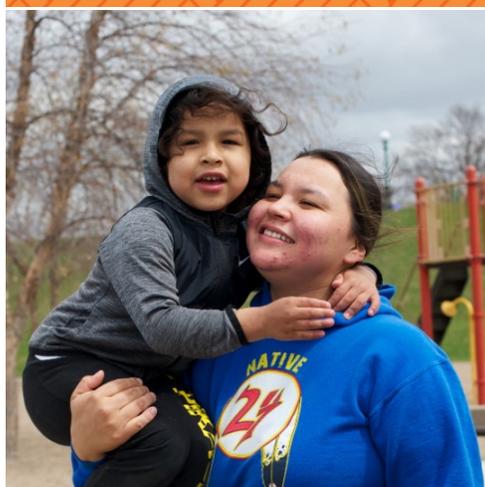


Indigenous Evaluation 101 Guidebook

Prepared as Part of Minnesota's Preschool Development Grant

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Contents

What is the Preschool Development Grant?	1
What is the purpose of this Guide?	1
Who is this Guide for?	1
How can Indigenous evaluation inform evaluations with and for other cultural groups?	2
What is Indigenous evaluation and why is it needed?	3
Data sovereignty and obtaining permission for research and evaluation	13
Tribal research review, and when this is needed	15
Good Relations Agreements	15
Theories of change and logic models.....	17
The evaluation plan and process	18
Existing data and sources of information.....	18
Collecting primary data.....	19
Data analysis and interpretation.....	24
Reporting and sharing	25
References	27
Good Relations Agreement.....	31



Introduction

This Guide was developed by Bowman Performance Consulting (Shawano, WI) and Wilder Research (Saint Paul, MN) as part of our contract with the Minnesota Department of Education to conduct an Indigenous Evaluation for Minnesota's Preschool Development Grant.

What is the Preschool Development Grant?

The State of Minnesota was awarded a federal [Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 \(PDG B-5\) Renewal Grant](#) in late 2019, following a one-year planning grant. The PDG B-5 aims to align and coordinate multiple systems for families with children, prenatally through age 5, including American Indian families. Through increased coordination of these systems, all families will be able to access services more efficiently and, ultimately, all children, including Indigenous children and families, will develop holistically. The grant focuses on: health and well-being; early learning; economic security; and safe, stable, nurturing relationships. The grant is a partnership across state agencies, including the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services and the Governor's Children's Cabinet.

What is the purpose of this Guide?

Existing training and resources on evaluation are widely available, but guidance on how to conduct evaluation that honors the culture and strengths of Indigenous communities is often missing. This Guide was developed to help the State of Minnesota, Indigenous organizations, and others to recognize the steps and considerations necessary to design and implement an evaluation that considers Indigenous ways of knowing. The Guide contains concrete tips and tools, and includes links to other resources. This Guide is not meant to be the only resource a reader would need to conduct an Indigenous evaluation, but rather to be a starting point for thinking about how to ensure evaluations are appropriately measuring the successes of Indigenous projects and programs.

Who is this Guide for?

This Guide was developed for the State of Minnesota, their grantees, and other organizations that are working within Indigenous communities, in particular for the Preschool Development Grant and other initiatives that center children and families. More generally, this Guide is geared toward professionals who are just getting started on their journey toward Indigenous evaluation, and seeking to understand foundational concepts and where to go to learn more.

How can Indigenous evaluation inform evaluations with and for other cultural groups?

While this Indigenous Evaluation Guide is tailored for considerations on designing and conducting Indigenous evaluations, many of the concepts can be applied as is or modified to fit the needs of any culturally responsive evaluation. All evaluations should be designed with the participants' cultural backgrounds and the specific culture of the program or initiative in mind.

Resources

The [Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment \(CREA\)](#) is located in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It is an international community of scholars and evaluation practitioners that exists to promote a culturally responsive stance in all forms of systematic inquiry including evaluation, assessment, policy analysis, applied research, and action research.

[Indigenous Peoples in Evaluation](#) is a topical interest group (TIG) of the American Evaluation Association, an international professional association of evaluators devoted to the application and exploration of program evaluation, personnel evaluation, technology, and other forms of evaluation.

This [American Evaluation Association's \(AEA\) Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation](#) affirms the significance of cultural competence in evaluation. It also informs the public of AEA's expectations concerning cultural competence in the conduct of evaluation. The introduction to this statement reads, in part: "Cultural competence is a stance taken toward culture, not a discrete status or simple mastery of particular knowledge and skills. A culturally competent evaluator is prepared to engage with diverse segments of communities to include cultural and contextual dimensions important to the evaluation. Culturally competent evaluators respect the cultures represented in the evaluation."



What is Indigenous evaluation and why is it needed?

Culturally responsive evaluations in Indigenous or Tribal contexts are complex and multifaceted studies. These evaluations require consideration of the intersection of multiple legal jurisdictions across federal, state, and Tribal governments based on funding sources and implementation sites. Evaluators and researchers must understand that Indigenous peoples, programs, and communities exist within a range of settings: rural, urban, and Tribal reservation lands. There are 574 federally recognized tribes acknowledged by the U.S. government. Each of these Tribal governments has their own set of elected officials, their own Tribal governance and operational structure, and their own laws, policies, and procedures (Bowman, Dodge Francis, & Tyndall, 2015).

Prior to European contact, Indigenous peoples inhabiting North America used their own systems of self-governance to sustain high levels of health, education, social, and community welfare for their people. Each Tribe is unique in its culture. From Tribal histories, documents, and other Indigenous artifacts, it is evident that Indigenous peoples thrived prior to European contact. Each Tribe's customs, worldview, traditions, and other teachings are grounded in a way of life that is distinct to that particular Tribe. Tribes met the needs of their people through a blend of self-governance and cultural traditions in which community members participated and provided accountability.

Though we, the Indigenous authors of this Guide, have spoken with many elders about our line of work, none has yet shared with us an Indigenous word that translates to the English/American term "evaluate." When we seek wisdom about Indigenous evaluation from our elders, what is most often heard are concepts, teachings, and stories about day-to-day life. If our ancestors did not assess or evaluate a situation, length of a season, food supply, and so on, it could literally mean life or death (Bowman & Dodge Francis, 2018).

This includes accountability to human and non-human relatives, as well as evaluation and use of data for subsistence living (e.g. Indigenous peoples tend to think about well-being comprehensively by assessing our interaction and living off the land with non-human relatives such as plants, animals, water, and air; Burnette, Clark, & Rodning, 2018). Indigenous peoples have different experiences and origin stories related to evaluation.

Despite the origins of evaluative thinking and utilization of data by Indigenous peoples and Tribal/First Nations communities and governments prior to European contact, very little representation of Indigenous evaluation exists in the published literature and Western canons of curriculum and development activities. The knowledge and contributions of Indigenous peoples and Tribal/First Nations governments are rarely taught in classrooms, universities, or professional evaluation curricula. Newcomb (2008), writing from an Indigenous perspective, characterizes the standard, Western historical narrative as the conqueror model, a narrative framework of conquest, ownership, and discovery based in a Western, Christian story that justifies domination of Indigenous peoples who are viewed as less than human. Under this narrative, historical texts are premised on the idea that colonials and Christians from Europe "discovered" a "new world." Indigenous peoples were seen as savages rather than human because they were not Christian, per the Doctrine of Discovery (Alexander VI, 1493). Unfortunately, this Western narrative, which is presumed and assumed in many historical and contemporary evaluation publications, continues to ignore, marginalize and/or distort the experiences of Indigenous peoples (Bowman, 2018). Understanding historical context in academia and government is essential. Evaluators and researchers must acknowledge and address the dynamics of power (Gitlin, 1994) and a long history of disempowerment when creating studies conducted with Indigenous peoples.

Given the historic and contemporary impacts of colonization, the understanding of Indigenous cultures and contexts becomes critically important in developing an effective Indigenous evaluation or research design, especially by non-Indigenous evaluators. Awareness of diversity within and across Indigenous communities, understanding of the unique cultural and traditional norms, and ability to navigate the various contexts in which an Indigenous evaluation is being conducted all contribute to successful (relevant, actionable) research and evaluation.

Too often, the absence and exclusion of Indigenous epistemologies, frameworks, methodologies, communities, and other resources in Western and mainstream academic research contributes to gaps in policy and programming, which ultimately lead to poorer outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Multi-jurisdictional Indigenous education, research, and project evaluation models and frameworks already exist:

- [Bowman's \(2019b\) background and contextual storytelling work about Nation-to-Nation evaluation using Tribal Critical Systems Theory](#)
- Bowman, Dodge Francis, and Tyndall's (2015) book chapter on culturally responsive Indigenous evaluation
- [LaFrance and Nichols' \(2009\) Indigenous evaluation framework for higher education settings](#)
- [Reinhardt and Maday's \(2006\) Interdisciplinary Manual for American Indian Inclusion](#)
- [Wilder Research's evaluation guide for culturally specific youth development programs](#) (MartinRogers & Granias, 2019)

Rational thought, science, survivance, strength, loss, and resilience are braided into Indigenous origin stories, traditional ecological and science knowledge (TEK), and current Indigenous scholarship (Kimmerer, 2013), including in evaluation. Indigenous wisdom translates well into contemporary evaluation policy, governance, and practice (Angal & Adalicio, 2015; Bowman, 2006, 2017, 2018; Bowman & Dodge-Francis, 2018; ; Kawakami et al., 2007; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Mariella et al., 2009; Martinez & Timeche, 2016; Smith, 2012; Wehipeihana et al., 2014).

In summary, there is no single definition of what Indigenous evaluation is, just as there is no single definition of what or who is Indigenous. Indigenous approaches to evaluation vary across individuals, communities, cultures, and contexts; however, there are common threads that are woven throughout many Indigenous approaches to evaluation. Some of the key components are described in the following sections of this Guide.

Indigenous evaluation key component #1: Incorporate and reflect Indigenous values, beliefs, practices, and cultural protocols

Indigenous evaluation and research processes are shaped using Indigenous values, beliefs, and practices that include cultural content, language, and sovereignty of the Indigenous peoples and Tribal/First Nations who are involved in the evaluation. Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing are centered and valued in the evaluation and research process. The values of the Indigenous communities and organizations that are involved with the evaluation are not only incorporated at a surface level, but are used to shape the creation and evolution of the evaluation and research process. While there may be some overlap across Tribes, Indigenous values and ways of knowing differ from one community to the next and may be put into practice differently across different individuals, programs, contexts, and time; situating the evaluation within this *specific* Indigenous context is critical.

There are shared histories that Tribal nations, Indigenous communities, and Indigenous families and children have experienced directly and learned and inherited from their ancestors across many generations. When working with Indigenous communities and organizations it is critical to remember these cultural disruptions that have occurred across generations due to genocide; cultural, religious, and language oppression; and forced removal of Indigenous children from their families.

Context as it relates to the specific Indigenous community and/or organization is important to consider throughout an evaluation project. And there is nobody better to assist with understanding local context and history than the community itself.

This means that some type of trauma is often experienced directly and/or epigenetically by Indigenous program participants. Historical trauma has also led to loss of culture and language for many Indigenous peoples, so the level of culture and traditions that is relevant and important for one community may be different than another community.

Indigenous cultural protocols for research and evaluation

Learning and following local cultural protocols are important aspects of the research and evaluation process. As with the varying definitions of what is considered Indigenous evaluation due to differences across individuals, cultures, and contexts, the types of cultural protocols that are utilized in the evaluation and research process will also differ by community and organization. There are, however, several important considerations to keep in mind when integrating cultural protocols, including the following:

Learning about and appropriately incorporating local cultural protocols

Knowing that cultural protocols are not the same across Tribes, communities, or organizations, it is important that evaluators take the time to learn about the cultural protocols specific to the group they are working with. These cultural protocols could include seeking permission to conduct the evaluation from a community elder or using traditional prayer or ceremony as a part of the project. It is critical to learn about how and when to appropriately incorporate these local cultural protocols.

Seek permission from local Indigenous communities or organizations, as appropriate As a part of local cultural protocols and Indigenous sovereignty, it is essential to determine not if but how to seek permission to conduct an evaluation or research project within an Indigenous community or organization. As described in the next section of this Guide, this may look like completing a Tribal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process, research review process, or Good Relations Agreement. Appropriate research and evaluation approvals may also include speaking with local elders.

Compensate community knowledge keepers and participants for their time, expertise, and participation

Indigenous community members and organizations are often approached by non-Indigenous entities and persons to share knowledge and/or participate in projects and events to fulfill institutional funding or reporting requirements. Unfortunately, these requests too often come without an authentic desire to engage. These requests often fail to provide compensation in any form for time and expertise, and may fail to recognize the additional burden this has on Indigenous peoples. As such, it is good practice to compensate Indigenous community members and organizations for their participation either through their traditional or western ways of compensation, using monetary or non-monetary compensation, whatever the preference is of the community and organization. Traditional and non-monetary examples could be offering tobacco, wild rice, and/or other community-specific items. Western examples could be a monetary stipend and/or a citation within a product of the evaluation.

Indigenous evaluation key component #2: Community participatory approaches

Indigenous evaluation and research studies should utilize a community participatory approach that has processes reflective of and relevant for the community. The level of community member participation in an Indigenous evaluation can vary and is dependent on a number of factors, including the community's capacity and interest to participate, the type of evaluation or research project being conducted, the protocols used to invite participation from the community, and the reasons underlying the evaluation and research team's community participatory goals.

While community engagement should be prioritized throughout every phase of an Indigenous evaluation, community engagement exists on a continuum. This continuum ranges from the community as advisor, in which the community reviews strategies and tools and provides feedback, to full community based participatory research (CBPR), in which the community leads the project, identifying the research questions and determining strategies. Figure 1 provides an overview of this continuum by project phase.

1. Levels of community engagement at various stages on an Indigenous evaluation project

Project phase	Community informed: Community as advisor	Community involved: Community as collaborator	Community directed (CBPR): Community as leader
Project planning/ decision-making	Advises on project (one-time input, limited decision-making control)	Gives input throughout project and is involved in decision-making	Drives project, sets timelines, defines research question
Data collection	Reviews and gives input to data collection strategies, tools; facilitates connections (e.g., cultural broker or liaison)	Conducts data collection (subcontractors); determines methods and co-creates tools	Develops questions, determines approaches, and makes staffing decisions; gathers information
Data analysis	Identifies questions that need to be answered using additional analyses	Participates in data analysis (e.g., coding or identifying themes), asks for additional analyses/raises new questions, interprets meaning	Plans analysis, conducts or requests analyses/raises new questions, interprets meaning
Reporting/sharing results	Reviews and provides feedback to drafts of reporting materials (of all types)	Helps identify key findings and develops recommendations, determines best modes for reporting	Develops materials/ approaches for reporting
Dissemination	Advises on dissemination strategies and key audiences; receives information	Co-presents findings, helps determine key audiences; shares information	Determines audience(s); presents findings to their identified audiences

However, participatory approaches must be considered differently within Indigenous communities to ensure the appropriate community processes are being used. These processes should be guided by the community's values, beliefs, and traditional practices, including any cultural protocols that may be involved (e.g. smudging, prayer, not recording or asking permission to record, singing, intentional silence, data sovereignty and protections via policy and/or ordinances or agreements).

It is important not to generalize when doing research and evaluation work in an Indigenous community—evaluators must do their homework prior to community engagement.

Possible ways to be inclusive of community and organization participation include:

- Connecting with the local Tribal governing body to determine any research or cultural protocols that should be followed, including submitting to a Tribal Institutional Review Board (IRB) or research review process, if relevant. This should be done any time evaluation or research is being conducted on Tribal lands or with Tribal members and when a Tribal IRB or other research review committee is available. (See more on this topic below).
- Inviting community or organization members to be a part of the planning and implementation of an evaluation or research project, including, for example, crafting a logic model, determining the evaluation questions, data collection, data analysis, data review, writing/reviewing reports, and dissemination of data.
- Seeking community voice in the evaluation, for example, holding community listening sessions, non-traditional or traditional Talking Circles, or asking for stories, similar to an interview.
- Communicating reciprocally with communities and organizations about the evaluation and research processes, including timelines, purpose, progress, questions, challenges, and data ownership and use.

Nobody knows a community or organization better than those who are a part of the group. Community members have their own individual expertise and strengths; however, generations of harmful impacts of western research and evaluation have created a chasm of distrust between Indigenous community members and evaluators and researchers (especially non-Indigenous), so it is critical to carefully navigate in partnership with community members utilizing a compassionate, strengths-based, and holistic approach. Creating study designs that are deficit-based, that continue to document and communicate negative trends and statistics, and that lack the appropriate and documentation of community strengths, resources, resilience, and innovations are not helpful.

Indigenous evaluation key component #3: Holistic and strengths-based framework

Indigenous evaluation and research processes are grounded in a holistic and strengths-based framework that upholds community and Tribal/First Nation values. This involves creating space for multiple knowledges, whether that is knowledge that Indigenous peoples hold from ceremonies and language, knowledge that is received from elders, or knowledge that comes from visions and dreams. Indigenous worldviews recognize that there are multiple knowledges and multiple perspectives; we are all on different journeys and pathways and we all carry different stories that influence what we see, hear, and feel, as well as how we interpret that which we take in (Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc., 2016).

Collecting these knowledges and experiences may best be done in different formats too, for example, embracing Talking Circles rather than focus groups, hearing stories instead of holding interviews, and utilizing art-based methods instead of or in addition to surveys. More information about methods that may be more appropriate in Indigenous settings is below.

Evaluators should take the opportunity to build upon and reflect the strengths of the Indigenous community or Tribe that is involved with the evaluation to identify questions, areas of growth or reclamation, and the knowledge that is already there. Evaluators should also take the time to intentionally identify the “right” evaluation questions and goals with a community or organization that are meaningful and do not stem from a deficit perspective.

Trauma-informed evaluation

Harm has been done and continues to be done on Indigenous communities through evaluation and research, and part of this is due to the neglect of non-Indigenous evaluators and researchers to learn the histories of colonization of Indigenous peoples and the intergenerational impact this has had on that which is being evaluated. Evaluators and researchers cannot do good work in good relations with one another without acknowledging and considering the systemic nature of the issues at hand and the biases that have been created because of that. An example of this learning piece could look like understanding how boarding schools ripped apart families and disrupted familial systems and traditional cultures and relationships, which has led to a disconnect between parents and their children, as well as ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child protection system. From a western lens, this may look like “lazy parenting” or “reliance on the system” that contributes to the negative biases against these parents based on racial identity, when really this should be seen as an opportunity for support in re-establishing those connections. Without understanding that background from this lens of historical and epigenetic trauma, it’s only seen from this biased perspective that doesn’t address root causes of issues facing Indigenous communities. Additionally, data gathered about challenges happening within Indigenous communities are often used to further support these biases, pushing the lens further and further away from the systemic nature of these issues that all lead back to colonization. Indigenous trauma-informed evaluation recognizes these histories aiming to utilize evaluation and research as a tool for Indigenous communities on their path toward justice and liberation.

Here are some resources for more information about trauma-informed evaluation:

- [A trauma-informed evaluation tip sheet from Wilder Research](#) (Johnson, 2016)
- [Tips for doing trauma-informed work with Indigenous peoples](#) from the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (George et al., n.d.)
- [A blog about the principles of trauma-informed evaluation](#) from the American Evaluation Association (Brown, 2021)

Indigenous evaluation key component #4: The evaluation should produce information that is useful and actionable for the Indigenous community

Indigenous evaluation and research design and processes generate findings and information that are meaningful and can be utilized by the Indigenous community, Tribal program or organization, and broadly by the Tribal/First Nation government. Often, evaluations are designed to satisfy funding requirements, while the actual needs and interests of a community or organization are ignored. Yet, the processes and outcomes of evaluation and research can be incredibly beneficial to the growth, improvement, and sustainability of a community or organization. Indigenous evaluation can be empowering for Indigenous communities when they define what evaluation looks like for them, how it should be done, and what the results will be used for.

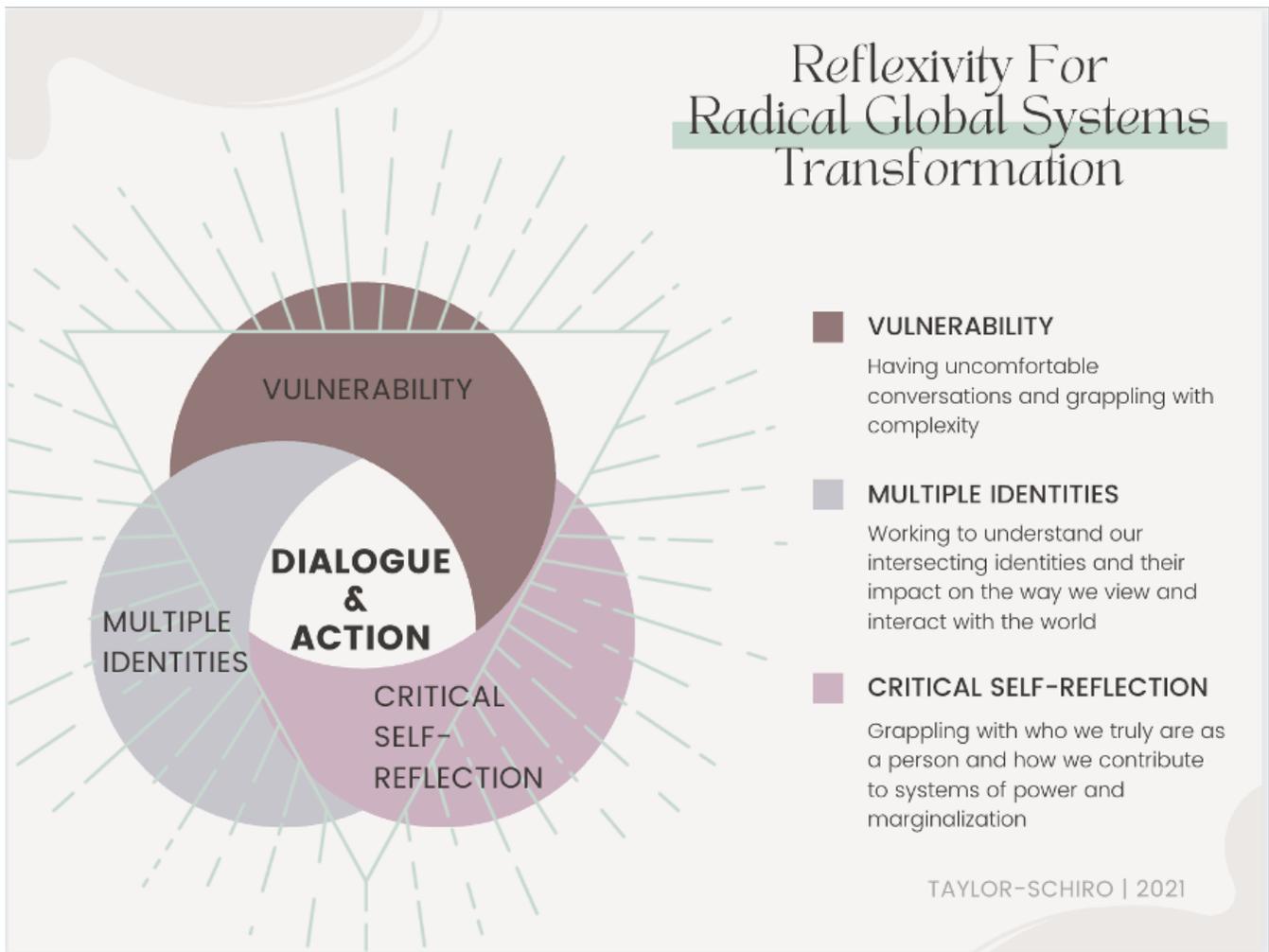
To produce meaningful, usable results for Indigenous organizations and communities, it can be helpful to approach evaluation not with the mindset of *how can I get results to satisfy the requirements for this funder and maybe get something out of it for our organization*, but rather, *how can I utilize evaluation to understand more about the goals and progress of the organization and community while also satisfying the requirements for this funder*. It's about finding that right balance for the organization, community, and project that is being evaluated, and it won't always be the same, but at the center of all that is done is the question: *How is this working for the people and community who are directly affected? How can this evaluation be useful to them?*

Indigenous evaluation key component #5: Reflective practice

Indigenous evaluation and research should incorporate critical and reflective practices that recognize positionality and identity for the intentional purpose of making Indigenous peoples, traditional and community knowledge, and the sovereignty of Tribal/First Nations visible and represented. This means taking time to reflect on what the role of the evaluator is in the project and the community, how this role is shifting over time and context, and the influence of one's identity. This is an often-overlooked part of a sound evaluation or research project (Indigenous or otherwise); however, Indigenous peoples across different communities have long committed to these practices as a natural value that is integral to the functioning of a holistic and interconnected way of being as one within a community of many.

Considering and reflecting on one's positionality and identity is something that should be done by all members of an evaluation or research team, often and on an ongoing basis, particularly at the beginning of a project.

Reflexivity For Radical Global Systems Transformation



Source: Reflexivity in Indigenous Evaluation: https://www.canva.com/design/DAEvfBE2I2g/D6-YkIrAfC8PdF08-YgKig/view?utm_content=DAEvfBE2I2g&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=homepage_design_menu

There are a variety of ways to practice reflection within an evaluation or research project, such as keeping a project journal and/or holding one-on-one or small group reflection meetings. The evaluation team should set aside time dedicated to practicing reflection, including at the beginning of a project, at each stage of the project, or after each task is completed. How this reflection practice is structured also varies, but can include the following questions:

- Would I consider myself an insider or outsider to the community or organization?
- What do I think I know about this community or organization?
- What is my level and nature of experience working with this community or organization in the past?
- What more do I need to know to engage effectively and appropriately with this community or organization?
- What identities do I carry and how might they influence the way I show up in this community or organization (i.e., gender, knowledge/experience with key goals, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, personal values, etc.)?

In addition to these individual and group reflection activities that are specific to the evaluation project at hand, another thing to consider when working with an Indigenous community or Tribe is if, when, and how to do a Land Acknowledgement to recognize the Indigenous peoples whose land the work is happening on. Here are some resources about land acknowledgements, which should be done not just as a performative measure but with real intentionality and reflection behind it.

- [Acknowledging territory](#) (Native Land Digital Jones, n.d.)
- [A guide and call to acknowledging Native land](#) (U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, 2017)
- [Native Land Map](#) (Native Land Digital)
- [Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment](#) (Native Governance Center, 2019)
- [National Museum of the American Indian land acknowledgement](#) (n.d.; includes lesson plans and K-12 resources)
- Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition's [Land Acknowledgement Guide](#) (2021)

Limitations of the evaluation

Indigenous evaluation, just like any research or evaluation, has limitations. It is important for the evaluator to identify and describe the limitations of the evaluation for the audience to ensure that inappropriate conclusions are not drawn or that the evaluation is used inappropriately to make important decisions of the program. Some of the most important and common limitations to consider are:

- Did the evaluation use an experimental design (with random assignment of participants to the intervention and control groups) that allows for causal statements to be made, or are the results only descriptive or correlational in nature?
- Who participated in the evaluation and how representative are they of the entire population that was served?
- What extenuating factors (like the COVID-19 pandemic) may have impacted the evaluation results?



Data sovereignty and obtaining permission for research and evaluation

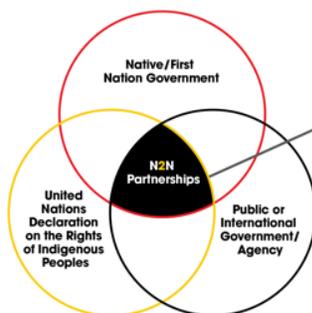
Approaching evaluation within Indigenous communities and organizations in a good way and with intentionality to not repeat any negative experiences from previous evaluations is critical. To do so requires understanding Indigenous sovereignty. It takes time to develop shared understandings through Good Relations Agreements and/or Tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and research review processes. Relationship-building may take more time, especially for non-Indigenous evaluators, because of several of the reasons already mentioned including differences in worldview, different traditions and cultures. Evaluators, like everyone, are operating within a larger context that is built on a foundation of white supremacy. Indigenous peoples must cope daily with the impacts of ongoing colonization, which include Western evaluation requirements. Under these conditions, considerations of historic trauma and sovereignty are paramount.

By blending systems theory and thinking, critical systems theory, Tribal Critical Theory (TCT), and Indigenous Evaluation (IE), evaluators can begin to conceptualize how Tribal sovereignty can be used on study designs, especially case studies (Bowman, Dodge Francis, & Tyndall, 2015) and also can be raised to a systems level, thus influencing evaluation policy and evidence-based practice through Tribal/First Nation and public government initiatives. Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2006) can be scaled up theoretically to Tribal Critical Systems Theory (TCST) for evaluation (Bowman, 2019a). TCST builds upon an emerging theoretical framing scaled up to systems and government levels for evaluation purposes.

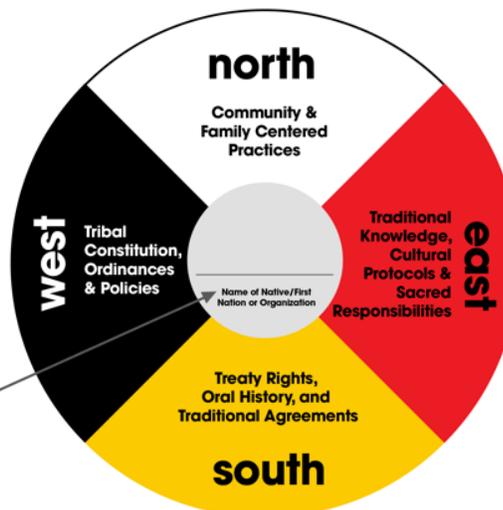
2. A framework for nation-to-nation evaluation, Bowman, 2020

Nation to Nation Conceptual Model

Tri-Lateral & Multijurisdictional Framework



N2N: Native/First Nation Framework



Source. Nation to Nation Conceptual model: <https://aea365.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Bowman-3.png>

TCST application to Tribal and non-Tribal government, policy, and evaluation activities offers nine tenets (Bowman, 2019a) as a theoretical foundation for nation to nation (N2N) evaluation (Bowman, 2020) which are based in the multifaceted legal, political, cultural, and community requirements of each unique Tribal Nation and community. A systems-level approach must be utilized for any initiative where sovereign Tribal/First Nations governments are involved.

Data sovereignty and Indigenous data protections (Carroll, Rodriguez-Lonebear, & Martinez, 2019) and other methods of using tribally driven participatory research (TDPR; Mariella, et al., 2009) for the legal and practical grounding of sovereign Tribal/First Nations governments are being applied to research and evaluation. Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars continue to work locally and globally as part of a broader nation building effort. Many local, national, and global Indigenous organizations and initiatives have been working on strengthening Indigenous protections in academic studies for decades.

See also the [Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network](#) and their global agenda as well as the continued work of the [United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#), the [First Nations Information Governance Center in Canada](#), and the [National Congress of American Indians](#) regarding sovereignty, data, governance, evaluation and research.

Separating the culture, language, and traditional knowledge practices or content of Indigenous peoples from their inherent legal and political rights of sovereignty is culturally, professionally, and ethically incongruent with human subjects, human rights, and Indigenous rights. All components of identity and citizenship must be considered for an evaluation or research study that is ethical, culturally responsive, and effective.

Data sovereignty and data protections are critical to understand and partner with Indigenous communities. Data sovereignty and governance means that it is recognized, and evaluation and research are built around the notion, that Indigenous peoples are sovereign peoples, with their rights and data protected. Tribal treaties, contemporary Tribal constitutions, ordinances, policies, and Tribal human/cultural protections boards and processes do exist. These need to be known and inquired about in advance of partnerships. This includes determining their own social, cultural, political, and economic development, and how data from evaluation and research done in their communities are used for this development.

The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) describes this concept more in depth and also says that “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions” (United Nations, 2007, p. 22-23).

It is essential to ensure that appropriate and comprehensive data protections are in place that acknowledge this sovereignty and provide Indigenous communities ownership over the evaluation process and data.

Per the [2016 Indigenous Data Sovereignty Agenda](#) (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016), the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in its first and second sessions (2002, 2003) already recognized that a key challenge faced by national and international bodies is the lack of disaggregated data on Indigenous peoples. The absence or lack of data that reflect where and how many Indigenous peoples there are, and how they are faring in relation to the realization of their individual and collective rights is directly related to the failure of governments and intergovernmental bodies in formulating and implementing Indigenous-sensitive decisions and programs.

There are two issues for evaluators to consider when working with Indigenous communities and Tribes: 1) Obtaining valid, reliable, and trustworthy data, and 2) the protection and governance of Indigenous data to prevent it from being used in unethical, illegal, and irresponsible ways. This is why nation-to-nation models that include the legal and political rights of Tribal/First Nations and the leadership of evaluation of and by Indigenous evaluators (Wehipeihana, 2019) are essential and urgent requirements for evaluators, funders of evaluation, and non-Tribal government partners.

Tribal research review, and when this is needed

Tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and research review are forms of data protection for Indigenous communities. These are formal processes typically completed in partnership with a governing body whenever one is attempting to do evaluation or research within a Tribal community; however, not all Indigenous communities have a Tribal IRB process available. To determine if the Indigenous community requires a Tribal IRB, evaluators must ask and/or do the research to see if one is available. This [list of IRBs from the Indian Health Service \(IHS\)](#) is a good place to start (Indian Health Service, n.d.). In Minnesota, there are two Tribal IRBs or formal research review committees that the authors were aware of at the time this Guide was published: Fond du Lac Nation and White Earth Nation.

Other Tribal Nations have other methods for data protection and governance, most must run through the Tribal Council, Tribal Legislature, or formal Tribal Education or Tribal Health Board. When there is no Tribal IRB, evaluators can and should still enter into formal agreements with the Tribal/First Nation before conducting any study. For example, Wilder Research has obtained Tribal Council approval from the Tribes that participate in the triennial [Reservation Homeless Survey](#).

Evaluation teams may also enter into informal agreements with the Indigenous community or program, which is discussed in the next section.

Good Relations Agreements

A Good Relations Agreement creates a shared understanding of how the evaluators and the Indigenous grantees and program participants will work together in order to ensure that the Indigenous evaluation has a positive impact for Indigenous people, communities, and organizations. The Good Relations Agreement specifies what evaluators must do and avoid doing to be in good relationships with Indigenous partners. It also specifies what Indigenous knowledge or practices should be incorporated into the evaluation.

Good Relations Agreements are an informal way to ensure data protection and culturally responsive evaluation for Indigenous communities. Good Relations Agreements can be made in place of or in addition to IRB approval, and are created in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations that are a part of the evaluation project. Examples of what might be included in a Good Relations Agreement include expectations for performance of the evaluation team, expectations for participation of the community or organization, values underlying the project from all parties, assumptions and processes of the evaluation, and how data will be protected. They are agreements that reflect similar provisions offered by an IRB or research review, as well as inclusive of the values and cultural protocols of a community. See the Appendix for an example Good Relations Agreement that we, as the evaluators, developed with Indigenous grantees and state partners for the Preschool Development Grant Indigenous Evaluation.



Theories of change and logic models

When developing an evaluation plan, a foundational part of the process is developing a theory of change and/or a logic model that are useful to the organization and/or community. Both can be useful tools for helping to plan an effective and meaningful evaluation and research process, communicating about a program or initiative, and helping to maintain accountability to the community regarding outcomes. Additionally, theories of change and logic models can be used to brainstorm and plan as an organization and/or evaluation team and to decolonize an evaluation project by moving toward an Indigenous-centered approach. Examples and resources for creating a theory of change and logic model are included in the following sections.

Theories of change

A theory of change can be thought of as a conceptual framework for a program or initiative, including what is to be done, why, and the expected outcomes. Theories of change can be as simple or complex as an organization or community would like them to be; however, the main purpose is to intentionally think through and identify how progress toward project goals can happen and have a visual representation of what this looks like.

[Better Evaluation \(2016\)](#) describes the how, what, and why of developing a theory of change.

Wilder Research (2020) developed this [theory of change for the Minnesota Historical Society's Native American Artists in Residence program](#) using a more standard format.

Wilder Research also co-developed with the program creators this [theory of change for the Mni Ki Wakan Decade of Water initiative](#) that incorporates more culturally relevant elements (Lubeck et al., 2021).

The Healing Foundation (2019) gives an example of [a theory of change about healing from trauma](#).

Logic models

Logic models are similar to theories of change, however, logic models are generally more technical in nature and are meant to give a snapshot of an organization's or program's key inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Logic models are often used as a starting place to develop an evaluation plan, because they show the key activities and outcomes that need to be measured.

Wilder Research developed this [tip sheet about developing logic models](#) (2010) as well as a [guide for thinking about program theory and logic models for the EvaluATOD project](#) (2009).

Mathematica also offers resources for [developing a logic model with complex initiatives](#).

This article from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services illustrates [how to convert a standard logic model format into a more culturally relevant format using the Medicine Wheel in the context of the Older American Act Title VI](#) (Jenkins et al., 2015).

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (2009) developed this [logic model to describe and evaluate a summer employment program](#).

Here is a link to several basic [logic model templates](#).



The evaluation plan and process

After developing a theory of change or logic model for an Indigenous evaluation, the next step in the process is to design and implement an evaluation plan. The evaluation plan is a document that describes the data collection tools and approaches evaluators will use to gather evaluation data, and on what timeline, as well as how to analyze, report, and use the evaluation results. As described above, an Indigenous evaluation plan should incorporate strategies to engage with the people who are directly affected by the evaluation as well as the tribal and Indigenous community leaders, as appropriate. This will ensure the evaluation process is culturally responsive, that data are appropriately protected, data sovereignty is addressed, and that the results are meaningful and useful for the people who are directly affected.

An Indigenous evaluation plan should use data collection tools, methods, and approaches that are culturally relevant and meaningful for the people who are directly affected. This requires knowledge of the local, specific context in which the evaluation is being conducted, as well as input from key community or program leaders.

The following sections of this Guide describe some data collection options used in Indigenous evaluation settings, as well as additional resources to learn more about these methods. These tools and approaches can and should be modified as needed to fit the local Indigenous context.

Existing data and sources of information

Before diving in to collect a bunch of new data (which requires a lot of time and effort), it is helpful to identify existing data sources that can help answer the evaluation questions, and then identify the gaps to fill with new data collection. For example:

- The organization or program that is being evaluated may keep track of who is attending their program or what specific services they are receiving as a part of the case management or administrative records, which can help evaluators understand more about who is served and what dosage (intensity and duration) of services they are receiving.
- A front desk staff person may keep a running list of feedback received by customers or program participants, which can be a source of information about participant satisfaction and potential areas for improvement.
- Data about the population of a specific geographic area or demographic group may be available on www.mncompass.org or other publicly available sources, which could provide more context about the population that the program serves or wants to reach.
- An elder who has known about this program and organization since its inception in the community tells the creation story of the organization, which can help evaluators understand what really matters, what to pay attention to in an evaluation, or to see more clearly where things got off track for a program.

Collecting primary data

When evaluation questions cannot be fully answered through existing data sources, it may be necessary to collect new information—also called primary data. Evaluators should be especially intentional when selecting and designing primary data collection methods for an Indigenous evaluation. Rather than allowing methods to be selected solely based on the information needed to fulfill the evaluation requirements, evaluators should carefully consider the following as they embark on primary data collection:

- How to blend Western and Indigenous ways of knowing—a Two-Eyed Seeing approach—to generate a holistic evaluation that yields meaningful results for both the evaluation team and Indigenous participants? (Bartlett et al., 2012).
- What will the experience of a proposed method feel like to participants? Were methods and designed protocols selected to ensure that the experience of participating in data collection is restorative and trauma-informed? How will evaluators minimize the likelihood that methods or protocols will cause harm or place undue burden on participants?
- How to respect, address, or incorporate community wisdom, the cultural traditions of participants, and historical trauma (including trauma inflicted by researchers) in methods selection and protocol design?
- Who is the right person to facilitate data collection methods? Is it appropriate for a non-Indigenous person or evaluator to conduct data collection for a given project? Should the evaluator co-facilitate methods with a respected community member, or train community members to collect the data themselves?
- What will participants gain from participation—information that is meaningful to participants and that they can use themselves? Monetary compensation? A meal?
- How to build trust and relationships with participants before implementing data collection methods?
- How to get input on proposed data collection methods from community members of the Tribal community that is directly affected? How to use that community input? How to clearly communicate this to the program participants who are being asked for feedback?

Project example: Using visual recording to capture stories

The Manidoo Ningadoodem (Family Spirit) Program of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is one of 15 projects funded through the Health POWER initiative from the Center for Prevention of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota. To capture stories and impact over the 3-year project—and to complement the quantitative measures being collected by project staff—the evaluation team hosted annual story mapping sessions with a visual recorder. As Family Spirit staff shared their milestones, challenges, and stories of impact from the year, a visual recorder captured their words and images on a blank canvass. Staff also had the opportunity to share photos, programmatic materials, and other symbols of importance with the visual recorder, who later integrated these images into the final visual. The mapping sessions served as meaningful opportunities to reflect and celebrate the year, and resulted in a visual that reflected Ojibwe culture and traditions.

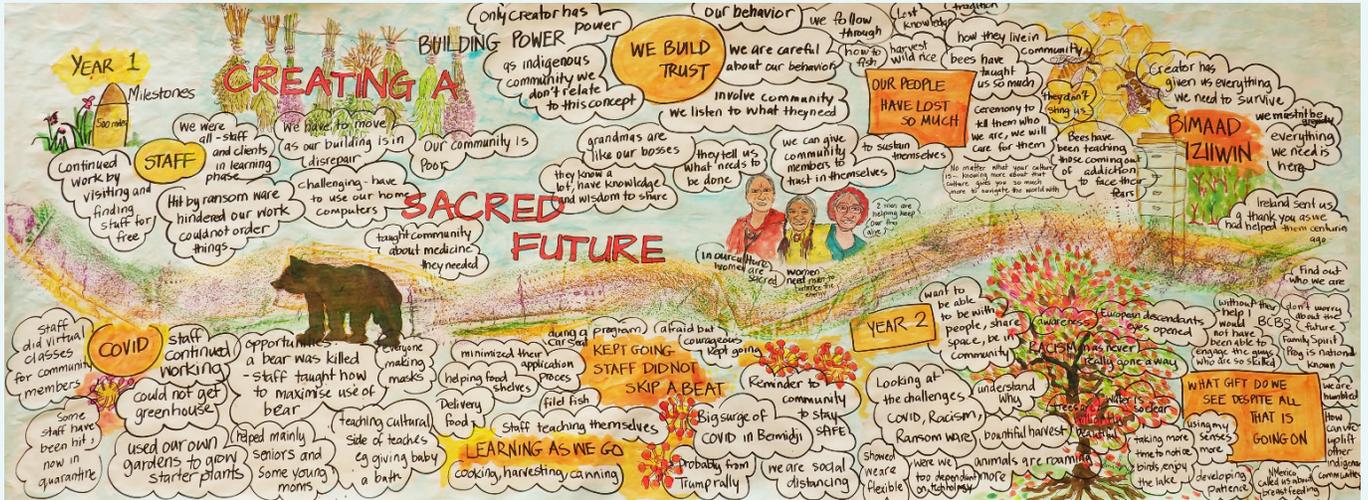


Image by Anne Gomez, created for the Manidoo Ningadoodem (Family Spirit) Program of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Primary data collections methods and approaches

While many primary data collection methods can be effectively adapted and integrated into an Indigenous evaluation, several methods lend themselves particularly well to Indigenous contexts and tap into Indigenous ways of knowing. Consider layering these methods with quantitative or traditional Western academic methods.

Talking circles

Rooted in Indigenous traditions, talking circles create a safe environment for participants to openly share their experiences, stories, and perspectives. In contrast to focus groups, which are typically facilitated by a research team member and use a semi-structured protocol, talking circles are often facilitated by an elder or respected Indigenous community member and use a less-structured format based in deep listening and storytelling. While traditions vary by (and within) Indigenous communities, talking circle participants take turns sharing one-at-a-time, with little to no disruptions or probes from the facilitator. Talking circles usually open with a prayer or ceremony and can last much longer than a typical two-hour focus group. Participants are often invited by word of mouth or identified by respected community members, and offered a meal and/or a gift of cultural significance for attending.

The experience of participating talking circles is intended to be healing or restorative, taking on more meaning than just the information or findings that they yield (Hunt & Young, 2021).

🌸 **This method is useful when** a culturally responsive way of capturing stories or experiences around a given issue is needed, or to understand how findings match community wisdom and knowledge. It is especially useful when the summative or generative input of community members will illuminate various facets of an issue or generate holistic solutions.

💧 **Resources:** <http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html>,

PhotoVoice

Photography-based approaches like PhotoVoice ask participants to take and submit photographs that depict their experiences around a specific concept, idea, or program. The resulting photos can be analyzed (often with participants) and paired with quantitative data to tell a well-rounded story.

🌸 **This method is useful when** capturing a range of perspectives, realities, and contexts of program participants and community members.

💧 **Resource:** A UK based charity, [PhotoVoice](#), uses ethical photography to promote positive social change. [Empowering the Spirit](#) is a Canadian based website supports school awareness of First Nations perspectives and exemplifies how they used [photovoice with students](#).

Harvest poetry

As a participatory qualitative method, Harvest Poetry empowers participants to select main takeaways and put them in their own words. Harvest Poems are typically created by asking participants of a meeting or gathering to listen and record key phrases that they hear throughout the meeting, and combine them into a poem that can be submitted to the evaluation team and/or shared with the meeting participants at the end of the meeting.

🌸 **This method is useful when** evaluators want to capture the essence of a listening session, gathering, training, or convening around preliminary findings—what stood out to people? Useful when paired with a post-survey to understand the range of experiences of an event. Harvest poems can also aid in overcoming power dynamics by engaging people who are uncomfortable sharing through other ways in large groups.

💧 **Resource:** Description and instructions for [haiku harvest strategy](#) from [Re-imaginary](#).

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM)

As a participatory qualitative method, Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) gathers together up to 20 people to identify a program's ripples of impact. REM often use appreciative inquiry as a backbone for the session and integrates individual reflection, paired conversation, and large group discussion. The resulting map visually depicts program outcomes and documents stories of impact.

🌸 **This method is useful when** capturing untold stories of program impact and visually representing the broad ripples of a program; or when there would be value bringing people together who are involved in different facets of a program (participants, staff, leaders, etc.) to generate energy for future work

💧 **Resource:** <https://community-development.extension.org/ripple-effects-mapping-an-effective-tool-for-identifying-community-development-program-impacts/>

Graphic recording and other art-based methods

While not typically a method in itself, the integration of a graphic recorder—someone who visually captures an event or meeting through drawings of images and words—can enhance other qualitative methods such as focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and Ripple Effects Mapping. Graphic recording can happen in real-time, after the data collection has been completed (with the help of notes or a recording), or both. Data collection participants can also provide feedback in real time on the visuals being created, and send photos or materials after the session for inclusion into the visual.

 **This method is useful when** evaluators need a visual way to capture the story of a project or program; want to engage participants, community members, and other audiences in the creation of a deliverable; or are looking to embed evaluation results in community context, images, and words.

 **Resource:** Description, examples and advice on [graphic recording](#) from Better Evaluation. **Project example:** **Working with community members to collect primary data**

Evaluation teams should strive to include Indigenous researchers on their work teams, especially when designing measurement tools and collecting data directly from Indigenous communities. However, when non-Indigenous evaluators find themselves in the position of collecting data from Indigenous communities, consider reaching out to (and compensating) Indigenous community members in these efforts.

To learn about the impact of community trainings and workgroups around Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) organized across five Native Nations, the evaluation team for the Tribal NEAR Science initiative asked Indigenous individuals who were a part of the project work and respected in each community to directly conduct data collection efforts and consult on the design of related collection tools. Over a three-year period, these trusted individuals conducted one-on-one interviews with community members (integrated into existing check-ins), and helped non-Indigenous members of the evaluation team to co-facilitate Ripple Effects Mapping sessions and talking circles. This collaboration helped respondents feel more comfortable participating and resulted in valuable insight on future solutions to prevent ACEs and bring healing to Indigenous communities.

Examples of methods we used for the Preschool Development Grant Indigenous evaluation

The Preschool Development Grant is intended to achieve a more coordinated system for supporting young children and their families in Minnesota as well as families who are expecting. There is a specific focus on supporting Indigenous families, to address the significant lack of access and disparities Indigenous families and communities face in terms of early childhood and family outcomes. For Minnesota's Preschool Development Grant Indigenous Evaluation, Wilder Research and Bowman Performance Consulting designed and implemented the following Indigenous evaluation methods:

Bead Voting Booth: Wilder Research and Bowman Performance Consulting developed a bead voting approach in order to be responsive to PDG Indigenous grantees' feedback that we need to do evaluation activities that are simple, fun, and engaging for community events and activities. We use large plastic jars labeled with different early childhood resources/supports listed on each. Next to the jars is a large sign with the prompt: *What programs and*

supports have you used to help child(ren) grow physically, culturally, spiritually, and academically? We give caregivers a pouch of beads, and ask them to drop a blue bead in the jars representing resources/sources of support that they have used. Then we ask them to take up to five orange beads, and put those in the jars (or jar) of the resources that was *most* valuable to them. At the end, we count up the seeds/beads in each jar to get a sense for people's use of various child development guidance and resources.



Tshiacha Lee, a Research Associate from Wilder Research, engages visitors at the Bead Voting Booth.

Story banking: For the PDG Indigenous evaluation, story banking answers questions about how Indigenous children and families are living in thriving communities. Indigenous families with young children and those who are expecting children are invited to share stories and experiences, through writing, videos, photos, and other images, of their families and how their community has supported them in caring for their children. Participants are given the following story “prompts:”

1. Think about something your child did recently that filled you with joy. What happened and why did this bring you joy?
2. Think about an experience your family had recently where you were able to engage in Indigenous cultural practices with your child(ren). What was meaningful to you about that experience and why?
3. Remember a time when you felt supported in your community related to parenting. Share what your community did to make you feel supported as a parent.
4. Think of a time when you observed something special about your child’s development or learning. What did you notice and why do you think it was important?

Participating storytellers are able to give their story a title and assign themes to the experience they shared which is part of the first stage of coding analysis. Wilder distributed a flyer about story banking, including a QR code linking people to a story banking website, for PDG Indigenous grantees to share with their families and participants. We also asked people to participate at the community events we attended. After we have collected enough stories (summer 2022-winter 2023) the team will use participatory analysis with the PDG Indigenous grantees to make meaning of the stories grantees share.

Coloring activity: As a way to collect stories, images, ideas, of what it looks like for Indigenous kids and families to thrive, Wilder Research staff also created a coloring packet for community events. The top sheet of the packet has the prompt “*My favorite thing to do with my family is...*” Kids (or adults!) can either draw or write their answer. We then invite participants to rip the top sheet off and pin the finished coloring sheets to a board at the event, so kids can see their work and get a sticker. The rest of the coloring packet includes Indigenous-themed images by Native American artist [Marlena Miles](#), which participants get to take home with a box of crayons.

Grandma Test Observation Tool: Wilder Research and Bowman Performance Consulting are working with several PDG Indigenous grantees and elders who are connected to their programs to develop an observation tool that we've been calling "The Grandma Test."

In the PDG Indigenous evaluation co-design sessions, one of the PDG Indigenous grantees described how we will know if our Indigenous children are doing well by how they interact with their grandmas. Do they tell jokes and giggle with each other and with their relatives, and are they using their Indigenous language? Do they interact with their peers and relatives in ways that reflect their cultural values and teachings? Although our Native grandmas are *always* proud of their grandchildren, these are the things that make them especially happy and hopeful because they know a child who has these things – their traditional teachings, access to Indigenous language learning, and good balance in their life – will be able to thrive in this world with that basis of strength and resilience.

We are working toward developing the Grandma Test Observation Tool that any elder who is working with or supporting an Indigenous early childhood, child care, or family program could use observe and make important notes about a particular child's progress and development, with important emphasis on the child's areas of strength and observed growth as well as areas where the child may need additional support or guidance. The tool is based on Indigenous worldviews and perspectives regarding child development. There are two versions being pilot tested in fall 2022: the medicine wheel and the 7 grandfather teachings. We are working with elders and PDG Indigenous grantees to pilot test these tools to determine if there is one version they like better than the other and if there are any changes we should make to the tool. Elders are being compensated for their time.

Ultimately, programs can use this tool with their elder staff, volunteers, program participants, and advisors to:

1. Facilitate deeper engagement of elders in the process of evaluation and ongoing learning.
2. Provide another source of information that can be used to help families and providers to ensure all Indigenous children they are serving have access to the teachings, resources, and programs they need to support their healthy, balanced growth and development.
3. Offer culturally-relevant, strengths-based input to families about their child's development.
4. Help Indigenous early childhood program learn about and share the story of the impact their program has for children and families.

Data analysis and interpretation

It is not within the scope of this Indigenous Evaluation Guide to provide all of the information an untrained evaluator would need to conduct data analysis for a comprehensive Indigenous evaluation project. Rather, this section of the Guide provides readers an overview of considerations and resources to inform data analysis in the context of Indigenous evaluation. As with many other parts of the evaluation process, but particularly for analysis, seeking the expertise of a professional evaluator may be useful to ensure use of appropriate methods for the data available, and that appropriate conclusions are drawn from the evaluation results.

Quantitative data analysis

With quantitative data (numbers), one can report things like totals, averages, percentages, etc. The appropriate calculation depends on the evaluation question(s).

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018b) developed this [brief guide for quantitative data analysis for evaluation](#).
- The Rural Health Information Hub (2017) developed some [tips for evaluating quantitative data sources](#).
- The Pell Institute (n.d.) developed this [toolkit for quantitative data analysis in evaluation](#).
- A tip sheet from Wilder Research about [organizing and analyzing data](#) (Holm-Hansen, 2008).

Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data (stories, pictures, words) allow for reporting of things like themes, key quotes that illustrate an important point or theme, etc. There are many less to more formal approaches to analyzing qualitative data. Evaluators should consider using a more formal coding process with tools such as Atlas.ti or Envivo when there is a lot of rich data, such as detailed notes from a series of talking circles. Evaluators should also use rigorous methods to reduce and identify any bias in the analysis process.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018a) developed this [brief guide for qualitative data analysis for evaluation](#).
- A tip sheet from Wilder Research (2011) about [using qualitative data](#).
- Better Evaluation’s blog about the [nuts and bolts of qualitative analysis](#) (Marshall, 2019).

Reporting and sharing

It is important when thinking about how to communicate the findings of an Indigenous evaluation to keep the end user in mind and remember that each audience may have a different reason that they are interested in the findings. The evaluation story should be reflective of the audience and what they want to know. With an Indigenous evaluation, evaluators should particularly consider how to make the results meaningful and useful for the relevant audiences including those who are directly affected (program participants and staff) as well as for Tribal and Indigenous organization leadership. This often involves telling the story using Indigenous artwork, themes, cultural metaphors, and other related strategies, as well as using an iterative approach to communicating results to facilitate deeper understanding and buy-in.

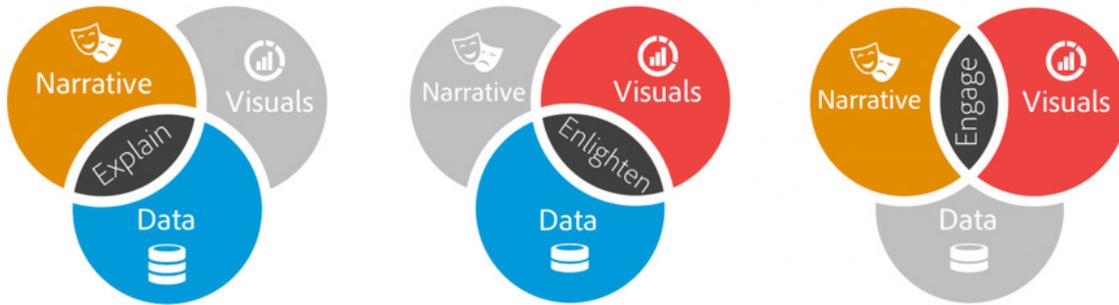
Don’t assume that one size will fit all for evaluation reporting—reports are not the only way! There are a variety of unique and creative ways to share evaluation data and tell a compelling story. Make sure to clearly identify the audience and the key messages and action items. Then, produce a report or other communication tool or document that is most likely to accomplish that goal. Evaluators can mix a standard written report with an art-based approach or other format for maximum reach and impact. Formats might include:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Written report + summary | ■ Blogs/learning papers | ■ Slidedoc |
| ■ PowerPoint/presentation | ■ Webinars | ■ Video or podcast |
| ■ Dashboards | ■ Graphic recording | ■ Data placemat |
| ■ Case studies | ■ Harvest poem | ■ Social media campaign |

Data storytelling

Data storytelling is more than just visualizing data effectively. Data storytelling is a structured approach for communicating data insights, and it involves a combination of three key elements: *data*, *visuals*, and *narrative*. When these three things are merged together, they can explain, enlighten, engage, or even entertain an audience.

3. Using a combination of narrative, data, and visuals can be an impactful way to tell an evaluation story



Source: Data Storytelling: The Essential Data Science Skill Everyone Needs, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brentdykes/2016/03/31/data-storytelling-the-essential-data-science-skill-everyone-needs/?sh=79a0442052ad>

In fact, neuroscientists have confirmed decisions are often based on *emotion, not logic*. So, when evaluators package insights as a data story that engages their audience, it builds a bridge to the influential, emotional side of the brain.

Evaluation use and data-informed decision-making

In an Indigenous and trauma-informed context, evaluators and others who use evaluation data should proceed with great care to ensure culturally appropriate information and processes are used to make and communicate about important decisions. During and after the evaluation data are reported to key audiences, the evaluation team should consider ways to support the implementation of any recommendations from the evaluation, as well as ongoing data gathering and data-informed decision-making. This can include presenting the key findings and recommendations to key audiences in a format and on a timeline that is most useful for them (i.e., when they are actually making a key decision that could be informed by that data). It may also include facilitating discussions or decision-making processes using the data that were generated or compiled as a result of the evaluation. Finally, this may include helping key evaluation stakeholders document decisions that are made or that could be made using evaluation data.

- Wilder Research presented to the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits annual conference about [data-informed decision-making for nonprofit organizations](#) (Connell et al., 2019).
- An Anthology article about [using data-informed decision-making as a strategy for change](#) (Chafin, 2020).
- This blog about [data-informed decision-making](#) (Ryan, 2021).

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Start in a good way

Honor the strengths of the community

Be mindful of intellectual knowledge that is collected and shared

Equity in evaluations

Involve people from the beginning and throughout the process

Be mindful of the trauma our communities share

Make time to share and get community's response to the findings

Honor people with gifts

Culture and language are prevention – bringing back traditional lifeways and teachings

Reports usable and used

Never arrive for a visit empty handed

Do not lump Indigenous people with other persons of color

Build trust by following protocols for introductions and establishing relationships and common interests and purpose

- **Be a good relative.** We come to the work rested and ready to pursue traditional, cultural, and spiritual ways of knowing, and as partners who listen and understand first, then decide on best pathways together.

- Start in a good way (virtual or in person) with prayer and good intentions in our hearts
- Make sure the evaluation makes sense to participants
- Keep connections and relationships at the center
- Share information with Tribal leaders and help them understand the purpose and process of the PDG initiative and evaluation activities
- Build trust among evaluators, grantees, and state staff through meaningful engagement over time

- **Be of good mind.** Listen first; reflect Indigenous ideas that are restorative, regenerative, and strengths-based. The evaluation process will respect the sovereignty and data privacy of Tribal Nations and Indigenous grantees and their participants related to data, knowledge, and innovations.

- Do not use extractive data collection methods; instead provide the data collected through the evaluation back to its rightful owners (Tribe or Indigenous organization) and use it only for the purposes that have been communicated and approved by grantees and Tribes, as appropriate
- Respect data sovereignty; use and share intellectual property and cultural/traditional knowledge that is included as part of the evaluation accordingly, and obtain appropriate approvals before sharing
- Keep local Indigenous culture and language at the center of the work; appreciate cultural ways of knowing
- Use a local Indigenous worldview to design the evaluation questions, methods, interpretation, and use
- Keep children at the center of all our work
- Honor the strengths of the community; do not start with the community's weaknesses or disparities
- Ensure that Indigenous communities and data are not left out of the bigger conversations about the Preschool Development Grant implementation and evaluation
- Do not lump Indigenous people with other people of color; they don't have the same issues or life as us and should not assume what works for them will work for us

- **Design and implement good work.** Co-create strategies, materials, processes, and work products that align with the Tribal Nations' and PDG Indigenous grantees' needs and that effectively address the critical components of the Preschool Development Grant Indigenous Evaluation.

- Share questions and agendas ahead of time so people can choose to participate or not
- Honor people with a gift, pay for their time, and feed them
- Be mindful of the trauma Indigenous communities face; use trauma-informed approaches
- Use methods, approaches, and materials that are culturally relevant for participants
- Use mixed methods – qualitative and quantitative data
- Always share findings back with community and confirm we are telling the right story with the data

- **Use wisdom to confirm our vision of a good future.** Continue to revisit our work to reflect on what is working well, what can be replicated for more impact, and what needs to be changed or left behind based on community needs and future needs (seven generations).

- Evaluation findings should be usable and used; reports should not get dusty on a shelf
- Evaluation findings and reports should be made available to other grantees to learn from each other
- Evaluate the Indigenous evaluation process itself to learn what worked and what we can improve next time
- Use evaluation as a way to shine the light and amplify good work being done in Indigenous communities



This Good Relations Agreement is adapted from previous agreements developed by Bowman Performance Consulting. This agreement is framed by the Lunaape Medicine Wheel (Bowman and Dodge-Francis, 2018) and will be used as a guide for our collaborative evaluation work together. The specific components were shared during the first grounding session. This agreement will be a living document and can be adjusted over time.

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