Wiradjuri

Pro Vice-Chancellor – Indigenous Strategy and Leadership
The University of Newcastle

Associate Professor Kathleen Butler – Bundjalung/Worimi

Head – The Wollotuka Institute for Indigenous Education and Research
The University of Newcastle

Introduction

This Evaluation Framework is framed by Aboriginal methodologies and principles and guided by Fraser's (2009) social justice concepts of redistribution, recognition and representation.

Recognition is key to redressing systemic inequalities that have perpetuated exclusion and too often resulted in institutionalised status subordination in educational policy and practice. This concept places emphasis on the capacity of evaluators to recognise the cultural values of participants to reinforce the key principle of family sovereignty. Representation is inextricably connected to this principle, to ensure meaningful participation of families in the evaluation process.

The aim is to redress the historical and systemic exclusion from participating as an equal peer in evaluation and, through the participation of families in evaluative processes, to then play a central role in the development of educational policy and practice. Embracing the Framework Principles in ways that draw on these inter-connected social justice concepts can establish a more collaborative, fair and credible evaluation process.

Professor Penny Jane Burke

Director – Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE)
and Global Innovation Chair of Equity
The University of Newcastle

Relationships

Place

Our Students

Aboriginal Family Sovereignty

Yarning

Empowering Change

Responsibility and Credibility

1. Our Students and Aboriginal Family Sovereignty

2. Relationships

3. Place

4. Yarning

5. Responsibility and Credibility

6. Empowering Change

Figure 1 & 1a.
The Re-imagining Evaluation Principles Diagram,
The Re-imagining Evaluation Principles List, 2022.

1. Summary & Scope

The Re-imagining Evaluation Framework for the NSW Department of Education centres Aboriginal students and Aboriginal families and is aimed at challenging existing assumptions and power relationships in education.

Evaluation is a key mechanism in determining 'what works' in policies and their implementation.

Ongoing concerns have been raised about the efficacy of policies and programs for Aboriginal people across all domains of inquiry. It is well recognised that there has been a lack of robust evidence on the impact of initiatives on Aboriginal students, families, and communities at a system and local school level. This has extended from the most fundamental elements of what is being evaluated and by whom, to the communication and implementation of evaluation findings. Communities have often articulated that the systemic failure to address these questions constitutes a 'broken promise', which impedes the achievement of equity for Aboriginal people and their relationship with government.

The commitment to develop a **Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework** represents a new approach and substantial commitment to changing the way that evaluations are undertaken, by including Aboriginal peoples, their knowledges, and perspectives, shaped by lived experiences, as valued partners in moving forward.

The guiding Principles are aimed at challenging existing assumptions and power relationships in education. It centres Aboriginal people as having jurisdiction over their own lives and over the land on which government schooling and education take place.

Acknowledging the power of schooling structures and systems that influence schools.

The NSW Department of Education through the Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships Directorate (AOPD), the the Centre of Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE), and Connected Communities, commissioned a University of Newcastle (UON) team (comprising staff and post-graduate students from the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership, the Wollotuka Institute, the College of Human and Social Futures, and the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education) to develop a Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework which will provide principles and advice for carrying out evaluations within the department in a culturally responsive manner. The Framework is designed for Aboriginal students and families, school staff, evaluators, researchers and policymakers.
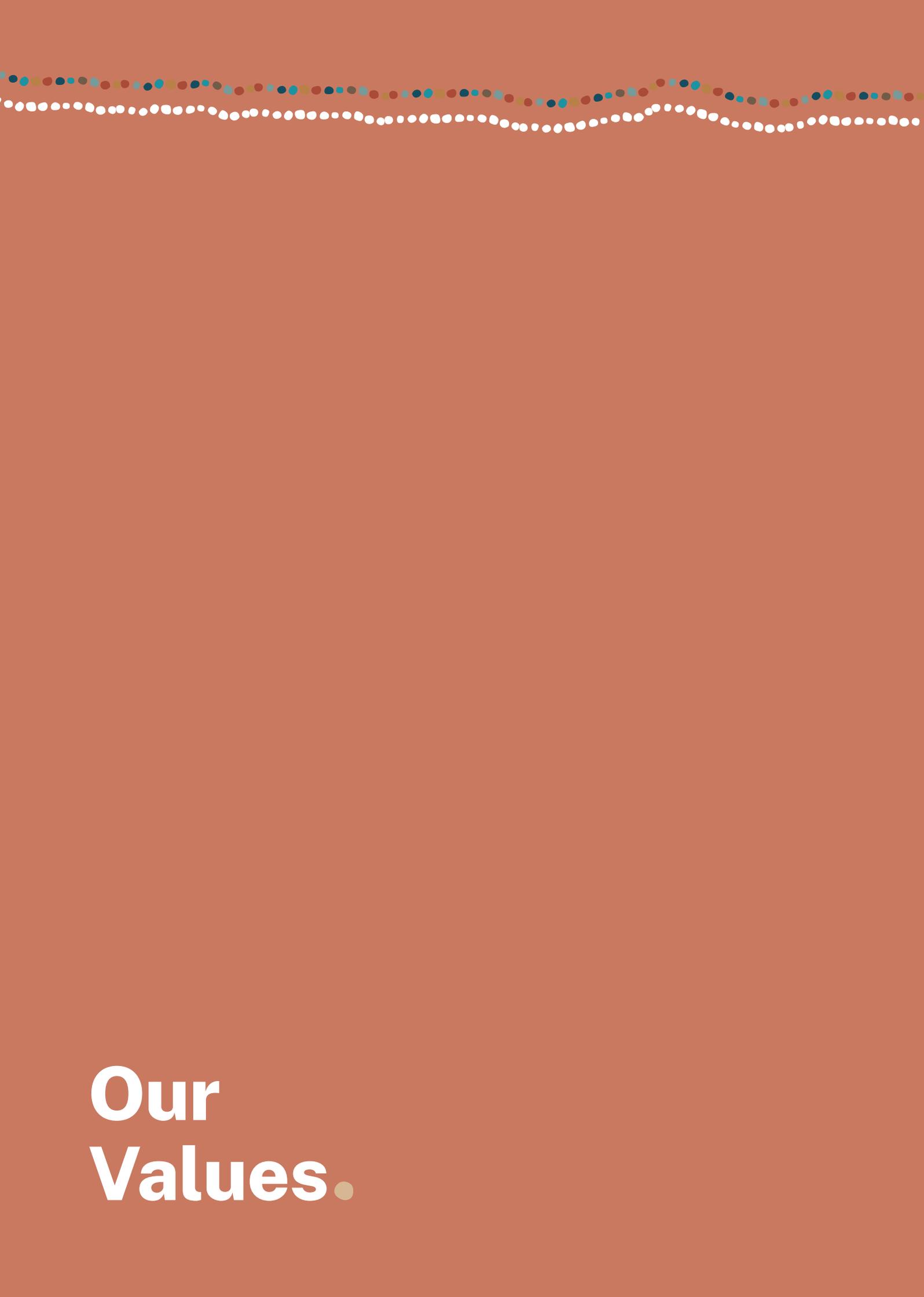
Our Values.

2. **Consultations**

Two consultation groups were engaged to provide feedback throughout the development of this work. The first group comprised a steering committee within the Department of Education and the second group brought together key stakeholders from the NSW AECG, NSW Teachers Federation, NSW Primary Principals Association and NSW Secondary Principals Council.

Throughout the consultations the following themes were identified:

● This work has the opportunity to make a positive impact on the learning outcomes of Aboriginal students and will be well received across the system. There was a sense of excitement and multiple people felt this type of work is well overdue.

> 66 *I feel that the things I am most proud of as a school leader are not valued by the system. I hope this work provides a time and space for me to share these stories and the system listens* 99

> 66 *Most evaluation questions are designed to get the answers they want to hear* 99

● The purpose of evaluation. Multiple members highlighted that currently, evaluation comes from the top down and this has led to a disconnect between 'corporate' (head office) and schools and then communities/families.
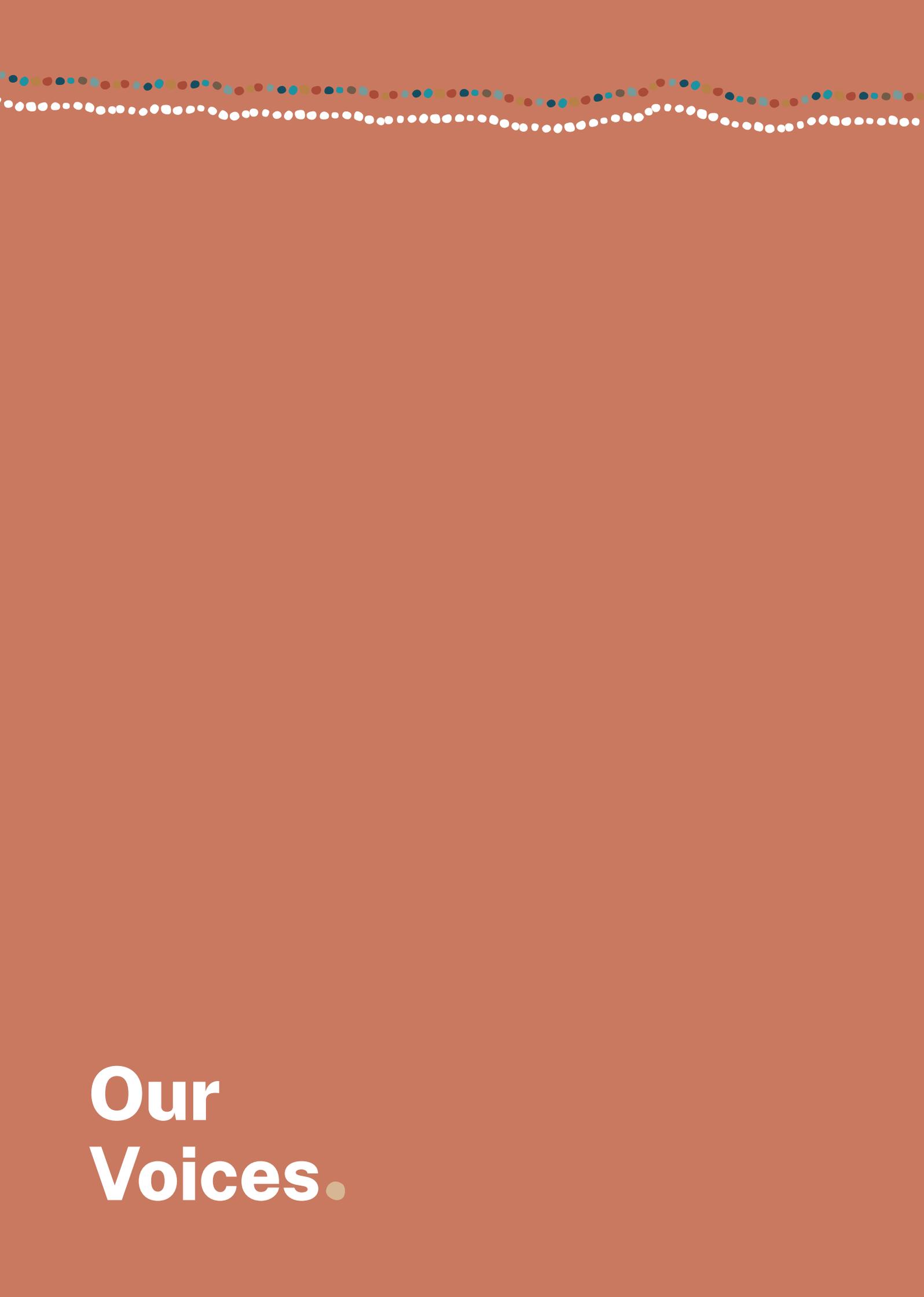
Our
Voices.

> *Hopefully this work will remind corporate that the source of truth is in schools. They may be well-intentioned but have no concept of looking into the eyes of Aboriginal kids*

> *Current evaluation processes don't get to the real problem, which is, who defines what success looks like and feels like*

- The unintended cultural bias that exists in current evaluation methodology is directly aligned to the purpose of evaluation. Members identified that cultural nuances are often dismissed and not understood by departmental staff.

- Respectful relationships with Aboriginal students and their families are critical for success in Aboriginal education. Members spoke of specific examples where long-term relationships have led to genuine knowledge sharing and the valuing of lived experience of the world's oldest continuing culture.

> *Yarning and sharing stories provided a space for deep understanding as community were able to articulate their views on specific initiatives and the systems assumptions were challenged*

> *Evaluation is used for two purposes, 'to pat ya on the back' or 'to belt ya with it', this shouldn't be why we evaluate*

- The importance of yarning and listening to the stories which were shared were discussed at both consultation sessions. Members felt both were extremely important in this work as they help all stakeholders develop a deep understanding of what is happening in schools. Two members identified an evaluation process that was successful which involved yarning and the opportunity for parallel stories to be shared.

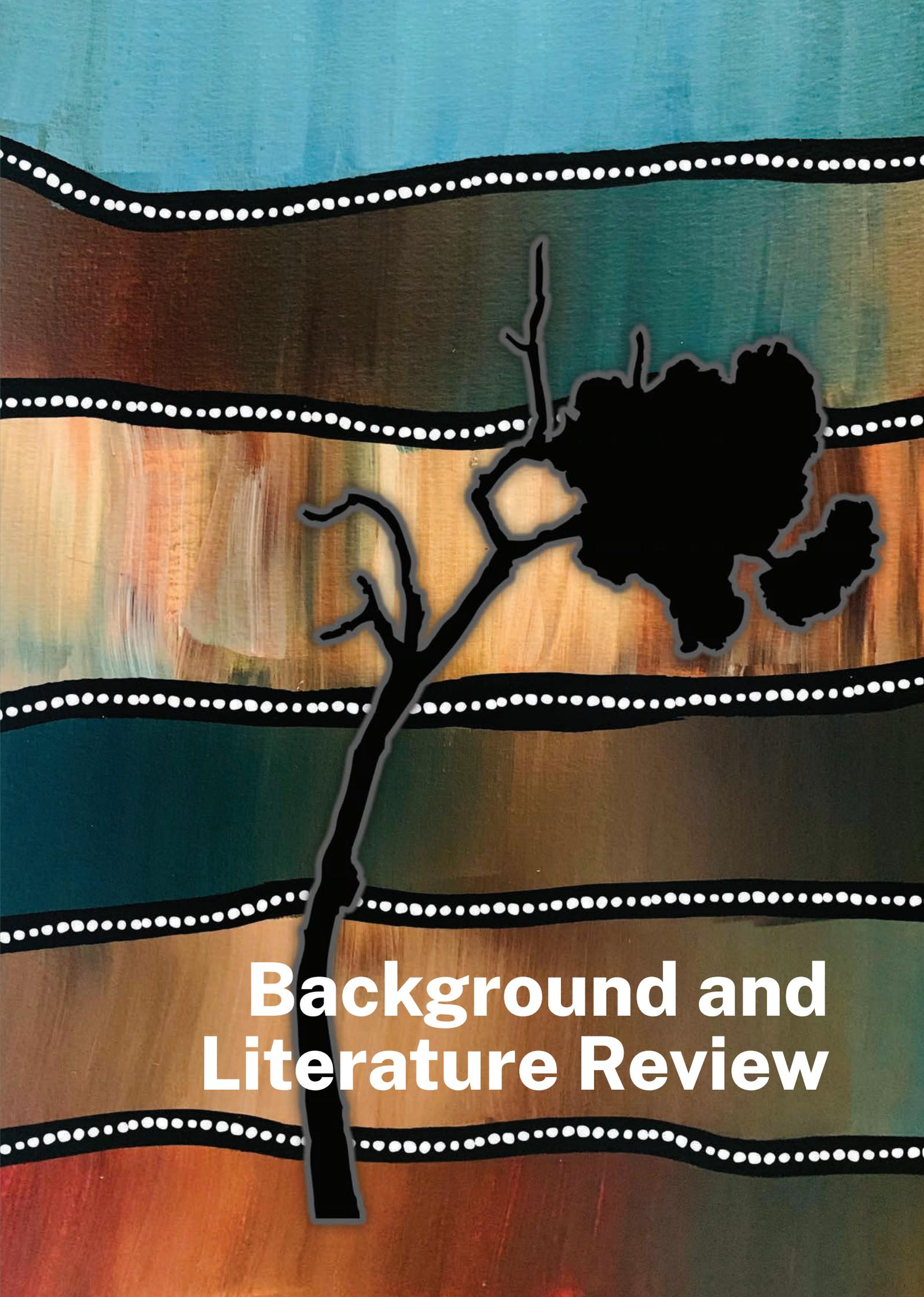> *We always say relationships are extremely important, but we never evaluate how well people do this across the system*

Get yarning about learning.

Background and Literature Review

3.1 The New South Wales Context

NSW Government Schools education evaluation and policy environment.

Since the implementation of the first Aboriginal Education Policy in NSW in 1982, the NSW public education sector has attempted to address historical and contemporary racism, provide improved engagement with Aboriginal communities and increase the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. These initiatives were often implemented unevenly, with varying levels of success in privileging Aboriginal voices in either high-level policy design or grassroots community practices. While there have been localised and individual successes these have on-the-whole failed to translate into broadly adopted structural change. This has been accompanied by a lack of rigorous assessment of the success and impact of programs and policies. Despite good intentions, under-resourced, quick turnaround timelines using a combination of quantitative 'tick and flick' responses and community 'consultations' have often created a legacy of broken promises and perceived tokenism within Aboriginal stakeholder groups (Dreise, 2019; Lowe, Harrison, Tennant et al., 2019).

With these concerns reproduced across all policy domains and jurisdictions, both Federal and State Governments have implemented a range of evaluation measures to address these issues. These whole-of-government approaches include the Evaluation Framework, Toolkit and Guidelines (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2013, 2014, 2016). This over-arching document was intended to provide a scaffold for applications that include departmental-specific evaluation frameworks. The NSW Department of Education and Communities' response (2014) is one example of this ongoing process.
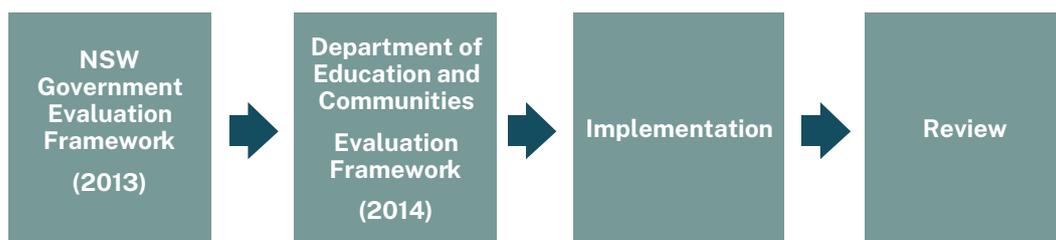
Figure 2. *Evaluation Framework Development*

This process assumed a linear model, which privileged structure over individuals, groups or collective agency. This continued in the cycle of types of evaluation shown in Figure 3 (below).

Figure 3. *Key Questions to identify the type of evaluation* (NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2014, p. 6).

The questions can be problematised, for example:

● Is this program the most appropriate approach? (According to whom?)

● What difference did the program make? (To whom?)

● Does the program provide value for money? (In whose estimation?)

This preliminary literature review uses this background context to locate inquiry and change, noting that there are existing State and departmental frameworks.

What is starkly evident in both the NSW Evaluation Framework and Guidelines (2013, 2016) and Toolkit (2014), and the NSW Department of Education Evaluation Framework (2014), is the very limited inclusion of culture as an explanatory tool or a foundational principle. In providing context to these questions, Aboriginal worldviews can reasonably be expected to differ from departmental metrics. Therefore, adding Aboriginal-engaged documents to the evaluation matrix is both useful and socially just. Failing to do this reflects the ongoing colonisation of institutions and masks the exclusion of Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing.

An environment which is both culturally responsive and culturally safe centres Aboriginal empowerment within program, policy, development and evaluation. This is not adequately addressed by simply making Aboriginal communities part of a list of stakeholder consultations.

An additional state-based context document also released in 2013 is the *OCHRE-NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal affairs: education, employment & accountability*, which provides a compelling narrative for understanding the role which government can play in relationships which affirm the self-determination of Aboriginal communities. This plan promotes empowering choice, community capacity building and decision making regarding government service delivery. The OCHRE plan was constructed with an inbuilt evaluation strategy and consequently, there is a body of literature detailing the diversity of regional and local responses to the policy and the processes of co-design and evaluation which were implemented (NSW Government Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 2015; Katz, Newton, Bates & Raven, 2016; Dreise, 2017, 2018; NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances, 2018) . Given the scope of consultation (see Figure 4) across the communities comprising the NSW Department of Education footprint, the OCHRE materials are a valuable resource for reviewing appropriate evaluation principles.

NSW Department of Education evaluation is also bound by its existing partnership with its peak Aboriginal community body. For the last forty years, the NSW AECG has advocated for improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and the education of all students on Aboriginal issues based on respect, empowerment and self-determination. The NSW AECG has further lobbied for increased cultural awareness for staff within the NSW Department of Education, running the Connecting to Country Cultural Immersion program which provides local context in teachers' ongoing learning (Burgess, 2019). This long-term relationship between the NSW Department of Education and the NSW AECG was most recently formalised in the Walking Together, Working Together Partnership Agreement 2020–2030.

21	427	207	27	2,700+
Taskforce reports released	surveys completed by the public	submissions received from the public	community and industry forums held by the Taskforce	people participating in the community and industry forums

Figure 4. *OCHRE plan community engagement infographic* (NSW Government Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 2013).

Consistent with this agreement, any evaluations undertaken by the NSW Department of Education should involve collaboration with the NSW AECG in development, implementation and evaluation where students may be impacted, noting that impact is felt across more than Aboriginal-specific programs and policies.

NSW Department of Education commitments:

We recognise the NSW AECG as the peak community advisory body to the department on Aboriginal education at all levels and in all stages of planning and decision making.

The Department and the NSW AECG are accountable to one another as we work to ensure that our students achieve their full potential academically, and as we embrace and foster their social, emotional, spiritual and cultural needs throughout their individual journeys.

We know that by improving knowledge and understanding and by listening to Aboriginal voices we will be helping to build school environments that are culturally safe, where racism is eliminated and that are great places to work and to learn.

NSW AECG commitments:

[W]e can continue to build on the successes that we have achieved to date that ensure our people have access and opportunities in the education system, by continuing to work respectfully and collaboratively with the NSW Department of Education

We are hopeful that the disparities and inequities that exist for our children in gaining an education are a priority for the Department and the pockets of racism that exist in all its forms are challenged

The NSW AECG, through its local and regional network promotes respect, empowerment and self-determination and believes the process of collaborative consultation is integral to equal partnerships and is fundamental to the achievement of equality

[W]e look to a place of its First Nations People future, a future that builds a nation founded on tolerance, respect and understandings of the unique place of its First Nations people.

Figure 5. Selected commitments from the NSW AECG and NSW Department of Education Partnership Agreement (NSW AECG & NSW Government, 2020).

In typical practice, conventional notions of program evaluation in school education focus primarily on assessing outcomes or impacts based on pre-determined objectives of those programs. In its broader meaning, the term evaluation refers to drawing out the value of what has been achieved, based on some form of inquiry. In program evaluations, inquiry and analysis focus on the program itself, its overall feasibility. Determining that value includes assessing a wide array of issues, from the credibility of the evaluators themselves, the role of stakeholders, the validity of the inquiry process and product, and the overall utility of the evaluation itself. In addition to all these value questions there is another crucial set of issues that are not about the what and how of program successes or failures. Underlying all these more technical and practice issues is the fundamental question of who gets to say what is valuable.

In aiming to determine what is successful, there is an implication that another aspect is evaluated as relatively less successful, and – again – who determines success and on what terms? Evaluation researchers acknowledge, for example, the potential harm that can be perpetrated through undertaking evaluation with deficit thinking and the forgone intention of 'fixing' something. (Dahler-Larsen, 2016; Schwandt & Dahler-Larsen, 2006).

With these considerations in mind, we can:

- Acknowledge resistance to evaluation itself and what underpins it.

- Interrogate who gets to say not just what value there is in the evaluation, but where the value is in the process itself and who can that evaluation offer value to.

- Acknowledge Western assumptions and government needs in engaging in evaluation, and the importance of contextualisation and differentiation in who might determine the needs, shape, processes, data captured, analysis, discussion, dissemination and communication of evaluation.

3.2 Cultural Sensitivity, Safety and Responsiveness

Clarifying and expanding terminology and language to encompass multiple dimensions of Cultural Capability.

Cultural Sensitivity has been increasingly used since the 1970s to encompass a broad range of activities and philosophies which recognise and respond to the impact that the dominant and dominating cultures can have in shaping the experience for minority populations. According to Foronda. 2008, a culturally responsive approach encompasses five elements: **Knowledge, Consideration, Understanding, Respect and Tailoring.**

In total, these elements prioritise that practitioners develop an awareness of both themselves and others, particularly regarding cultural diversity. A culturally responsive approach is open to change and avoids stereotyping, exploring client or stakeholder expectations of what good care or service entails. Practitioners need to accept that their knowledge is only one valid form of enquiry and may not be able to satisfactorily capture the perspectives of other knowledge systems.

What emerges from the literature is a lack of agreement on which terms are most appropriate. For example, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia

(FECCA) note in their Cultural Competence in Australia Guide that cultural sensitivity is one term in the cultural competence environment which is used interchangeably with:

> Intercultural awareness, cross-cultural awareness, cultural diversity, diversity and inclusion, unconscious bias, inter-cultural communication, cultural intelligence [and] cultural capability (FECCA, 2019, p. 12).

It should be noted, however, that terms such as 'cultural competency' are no longer considered appropriate by groups such as the NSW AECG. This is reflected in work such as the University of Newcastle Cultural Capability Framework (2021), which uses 'cultural responsiveness', creating behavioural change on an individual and organisational level.

In the Australian context, cultural sensitivity has the most currency in the Health sector and across a range of cultural competency/safety continuums. For example, The Cultural Safety in Health Care for Indigenous Australians: Monitoring Framework (AIHW, 2021), includes cultural sensitivity as one

of four 'building blocks' contributing to culturally safe health systems. These building blocks develop from cultural awareness to cultural sensitivity before moving to cultural competence and culminating in cultural safety.

Additionally, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2018, p. 4) has recognised a three-phase model of cultural competency based on:

1. **Cultural awareness, defined as understanding that differences exist;**

2. **Cultural sensitivity, defined as accepting the legitimacy of difference and reflecting on the impact of the service provider's life experience and positioning on others;**

3. **Cultural safety, as defined by recipients of care or services.**

They represent this as moving from a broad base to a pinnacle (Figure 6). It should be noted that all of these processes should be considered an ongoing journey, rather than a destination.

Additionally, it should be noted that cultural sensitivity does not feature as the most desirable attribute or approach in any cultural competence continuum operating in the Australian context. Rather, it is seen as a tool for scaffolding practitioner development, sitting in the lower to middle spectrum. Given that the NSW Department of Education's aspiration in the NSW AECG and Department of Education's Partnership Agreement (2020) is for cultural safety, there is a possible disjuncture between using cultural sensitivity as the Framework goal. While these concerns do not preclude the effective use of cultural sensitivity as a practice goal, careful consideration should be given to stakeholder perception and a consultative process to co-determine what cultural sensitivity in the NSW education domain constitutes and whether it is the term which best encompasses the shared goals of the Framework. A useful model is the response by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL 2020, p. 2) which uses the following disclaimer:

For the purposes of this work, the working term Indigenous Cultural Competency is used consistently and is defined as the

CULTURAL SAFETY is an outcome that enables safe services to be defined by those that receive the service.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY alerts peoples to the legitimacy of difference, and begins a process of self-exploration as the powerful bearers of their own life experience and realities and the impact this may have on others.

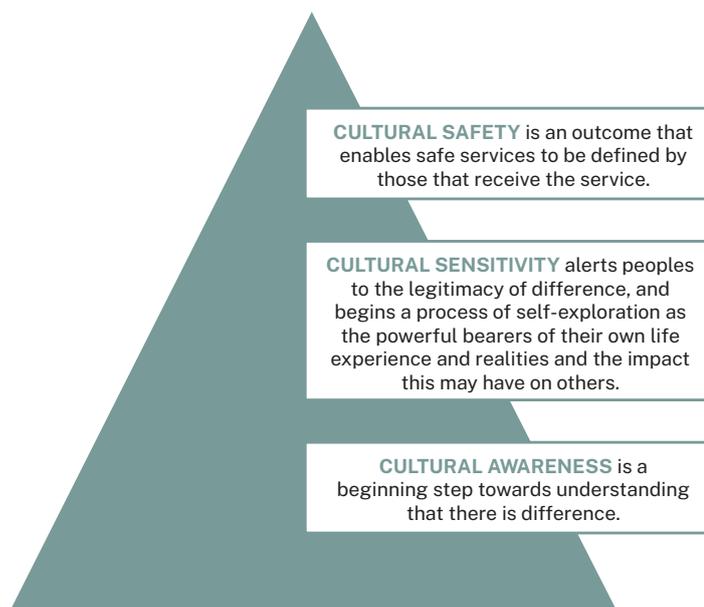CULTURAL AWARENESS is a beginning step towards understanding that there is difference.

Figure 6. *The process toward achieving Cultural Safety* (AHRC 2018, p. 5).

ability to understand, communicate, and effectively and sensitively interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, communities, and staff. A range of other terms have also been used to refer to this ability and AITSL welcomes an opportunity to determine language that is most useful and appropriate to the teaching profession.

In addressing some of the limitations mentioned above the literature review has expanded the scope of 'cultural sensitivity' to include its associated terminology, such as culturally responsive practice, cultural competence and cultural capability (see Appendix). Indigenous Evaluation Frameworks are an example of operationalising cultural sensitivity, providing best practice examples that frame the development of the Guiding Principles put forward in this document. Together, these need to be applied to the existing institutional benchmarks that frame current levels of accountability and reporting.

The NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines (2016) have been designed to help agencies to conduct consistent, transparent and high-quality evaluations of NSW Government funded programs. All NSW Government departments should conduct their evaluations in line with the Principles and standards outlined in this Framework.

A commonality in the Indigenous frameworks in Appendix 2, is that they all relate to programs which are funded externally by either state or federal agencies. As such, there is a level of compliance to be adhered to. In NSW this is also true. As such, the literature review and the culturally responsive Guiding Principles of the Framework are a means of interrogating an existing structure, rather than an opportunity to redefine evaluation entirely.

The 9 Principles of the NSW Government Program Evaluation (2020, p. 5) are:

1. **Build evaluation into your program design.**

2. **Base your evaluation on sound methodology.**

3. **Include resources and time to evaluate.**

4. **Use the right mix of expertise and independence.**

5. **Ensure proper governance and oversight.**

6. **Be ethical in design and conduct.**

7. **Be informed and guided by relevant stakeholders.**

8. **Consider and use evaluation data meaningfully.**

9. **Be transparent and open to scrutiny.**

Based on the literature reviewed, key questions for further exploration in stakeholder consultation include:

- How will Aboriginal communities be affected by the program?

- How will self-determination be enacted through recognising the right of Aboriginal communities to be consulted?

- Have Aboriginal people been involved in setting program goals?

- Are the evaluation methods inclusive for Aboriginal people, knowledges and cultures?

- Are Indigenous research methods likely to enhance the evaluation methodology?

- Are Aboriginal people represented as a specific cohort of the evaluation?

- Is the evaluation adequately resourced?

- Can Aboriginal communities and stakeholders be recompensed for their participation?

- Are timelines flexible to allow for:
  - Continuing conversations to nurture relationship-building between evaluators and communities?
  - Changes in community availability for cultural reasons?
  - Cycles of engagement and feedback rather than one-off consultation?

- Are evaluators experienced in working with Aboriginal communities?

- Is cultural capability building needed for existing evaluation teams?

- Is it possible to use Aboriginal evaluators?

- Are there mechanisms to partner evaluation teams with local Aboriginal community sponsors?

- Is the NSW AECG structurally recognised at agreed points in the evaluation?

- Is it appropriate to have an Aboriginal reference group for design, implementation, and evaluation of the program?

- Is the evaluation design and implementation consistent with best practice ethics standards, for example, AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020)?

- Is Aboriginal community involvement based on informed consent?

- Are Aboriginal communities aware of mechanisms for feedback or complaint on the evaluation process?

- How, and in what formats, will findings be communicated to Aboriginal communities?

- Do Aboriginal communities clearly understand the reasons for evaluation and the use of evaluation data?

- Is Aboriginal Data Sovereignty protected?

- Are processes transparent to Aboriginal communities?

3.3 Aboriginal Data Sovereignty

All evaluations require information and data in order to understand the phenomenon that they are investigating. Aboriginal communities and scholars have provided clear advice on how to collect, share and store data in ways that are respectful and culturally responsive. A key aspect of doing this is by enacting Aboriginal Data Sovereignty.

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation has developed the following principles on managing data in ways that are consistent with Aboriginal Data Sovereignty. Data sovereignty refers to the ability of a community to control data that is produced about them or using their knowledge. For Aboriginal people, this means that they have the right to autonomously decide what, how and why Aboriginal data is collected, accessed and used. It ensures that data on or about Aboriginal peoples reflects their priorities, values, cultures, worldviews and diversity.

In 2018, the Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective developed an Australian set of Indigenous Data Governance protocols and principles.

The principles state that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a right to:

1. **Exercise control of the data ecosystem including creation, development, stewardship, analysis, dissemination and infrastructure.**

2. **Data that is contextual and disaggregated.**

3. **Data that is relevant and empowers sustainable self-determination and effective self-governance.**

4. **Data structures that are accountable to Indigenous peoples and First Nations.**

5. **Data that is protective and respects our individual and collective interests.**

These principles are broadly consistent with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012), Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) Ethical Guidelines: Key Principles (2020) and the Aboriginal Affairs NSW research agenda 2018–2023. This chapter has foregrounded the Maiam nayri Wingara principles as they are more recent than the AIATSIS guidelines and are the result of significant consultation with Aboriginal people.

The enactment of these principles would require a shift from dominant data collection practices to those that address Indigenous data needs. In a 2018 paper, Walker characterises the difference between these two approaches as:

Table 1: Blameworthy, aggregate, decontextualised, deficit and restricted (BADDR) Data Outcomes versus Indigenous Data Needs

Dominant BADDR Data	Indigenous Data Needs
Blaming Data	**Lifeworld Data**
Too much data contrasts Indigenous/non-Indigenous data, rating the problematic Indigene against the normed Australian as the ubiquitous pejorative standard	We need data to inform a comprehensive, nuanced narrative of who we are as peoples, of our culture, our communities, our resilience, our goals and our successes
Aggregate Data	**Disaggregated Data**
Too much data are aggregated at the national and/or state level implying Indigenous cultural and geographic homogeneity	We need data that recognises our cultural and geographical diversity to provide evidence for community-level planning and service delivery
Decontextualised Data	**Contextualised Data**
Too much data are simplistic and decontextualized focussing on individuals and families outside of their social/cultural context	We need data inclusive of the wider social structural context/complexities in which Indigenous disadvantage occurs
Deficit, Government Priority Data	**Indigenous Priority Data**
Too much data reprises deficit linked concepts that service the priorities of Government.	We need data that measures beyond problems and addresses our priorities and agendas
Restricted Access Data	**Available Amenable Data**
Too much data are barricaded away by official statistical agencies and institutions	We need data that are both accessible and amenable to our requirements

Source: Walter 2018

There are significant differences between these approaches. Indigenous scholars note that current practices cause ongoing harm and may attempt to mitigate one harm by perpetrating another (Walter et al. 2021). For example, aggregation is a key mechanism for ensuring anonymity, however it may also result in decontextualised data. Similarly, data that contrasts Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations can highlight areas of need but may also result in blaming and deficit accounts of Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW (2017) has identified that evaluators of Aboriginal programs must negotiate complex dynamics in order to ensure community ownership of the project while maintaining their independence and academic rigour. They note that:

> although the community owns the data and research findings, the evaluators also must exercise their own judgement based on analysis of the data with reference to the research literature. Thus, the evaluators must constantly negotiate the expectations of community and government while maintaining the ethical requirement for independence and objectivity.

Despite being complex, Aboriginal Data Sovereignty is a critical area for the department to address in order to meaningfully progress its Closing the Gap responsibilities.

Closing the Gap

The NSW Government 2021-22 Closing the Gap Implementation Plan has identified 'shared access to data and information at a regional level' as a focus area (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2021). Community consultation undertaken by Aboriginal Affairs has identified the following community priorities:

- We need to collect and share data that is meaningful and relevant to local communities. (This aligns with principles 2 and 3 of the Maiam nayri Wingara principles.)
- We need resourcing, training and communication to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to decide what data ownership and sovereignty means at a local and regional level for them. (This aligns with principle 1 of the Maiam nayri Wingara principles.)
- We need to change the way we manage data to make sure it empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is culturally safe. (This aligns with principles 4 and 5 of the Maiam nayri Wingara principles.)

Towards Data Sovereignty – Collecting, Sharing and Reporting Data

In order to ensure the department's evaluations are culturally responsive, data sovereignty should be embedded in all stages of an evaluation, with data sovereignty practices considered alongside the other evaluation guiding principles outlined in this report.

Below is a brief description of some practices for collecting, sharing and reporting data. It notes minimum practices, relevant data sovereignty principles and next steps that may contribute to moving us towards data sovereignty.

1. Minimum Requirements

Basic elements of respectful data management form a minimum standard for how Aboriginal data should be managed. These elements will reduce active harm from data collection and presentation practices while the department works towards more substantial changes.

1.1 Collecting Data

- Use the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Standard Indigenous Question to ensure consistency in format and content and the best chance of data being able to be used in a time series (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014a).
- Use a consistent and appropriate data collection process that allows people to self-identify their Aboriginal status.
- Use consistent rules for the storage, editing and linkage of data related to Aboriginal status.
- Case study and other in-depth research methods should be considered in order to provide nuanced and context-specific information that will assist communities to understand their own context.

1.2 Sharing Data

- Data is made available to Aboriginal communities and their agents for their projects.
- Requests for Aboriginal students' data undergo appropriate risk and privacy assessments. The release of this data has all standard Data Release procedures in place.
- Aboriginal organisations or internal stakeholders are identified as data stewards. They are actively engaged in the assessment and approval process for the release of data on Aboriginal people.

1.3 Reporting Data

- Ensure basic respect is afforded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by not using terms that are known to be offensive. The ABS (2014a) advises that

abbreviated forms of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Torres Strait Islander' should not be used, in any reporting, including 'in column headings, spanner headings, stub labels and other text fields in tables (e.g. table titles and footnotes)'.

- Data is provided with as much disaggregation as de-identification allows, with cells of less than 5 suppressed.
- Approvals for release are obtained from appropriate data owners or stewards.

2. Data Sovereignty Principles

The Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Governance protocols and principles provide guidance on the three elements discussed in this paper. These principles are aspirational for many government agencies and may not be able to be implemented in all contexts.

2.1 Collecting Data

The Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Governance protocols and principles (2018), state that Aboriginal people have the right to 'exercise control of the data ecosystem including creation, development, stewardship, […] and infrastructure'.

- **Creation and Development** – Where datasets are created to collect information specific to Aboriginal people, the variables should be co-designed with Aboriginal people to ensure the collection and outputs are culturally safe and useful to the community.
- **Stewardship and Infrastructure** – Data is kept securely, with access by individuals that the data owners agree to, and in formats that are respectful. 'There is a clear and formal agreement prior to the start of research about the rights that communities have in relation to data and publication' (AH&MRC, 2020, p. 12).

2.2 Sharing Data

The Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Governance protocols and principles state that Aboriginal people have the right to 'data that is contextual and disaggregated' and 'data that is relevant and empowers sustainable self-determination and effective self-governance' (2018).

- **Contextual and Disaggregated Data** – Data is provided in formats that allow for more nuanced accounts of community experience and avoids erasing the diversity of experience in Aboriginal communities.
- **Providing Relevant Data** – Provide data that is meaningful and useful to the communities that it is about. Where datasets are created to answer specific research or policy questions, there should be a clear understanding of what data is needed for a specific purpose, good design of variable definitions and data collection systems, and high levels of data literacy in those developing and using the data.
- Communities should have ownership of data provided to researchers (and its subsequent analysis), and should have easy access to existing or administrative data about them.

2.3 Reporting Data

Principle 5 of the The Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Governance protocols and principles states that Aboriginal people have the right to 'data that is protective and respects our individual and collective interests' (2018).

- **Protective** – Avoid 'blaming' data that is based in deficit models and instead prioritise representations that address the priorities of Aboriginal people (Walker et al., 2018).
- **Respect Individual and Collective Interests** – Aboriginal people have the right to veto the interpretation of data that does not align with their interests (Flexner et al., 2021).

3. Possible Next Steps

There are many steps from the minimum standards to fully embedding data sovereignty principles in our day-to-day work. Below are some possible next steps.

3.1 Collecting Data

- Develop a clear understanding of how to provide data to Aboriginal communities in ways that are most useful to them while maintaining alignment with existing data management principles (e.g. privacy principles, public interest principles, the NSW Government Cloud Policy, NSW Cyber Security Policy and NSW Information Classification, Labelling and Handling Guidelines).

- Genuine and meaningful consultation with representative groups on the agency's use of Aboriginal data, including how data is used and what datasets would be valuable to communities.

- When new datasets or evaluations are developed, Aboriginal people should have ownership of the data they provide. The AH&MRC Ethical Guidelines (2020) state that the Aboriginal community, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) or appropriate alternative Aboriginal organisation should be recognised as having:

  - Ownership of the data provided to researchers.

  - Ownership of the data resulting from the research (e.g. arising from the collation and analysis of original data).

- Researchers should ensure that there is a clear and formal agreement prior to the start of research about the rights that communities have in relation to data and publication.

3.2 Sharing Data

- Improve data access for Aboriginal people by ensuring relevant data is easy to find.
- Consult with people about what they want from our existing data.
- Proactively share data with communities.
- When new datasets or evaluations are developed, embed data sharing with Aboriginal people within the project processes. The AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research (2012, p. 17) state:

'Indigenous peoples make significant contributions to research by providing knowledge, resources and access to data. These contributions should be acknowledged by providing ongoing access for Indigenous people to research results, and negotiating rights in the research at an early stage.

The community's expectations, the planned outcomes and access to research results should be agreed. Written agreements are encouraged.

Agree at the outset on the ownership of research results, including institutional ownership of data, individual rights of researchers and Indigenous participants, and collective rights of Indigenous community groups'.

3.3 Reporting Data

- Make data available and ensure that Aboriginal stakeholders are aware of the assets, have access to them and feel confident to use them (as an example, 'return of information' practice in the ABS has involved ABS staff going to remote communities and giving them a presentation of the data that was already publicly available on the website).

- Be sensitive in reporting information that may contribute to negative stereotyping of Aboriginal people or position them as 'other' to 'mainstream' Australia. Consider how to present information in a way that is adequately contextualised and focuses on the strengths and resilience of Aboriginal people.

- Disseminate clear and explicit advice for all staff on appropriate terminology and reporting.

Making meaningful progress towards data sovereignty requires a whole-of-government response, where agencies are in ongoing conversations with Aboriginal communities to refine how they manage, report and share data.

Aboriginal Data Sovereignty principles are a critical component of culturally responsive evaluation. In the next section, we consider the other pillars of the Re-imagining Evaluation Framework.

Stories
not numbers.
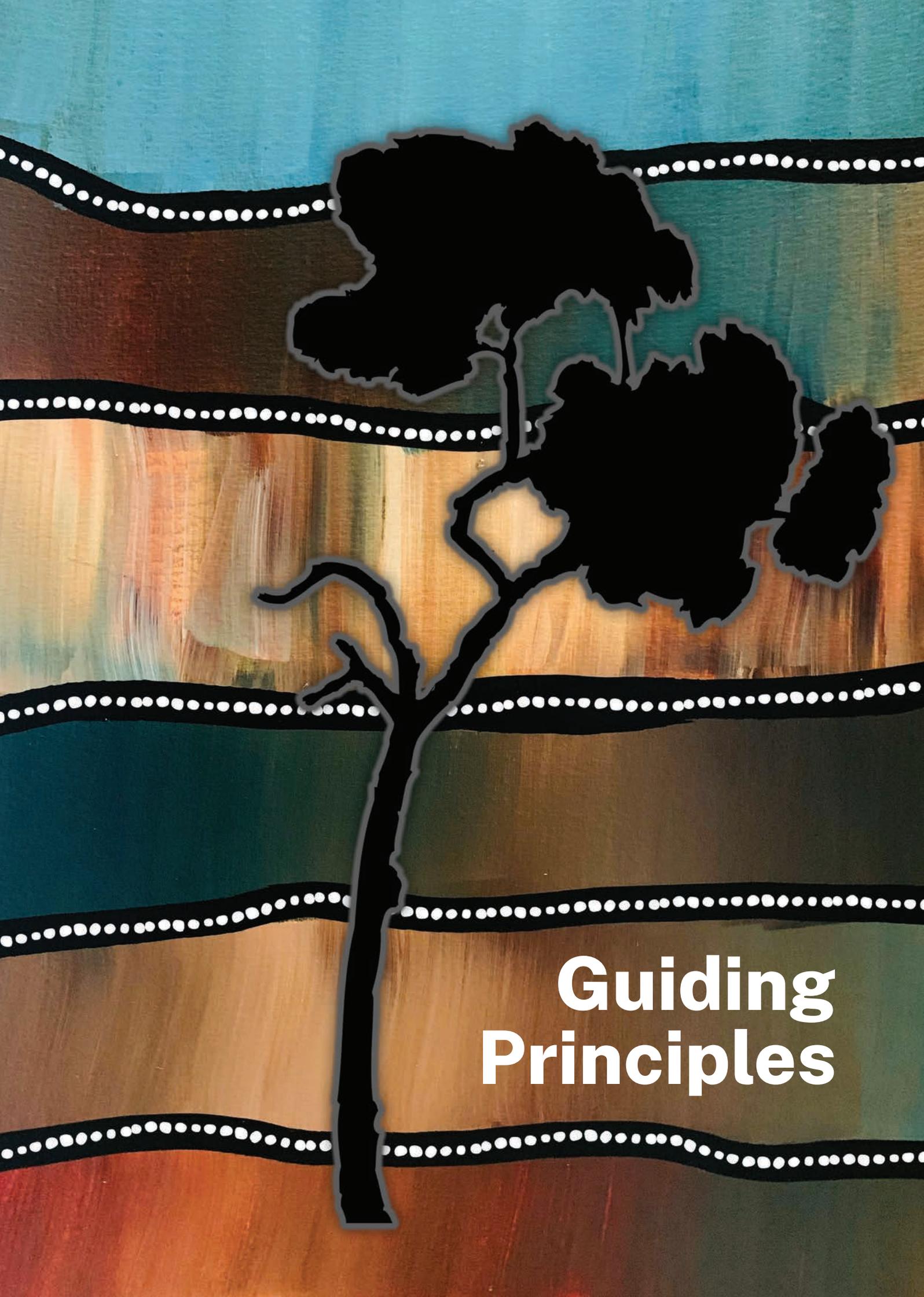
Guiding Principles

Don't be gammin.

4. Guiding Principles

Supporting pillars and principles for meaningful change.

Evaluation is a key mechanism in determining 'what works' in policies and their implementation. Ongoing concerns have been raised about the efficacy of policies and programs for Aboriginal people across all domains of inquiry. It is well recognised that there has been a lack of robust evidence on the impact of initiatives on Aboriginal students, families and communities. This has extended from the most fundamental elements of what is being evaluated and by whom, to the communication and implementation of evaluation findings. Communities have often articulated that the systemic failure to address these questions constitutes a 'broken promise', which impedes the achievement of equity for Aboriginal people and their relationship with government.

This systemic failure to address these questions is related to overly instrumentalist frameworks for evaluation that primarily ask 'what works' without closer consideration to the broader ethics of evaluation practices. There are long-standing and ongoing debates that interrogate the difficult role evaluation plays in relation to projects of social justice, including the observation that a 'focus on 'what works' makes it difficult if not impossible to ask the questions of

what it should work *for* and who should have a say in determining the latter' (Biesta, 2007, p. 5). Certainly it can be argued that taking up a crude 'what works' agenda with evaluation tends 'to obliterate prior considerations such as who gets to decide what 'working' means, looks and feels like' (Burke et al., 2021, p. 27). These important debates focus on developing questions, approaches and practices that can engage and navigate problems that arise, if and when we acknowledge the historically formed power relations producing the contexts into which this Framework seeks to intervene. For example, in foregrounding the importance of context we would want to acknowledge how it is not common to see policy and program evaluation engage at length and in detail with 'contextual dimensions of power, economy, living situation, and class, among other denominators of equity and socio-political status, and the contextual dimensions specific to culture' (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004, p. 6).

These debates include many relevant concerns that can challenge and shape evaluation framework development, and the practices that stem from it, including but not limited to: how privilege (including white privilege) tend to operate problematically

in relation to processes of evaluation (Kirkhart, 2016; McKegg, 2019); the issue of credibility, or lack of credibility, that can emerge with 'objective', 'independent' and experimental approaches to evaluation of social programming (Rallis, 2009; Gale, 2018); the presumption that evaluators can fully understand a cultural context (LaFrance, 2004); how knowledge systems influence evaluative thinking and how a particular 'politics of knowledge' and evidence hierarchies become obstacles to more equitable evaluation (Wehipeihana & McKegg, 2018; Burke & Lumb, 2018); the role that language as an aspect of culture plays in processes of evaluation (Cooksy, 2007; Rallis & Rossman, 2000); efforts to produce more inclusive and transformative evaluation practices (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007); and ways that value systems and judgements can be unpacked to produce more transparent, explicit and participatory ways of forming value positions (Alkin, Vo, & Christie, 2012). It is intended that, as part of the ongoing review process, these debates will be drawn upon iteratively to help guide aspects of the ongoing consultation process and Framework development.

In deeply considering these ethical considerations, the aim to develop a Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework represents a substantial commitment to changing the way that evaluations are undertaken, by including Aboriginal peoples as valued partners moving forward, with reference to their knowledges and perspectives that have been shaped by lived experiences.

The Principles for the Framework are based on a preliminary literature review which privileges the NSW context. In remaining consistent to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs OCHRE Plan (2013, p. 5), the review

centred the aim to 'support strong Aboriginal communities in which Aboriginal people actively influence and participate fully in social, economic and cultural life'. It adopts the OCHRE pillars – Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment as key considerations in developing new ways forward that apply equally to an evaluation context as to other domains.

Opportunity – The principles recognise that there are opportunities which include:

- Prioritising a strengths-based approach to Aboriginal Education.

- Developing new forms of engagement which empower all stakeholders.

- Fostering a culture of innovation and achievement.

Choice – The Principles are underpinned by an active choice to:

- Respect the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and cultures in NSW.

- Allow for localised variation in policy and practice as standard rather than exception.

- Recognise the importance of informed consent for stakeholder participation.

Healing – The Principles may facilitate healing by:

- Acknowledging the historical injustices experienced by Aboriginal people through imposed government policy and programs.

- Committing to listening to Aboriginal communities' feedback on the impact of policy and programs.

- Actively seeking to address Aboriginal community concerns.

Responsibility – The Principles ascribe responsibility for:

- Including Aboriginal communities at all stages of policy and program development and evaluation.

- Communicating evaluation findings to communities in a range of appropriate and accessible mediums.

- Implementing evaluation recommendations.

Empowerment –The Principles can facilitate empowerment by:

- The capacity building of NSW Department of Education Stafff and evaluators in culturally responsive practice.

- Providing visible and meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal priorities and perspectives.

- Operationalising the NSW AECG, NSW Department of Education Partnership Agreement 2020-2030.

- Ensuring wherever possible that Aboriginal people themselves are undertaking evaluation processes, and not solely non-Aboriginal staff.

Our Approach

The consultation and extensive literature review completed throughout this process have led to the creation of the Re-imagining Evaluation Principles.

These Guiding Principles are aimed at challenging existing assumptions and power relationships in education. They centre Aboriginal people as knowers rather than subjects, and as having jurisdiction over their own lives and over the land on which government schooling and education take place.

This Framework and its Principles signal a new way of doing business and understanding the impact of our work. This Framework applies to us all, from from leaders and corporate staff to classroom teachers.

4.1 Principle 1:
Our Students and Aboriginal Family Sovereignty

The Principle at the core of the Framework is Aboriginal Family Sovereignty. It honours the centrality of family, which encompasses the kinship structures that exist in Aboriginal people's lives. It is extremely important for all staff within the department to understand the aspirations of Aboriginal families, using the key Aboriginal community organisations in NSW to assist with this process: the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG), the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs).

In practice, Aboriginal family sovereignty recognises the inclusion of Aboriginal families in decision-making processes where culturally responsive consultation is a right, not a privilege or concession.

The department has implemented a Personalised Learning Pathway (PLP) process to ensure there is time and space created for engagement with Aboriginal families. The application of these Principles will ensure that this engagement is meaningful for all stakeholders.

The Principles should be implemented such that Aboriginal community self-determination is enhanced and not diminished.

4.2 Principle 2:
Relationships

Relationships are crucial to stakeholder willingness to participate in evaluation. They take time to develop and effort to maintain, which in turn fosters an environment of trust where all parties can listen, learn and grow together. This may also involve skill sharing where community participants take on new roles that had previously been denied to them.

4.3 Principle 3:
Place

Place is an integral part of Aboriginal people's identity. It highlights the diversity of local peoples, cultures, connections and knowledges that exist across NSW. It acknowledges the complexities of implementing a system-wide approach to any aspect of schooling.

System-wide initiatives should contain the flexibility to be adapted at the local level with local stakeholders. Engagement should be integral to all stages of formulating, implementing and evaluating policies and programs. Care should be given to ensure that departmental staff understand and adhere to community protocols around communication and provide flexible time frames for activities.
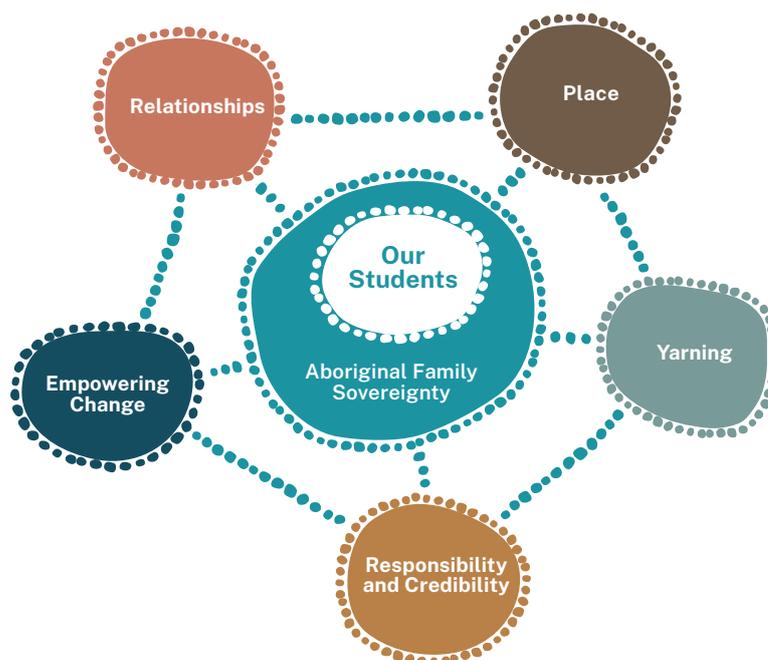
4.4 Principle 4:
Yarning

Conversations that involve active listening create an ongoing culture of reflection, from the co-definition of priorities to formalising mechanisms for, and responding to, feedback. Adequate resourcing should be provided to facilitate this.

4.5 Principle 5: Responsibility and Credibility

Evaluation needs to satisfy internal and external reporting requirements in a timely manner. Discussion with communities around the diverse and multiple ways of providing accountability is crucial when decisions are made on how to report. This is another opportunity for skill sharing where communities learn more about evaluation processes, get to choose culturally appropriate methods of reporting, and participants external to the communities (government departments, academics, consultants, etc.) learn certain methods get valued and others not. Communication of results should be in accessible formats to reach all stakeholders.

4.6 Principle 6: Empowering Change

Evaluation identifies and promotes best practice and meaningful change. It facilitates and celebrates the strengths of Aboriginal communities and cultures, the capacity building of NSW Department of Education staff, internal and external evaluators, in a spirit of walking and working together.

The Re-imagining Evaluation Principles Diagram
Visualising Connection

The Re-imagining Evaluation Principles Diagram emphasises the links between each of the individual Principles, and locates our students and the Principle of Aboriginal Family Sovereignty centrally at the core. Visually, the diagram articulates the importance of connection as part of the Framework.

Figure 1. (repeated from page xii) *The Re-imagining Evaluation Principles Diagram.*

Our way forward.
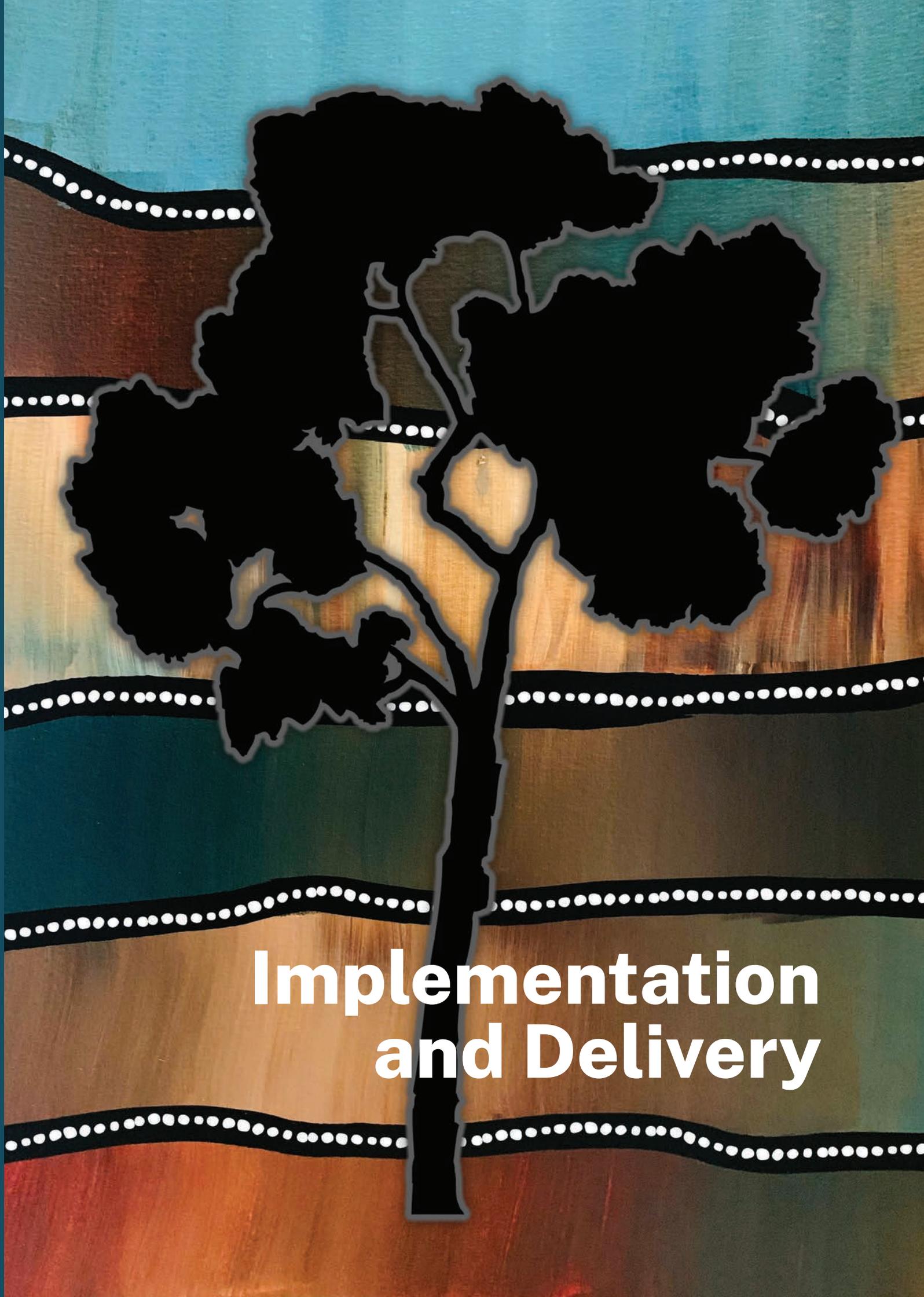
Implementation and Delivery

Students and Families at the centre.

5. Implementation and Delivery

Guiding the way forward for students, families, staff in schools and staff not in schools.

There will be a series of resources to support the implementation of this work:

1. A new way forward for learning, teaching and leading.
2. A new Principles Framework.
3. For Aboriginal students.
4. For Aboriginal families.
5. For staff in schools.
6. For staff not in schools.

These resources will translate information and outcomes across these stakeholder groups. This will aim to improve cross-stakeholder communication by catering to the understandings and practices of each stakeholder group, and providing a pathway for sharing, listening and understanding. The resources will act as a Framework to link the value of Aboriginal knowledge and lived experience across the three stakeholder groups of family/community, school staff and those staff not in schools.

The separate resources will offer a guideline of what culturally responsive evaluation should look like within each stakeholder group and the cultural understandings that should be considered.

The resources will outline cross-stakeholder terminology to aid in translation and communication of understandings.

The resources are not going to be 'one size fits all' documents, but foundational working documents that are designed to be modified and personalised to the unique social environments of each stakeholder group.

The resources will be constructed with respectful relationships and partnerships as the core catalyst of design and implementation. Key relationships and partnerships will unlock the true benefits and understandings of the resources.

5.1 Guiding the Way Forward

Resources for students, families, staff in schools and staff not in schools.

Image: Nathan Towney, Pro Vice-Chancellor – Indigenous Strategy and Leadership, Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership, and Associate Professor Kathleen Butler, Head, the Wollotuka Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, The University of Newcastle

Video resources and suggestions on how to support the implementation of the Re-imagining Evaluation Principles for students, families, staff in schools and staff not in schools will help to guide the way forward.

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7.1 **The Artwork**

Adam Manning
Deadly Layers I, II and III, 2022
mixed media on canvas
and digital painting
30 cm x 22.5 cm

The Story of the Artwork

> **The symbol of a tree is used to represent balance.** When sunlight is directed at one side of a tree, it only grows towards that direction. The branches, leaves and twigs are nourished on one side, while the other side of the tree receives little sustenance.
>
> This metaphor sheds light on the condition of the NSW education system, where numbers produced through exams and standardised testing are emphasised and promoted, and schools are only highlighted through their achievements in annual HSC and NAPLAN results.
>
> This causes an imbalance where schools and students are seen as second to statistics, and success of schools and the success of students are defined by the numbers they produce.
>
> In light of this imbalance, the Re-imagining Evaluation Principles are designed to shed light on: the amazing stories of students, schools and families; to promote growth in positive relationships; to nourish the importance of place; and to share success stories that would normally never see the light of day.
>
> Balancing the tree will provide valuable insight, where we can look beyond statistics, and gain genuine perspective of the true success our schools and students.

James Ballangarry
(on the narrative he devloped for the artwork that Adam created)

7.3 Artist Statements

The Paintings

As a proud Aboriginal man, and an artist/educator painting and expressing the Framework – this is something that's very close to my heart. When creating this visual work, I expressed the Principles using horizontal layers and varying colours. For example, the top layer expresses Aboriginal Community, the second is Principle One etc. Furthermore, the centre section features a gumtree, which connects all the layers (Principles), and provides a way of visually expressing the various sections of the Framework.

The Soundscape

The soundscape sonically brings the Framework to life and gives the listener another way to understand the Framework. However, this soundscape is based on feeling something rather than simply reading words. Therefore, as the listener will observe, there are five main sections which all align to the Principles. Furthermore, this notion of sonic story telling has been practiced by Elders for thousands of years.

Adam Manning

7.4 What does Re-imagining Evaluation sound like?

Relationships: 0:00 – 0:11
This Principle is captured via a field recording from an Awabakal Park location.

Place: 0:12 – 0:16
This Principle is expressed through the harmonisation of an orchestral sustain and the didgeridoo.

Yarning: 0:17 - 0:42
This Principle is expressed via a gentle conversation between the clapsticks, didgeridoo and the cello.

Responsibility and Credibility: 0:42 – 0:54
This Principle is expressed through the introduction of rhythm and tempo.

Empowering Change: 0:55 – 1:33
This Principle expresses the empowerment of change through the application of harmony, melody and rhythm.

Video and Audio

Adam Manning
Deadly Layers Soundscape, 2022
video and sound composition
1 minute 42 seconds duration

8. Appendix

Re-imagining Evaluation Principles

Adam Manning
Deadly Layers III, 2022
mixed media on canvas and digital painting
30 cm x 22.5 cm

Relationships · **Place** · **Our Students** · **Aboriginal Family Sovereignty** · **Empowering Change** · **Yarning** · **Accountability and Credibility**

What does Re-imagining Evaluation sound like?

For video of the paintings and audio of the Re-imagining Evaluation soundscape by Adam Manning, please follow the QR link.

Re-imagining Evaluation Principles
for the NSW Department of Education

Ongoing concerns have been raised about the efficacy of policies and programs for Aboriginal people across all domains of inquiry. It is well recognised that there has been a lack of robust evidence on the impact of initiatives on Aboriginal students, families, and communities at a system and local school level. This has extended from the most fundamental elements of what is being evaluated and by whom, to the communication and implementation of evaluation findings. Communities have often articulated that the systemic failure to address these questions constitutes a 'broken promise', which impedes the achievement of equity for Aboriginal people and their relationship with government.

The commitment to develop a Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework represents a new approach and substantial commitment to changing the way that evaluations are undertaken, by including Aboriginal peoples as valued partners moving forward, with reference to their knowledges and perspectives that have been shaped by lived experiences.

The guiding Principles are aimed at challenging existing assumptions and power relationships in education. It centres Aboriginal people as knowers rather than subjects, and as having jurisdiction over their own lives and over the land on which government schooling and education take place.

Acknowledging the power of schooling structures and systems that influence schools.

Re-imagining Evaluation Principles

The **Re-imagining Evaluation Principles** centre students and Aboriginal families and are aimed at challenging existing assumptions and power relationships in education.

1. Our Students and Aboriginal Family Sovereignty
Our core principle honours the centrality of family, and encompasses the kinship structures that exist in Aboriginal people's lives. It recognises the inclusion of Aboriginal families in decision-making processes where yarning is a right, not a privilege or concession. Through respecting the aspirations of Aboriginal families, it ensures that Aboriginal family sovereignty is enhanced and not diminished.

2. Relationships
Relationships are crucial to stakeholder willingness to participate in school activities. They take time to develop and effort to maintain, which in turn fosters an environment of trust where all parties can listen, learn, and grow together.

3. Place
Place is an integral part of Aboriginal people's identity. The principle of Place highlights the diversity of local peoples, cultures, connections and knowledges. It acknowledges the complexities of implementing system-wide approaches to any aspect of schooling, but insists on flexibility, differentiation and adaptation to local stakeholder needs and timeframes, as well as the adherence to community protocols around communication.

4. Yarning
Yarning is a complex term with many layers. Yarning cannot take place without a respectful relationship established over time. It involves deep listening, honest conversation and creating an ongoing culture of reflection. Adequate resourcing should be provided to facilitate this as it takes time, space and structure.

5. Responsibility and Credibility
Evaluation needs to satisfy internal and external reporting requirements in a timely manner at all levels. Communication of results should be in accessible formats to reach all stakeholders.

6. Empowering Change
Evaluation identifies and promotes best practice and meaningful change. It facilitates and celebrates the strengths of Aboriginal communities and cultures, and builds capacity for all stakeholders in a spirit of walking and working together. Listening, and then changing behaviour, processes, structures etc. is an important part of building credibility with stakeholders.

Download

Our kind
of success.