



**Resources on aspects of evaluation for
university outreach practitioners working with
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**



NCSEHE
National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University



This booklet is part of a suite of resources developed as part of Dr Katelyn Barney's Equity Fellowship conducted under the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) Equity Fellows Program, funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

Additional resources that form part of the fellowship include:

A suite of video resources which is designed for university outreach practitioners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Podcast series "Indigenous Success: Doing it, Thinking it, Being it". Hosted by Dr Katelyn Barney and Professor Tracey Bunda, this podcast series focuses on "what works" in outreach programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students. Each episode is an interview with an Indigenous staff member or university student about aspects of effective outreach programs.

Acknowledgements

The project would not have been possible without the generous support of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education who have funded this fellowship. I sincerely thank the members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group for their feedback and guidance throughout the fellowship:

- **Associate Professor Clair Andersen**, University of Tasmania
- **Professor Tracey Bunda**, The University of Queensland
- **Professor Bronwyn Fredericks**, The University of Queensland
- **Associate Professor Graeme Gower**, Curtin University
- **Professor Martin Nakata**, James Cook University
- **Professor Maria Raciti**, University of the Sunshine Coast

Many thanks to evaluator Professor Susan Page, Western Sydney University, for her advice and feedback regarding the fellowship, particularly in relation to the data analysis, the webinar and development of other resources. Hayley Williams provided research assistance for which I am most grateful. I particularly acknowledge Hayley's analysis of the survey and the caregiver/parent interviews. For assistance with organising interviews with Indigenous university students, I thank the outreach staff at the five university sites. I also sincerely thank all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, university staff who work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach programs, and caregivers/parents of students who were interviewed as part of the fellowship.

Acknowledgement is also given to the 98 Indigenous university students who completed the survey. Thanks also to the other Equity Fellows of 2019/2020, in particular Dr Nicole Crawford, Dr Janine Delahunty and Dr Andrea Simpson for discussion on various aspects of the fellowship. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at The University of Queensland provided a supportive environment to undertake the fellowship.

Many thanks to Aunty Denise Proud for her painting depicting the role of outreach programs, "Inspirational Stepping Stones".

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ABOUT DR KATELYN BARNEY'S EQUITY FELLOWSHIP

“ Building a stronger evidence base to support effective outreach strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Increasing impact and university participation. ”

The fellowship involved a mixed-methods approach (combining qualitative and quantitative methods) to identify “what works” in outreach programs for Indigenous students.

Through collaboration with an expert Indigenous advisory group, Aboriginal research assistant Hayley Williams and staff at universities, the fellowship documented and mapped the range of outreach programs universities are running for Indigenous students and then evaluated two outreach camp programs specifically for Indigenous students at Australian universities.

Working closely with staff at selected universities, qualitative data was collected from Indigenous tertiary students who had previously attended a high school involved in outreach activities before their transition to university.

The project also involved interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff who run

outreach programs for Indigenous students and with caregivers/parents of Indigenous students who participated in outreach programs to explore their perspectives on the impact of outreach activities on their child. Quantitative data obtained through a nationally circulated survey of Indigenous university students who participated in an outreach program while at school was also analysed.

Key findings from the fellowship were:

- The peer-to-peer connections Indigenous students form are a key success factor of outreach camps.
- Camps are part of a suite of outreach activities that many Indigenous students undertake while at school. Therefore, causality between outreach activity and transition to university is difficult to prove.
- Camps play an important role in demystifying university and provide “a taste” of university life for Indigenous students.
- Most Indigenous students participated in outreach camps during year 10, 11 or 12 and they were already considering transitioning to university.
- More cultural aspects and more Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum are needed in some camps.
- Post-camp engagement with Indigenous students is particularly important and needs to be strengthened in some camps.
- More practical resources are needed for staff to assist them to evaluate their programs.

[The fellowship final report is available online.](#)



Dr Katelyn Barney with Professor Tracey Bunda and Dr Hayley Williams

INSPIRATIONAL STEPPING STONES (2021) BY AUNTY DENISE PROUD

The painting depicts the role of outreach programs as a stepping stone for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into university. The large circle to the left signifies the university while the large circle to the right represents the importance of culture.



The small circles represent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who attend outreach programs and who come from diverse places across Australia to participate. They bring their connections to Country and culture with them when they attend outreach programs. The slightly larger circles at the bottom right represent the important roles of

student ambassadors or mentors who work on outreach programs.

The brown and white curvy dotted lines that join the circles signify the pathways or stepping stones between students and universities through attending outreach programs. The pathways are interconnected to highlight the importance of staff maintaining connections with Indigenous students who participate in outreach activities so that students are supported beyond undertaking the outreach program, from school, into university and beyond.

The circles are all connected and linked – when students attend outreach programs they make important connections with their peers, as well as connections to student ambassadors, and university staff. The culture circle is connected and linked to all of the other circles because of the importance of strengthening the cultural aspects and Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum in outreach programs.

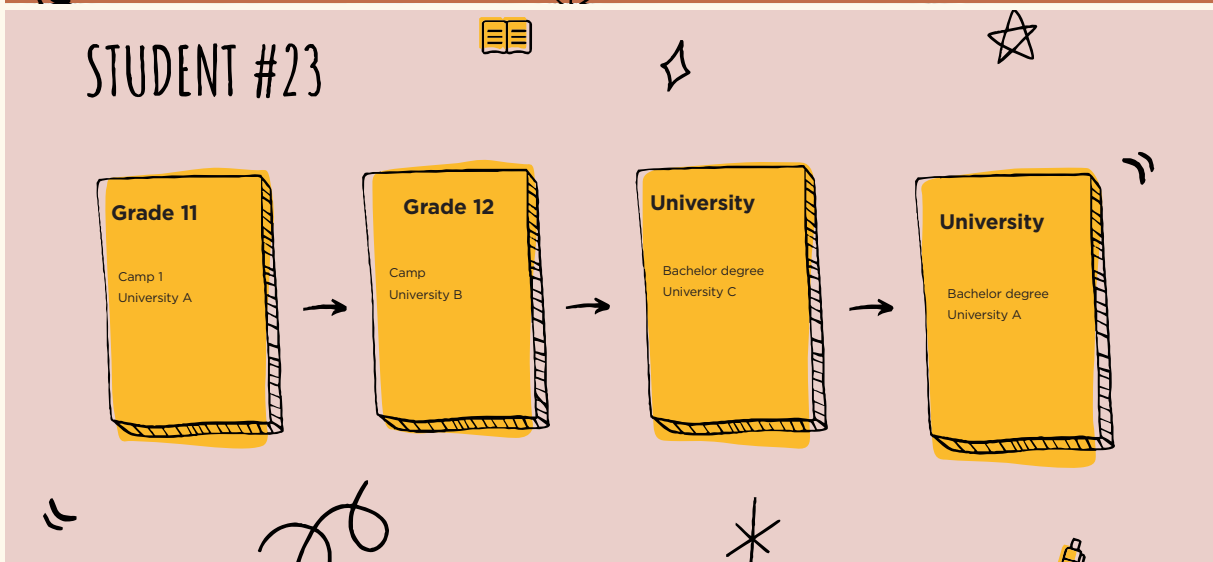
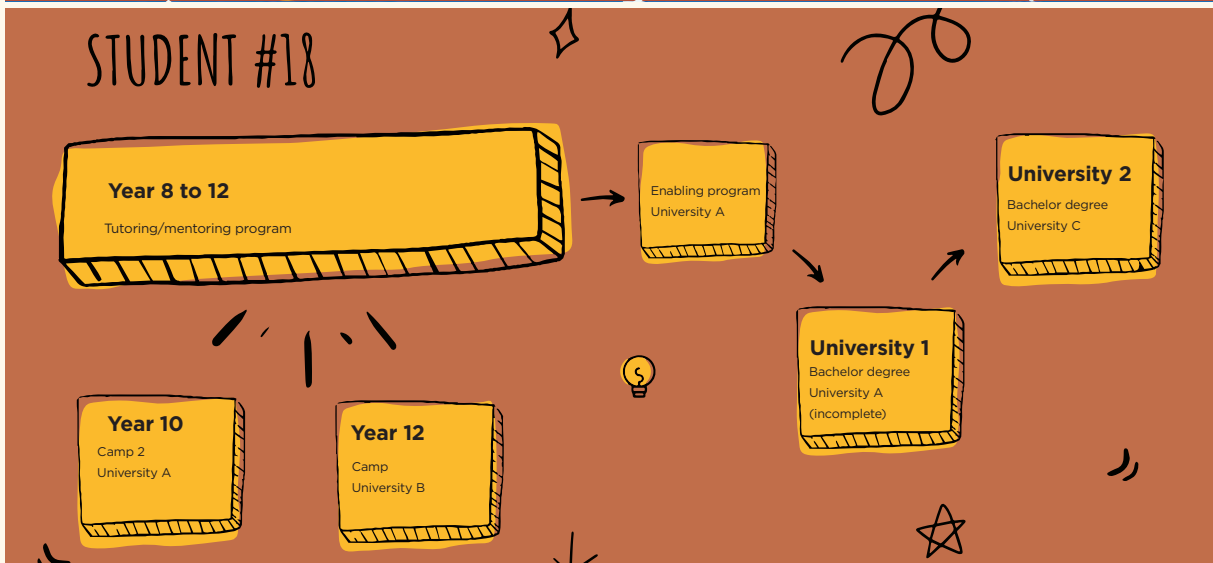
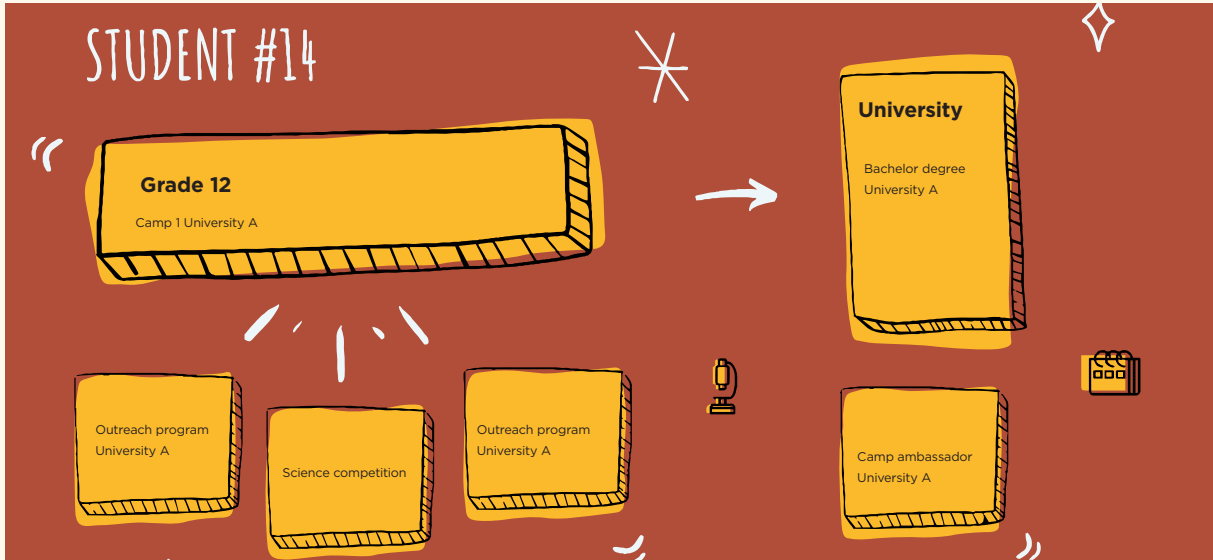
Earthy colours are used in the painting to signify the important spiritual connection to land, family, community and Country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The gold in the artwork represents the importance of family and community for students.

About the artist

Aunty Denise Proud is an Honorary Research Senior Fellow of The University of Queensland and is an internationally renowned educator, author and artist. Aunty Denise is a proud Aboriginal woman who was born and raised on Cherbourg in Queensland. As a consultant Aunty Denise delivers cultural and educational workshops across a range of sectors and industries to better support organisations in engaging and collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.



EXAMPLES OF STUDENT PATHWAYS INTO UNIVERSITY



WHY IS EVALUATION SO IMPORTANT?

- “ Evaluation actually provides a lot of rich information about the effectiveness of the program and whether the way it’s being run is done well. ”

Professor Maria Raciti

- “ We need to find out how the program is running, how the students are feeling about the program. What have been some of the major challenges? ”

Associate Professor Graeme Gower

- “ Measuring impact through evaluation can draw issues out to the various stakeholders. ”

Dr Kevin Dolman

- “ What is really important here is that our frameworks for our programs, activities and our evaluation are calibrated to the participants’ experiences and are able to capture that, but also able to catch up to the needs and the feedback from stakeholders and particularly from our communities. ”

Associate Professor Anna Bennett

- “ The more we understand about which outreach activities are contributing most successfully, the more we will understand that there will be different approaches and different solutions needed in different environments. ”

Adjunct Professor Peter Wilkins

- “ Evaluation is really important in projects because I think anyone who is actually working here wants to be able to prove that they’re doing a good job. It’s why people come into the field and we owe it to students and community to ensure that we are spending our time, money and their time effectively. ”

Associate Professor Ryan Naylor

- “ Evaluation is asking us, are we doing the things that we set out to do? Are we doing the right things? Are we doing those things the right way? But when we’re thinking about programs for which people and places are really important, we have to also think about whether we’re doing the right things in the right way for the right people and in the right places. ”

Associate Professor Caroline Salom



PLANNING FOR EVALUATION

PROFESSOR MARIA RACITI



Professor Maria Raciti is a social marketer who uses marketing tools and techniques to bring about social justice and behaviour change. Professor Raciti is a Director of the Indigenous and Transcultural Research Centre at the University of the Sunshine Coast, an Adjunct Fellow with the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and was part of an Australian Government departmental taskforce assisting with the 2019 National Regional Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy. Maria is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK), is regularly engaged as an expert advisor and has undertaken several large-scale research projects that have produced meaningful and impactful outcomes.



Key points:

- It's important that evaluation doesn't occur at the end of a program but rather occurs throughout.
- Plan to do evaluation before, at the beginning, in the middle and after you complete the actual outreach activity itself.
- At the pre-evaluation stage identify who are the stakeholders? Who's involved? What do you see as success and what are our KPIs?
- Identify the key people you should be talking to.
- **Before** the outreach program begins, you might do a short survey or interviews with students who are going to participate in the outreach project and ask them what their expectations are, what they're hoping to achieve as a result of it.
- **During** the program you might ask students where they see their career going or what university options they have ahead of them.
- **After** the program you might be talking to the university staff or academics who are delivering the project. How do they feel it went? What worked well?

Tips for outreach practitioners

Evaluation occurs across all phases of an outreach program

Evaluation includes outreach program participants and partners

Compare to previous outreach programs to show change over time

Follow-up evaluations with your program participants 3 months and 12 months after their experience is encouraged

- You could also consider, at the end, talking to the school itself in terms of how you felt the program was run. If it was run well or efficiently, or any other suggestions you have to improve the program itself.
- **Follow up:** you should also consider a follow-up evaluation two or three months later and even a year later, because this is where we see the real impact.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS HAVE OCCURRED IN RELATION TO QUALITY OF EVALUATION IN INDIGENOUS PROGRAMS

DR KEVIN DOLMAN

Dr Kevin Dolman is an Eastern Arrernte man and Principal of Indigenous Evaluation Services, a sole trading consultancy specialising in Indigenous policy, performance monitoring and evaluation. He has a special interest in assisting organisations to deliver transitional and more sustainable economic, social and cultural impacts for Indigenous Australians. He is a member of the Australian Evaluation Society Indigenous Culture and Diversity Committee, an assessor for the annual AES Indigenous Evaluation Award, a lawyer for the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Research Committee, and a director of Dream-a-Dream Foundation. His career reflects a lifelong commitment to improving the lives of Indigenous Australian families.



Key points:

- There are many different ways to evaluate a program.
- The Productivity Commission published a detailed and comprehensive guide to ensuring Commonwealth Government agencies conduct better quality evaluations. It states there are no simple formulas but different contexts require different approaches to evaluation.
- Engagement and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is fundamental.
- Your evaluation needs to be focused on what you would like to know and needs to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are delivering and receiving the services are involved in the evaluation.
- Another strategy for ensuring good quality evaluations is that all evaluations should seek formal approval from a research ethics committee such as the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
- Applying ethical standards improves the quality and consistency of evaluation and ensures that the evaluation has a positive impact on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

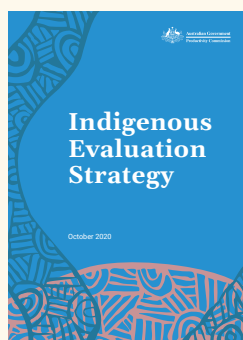
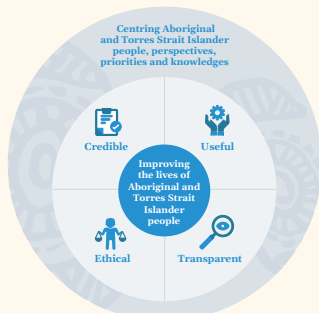


Figure 1 Guiding principles of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy



Productivity Commission (2020)
Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

PDF

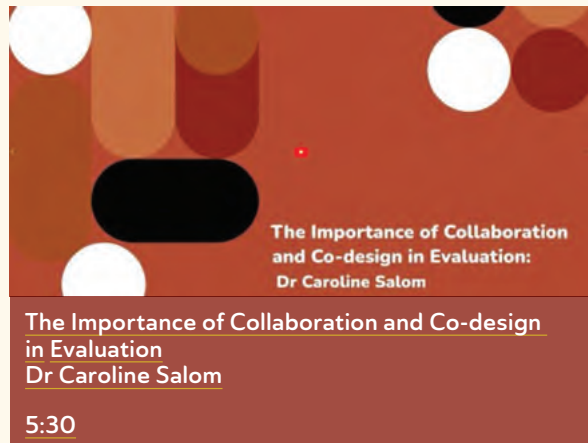


COLLABORATION AND CO-DESIGN IN EVALUATION

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CAROLINE SALOM



Associate Professor Caroline Salom holds a PhD from The University of Queensland in the epidemiology of comorbid substance and mental health disorders and has worked in the addiction field for over 15 years in both academia and service provision. Prior to this she worked in the molecular biology side of medical research for many years, particularly inflammatory diseases. She has particular interests in the genetic and social factors contributing to chronic health conditions, and how support services can be designed to respond to these challenges. She also has expertise in health service design, uptake and evaluation.



Key points:

- One of the really big questions is who should be doing this evaluation?
- It is vital because we think about who is it that needs the information from this evaluation? And that very important question determines everything we do from the beginning.
 - Is it the people for whom the program is being implemented? Is it the people who want to fund the next iteration of this? Or is it the people who are actually the recipients of the program? And typically, all three of those groups are important.
- This question becomes important at the very beginning of the evaluation, which typically should be happening while you're planning the program as well.

Collaboration and co-design help us understand...

What is the program and how is it intended to work?

What **change** do we hope to see after this program?

What **questions** should we ask?
Who should we ask?

What are the **strengths** of the program?

Whose **perspective** is important?

Who will **use** the evaluation, and how?



PURPOSE AND KEY QUESTIONS TO FRAME EVALUATION

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR PETER WILKINS

Adjunct Professor Peter Wilkins has extensive public sector leadership and management experience and undertakes research and consultancies regarding performance auditing and improvement, evaluation, collaboration, accountability and governance. He is an Adjunct Professor at The John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP) at Curtin University and an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Discipline of Global Studies at Murdoch University. He has served as Western Australia's Deputy Ombudsman and prior to this had been WA Assistant Auditor General Performance Review.

He has diverse work experience in Australia, England, Malaysia and Canada including roles as an engineer, research fellow, consultant and thirty years as a public sector manager. He is Deputy Chair of the Board of Australian Volunteers International, a member of the International Evaluation Research Group, the Accountability Roundtable, the Australasian Study of Parliament Group and the Finance and Risk Committee of the Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees. He is a National Fellow of the Institute of Public Administration Australia.

Key points:

- Beginning stages of evaluation are rewarding and challenging.
- What is the purpose?
- Who is the audience?
- Who will benefit?
- How will you engage with people involved? What are the ethical considerations to ensure you have an informed consent to be involved?
- Consider early on how the findings of the evaluation will be communicated – social media and video presentations might be used.
- Targeted written reports to particular audiences can be valuable.
- Set the scope for the evaluation: important to ask 2-4 questions.

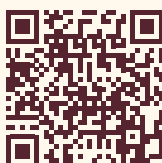
MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY INITIATIVES
Expert Summary 01/2014 by Peter Wilkins and Jennifer de Vries

PURPOSE
This summary aims to assist practitioners who are commissioning, planning or commencing evaluations of equity initiatives in higher education by identifying key issues for consideration and outlining key sources of guidance on the planning and implementing of evaluation.

BACKGROUND TO ISSUE
Australian universities are undertaking a wide range of Outreach, Access and Support initiatives to improve student equity and social inclusion within higher education. A growing need has been identified by practitioners who design and deliver equity initiatives, for

Figure 1: Evaluation involves five key aspects.

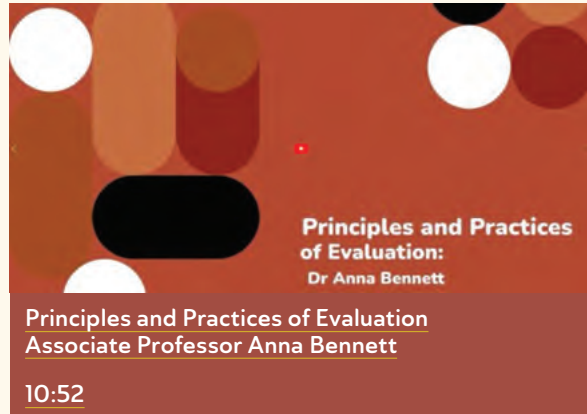
Monitoring and Evaluation of Higher Education Equity Initiatives
PDF



PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF EVALUATION

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ANNA BENNETT

Associate Professor Anna Bennett is Director of the Pathways and Academic Learning Support (PALS) Centre at the University of Newcastle, Australia, which offers higher education pathways, preparation programs and learning support for over 16,000 domestic and international students every year. Associate Professor Bennett has also recently contributed new concepts that better enable all students to develop academic capability, and about the importance of pace and time in higher education courses to improve inclusion and retention. She also produced the Equity Initiatives Framework (EIF), another Department of Education commissioned international review of access and equity program impact, which focused on the whole of the student learning journey, from access to postgraduate programs and learning support. The framework is used by the majority of Australian universities to guide and evaluate their access, transition and equity programs, and



is outlined in a recent publication “Access and equity program provision-evaluation in Australian higher education: a what matters approach” in *Educational Research and Evaluation* (2019).

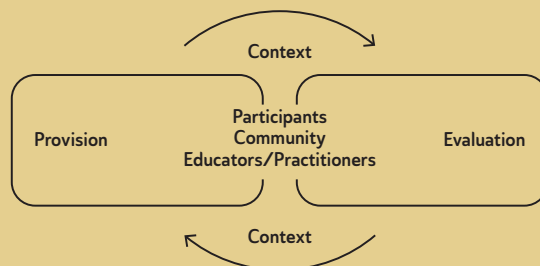


Key points:

- Ensure that both the program and evaluation are always open, reflective, responsive and interconnected.
- List the aims, activities and outcomes.
- Engage in ongoing evaluation in various forms.
- Focus on equity, and capturing all participants’ goals, experiences, relationships with educators/peers, and outcomes.
- Explore ways to understand experiences, complexities and gaps.
- Be holistic in your approach and approach your program/your initiative in ways that are creative and that are able to inspire the students.
- See the ‘What Matters’ guide for practitioners (Bennett, 2019).

A ‘WHAT MATTERS’ GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Gain fullest view of initiative: from students, practitioners, community, all stakeholders
- Apply holistic methodological approach with mixed methods: e.g. interviews, focus groups, qualitative and/or quantitative surveys
- Enable capture of diversity and difference
- Engage in continuous process of evaluating creatively over time and feeding back into design
- This prevents overly linear program logic that flows only one way from aims, activities to outcomes
- Map insights about outcomes back to learnings, which then feed back into aims and activities



Provision-evaluation; ‘an ongoing iterative and creative process’ (Bennett *et al.* 2015)

COLLECTING INTERVIEW DATA AND ASKING THE 'RIGHT' QUESTIONS

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR GRAEME GOWER



Associate Professor Graeme Gower is a descendant of the Yawuru people of Broome, Western Australia and has been involved in Indigenous education for more than 30 years. Graeme is actively involved in the development and delivery of courses both in and outside the university sector to equip future Indigenous leaders and to develop the cultural competence of non-Indigenous undergraduates and professionals. He is also actively involved in research in Aboriginal education and is Project Lead of On Country Teacher Education Training program at Curtin University.



Key points:

- Carefully think about the whole process that is involved in conducting an evaluation.
- This typically involves the submission of an ethics application form via your university. This process ensures that your evaluation follows correct protocols.
- You need to carefully think about the type of data that you'd like to collect and carefully plan the questions that you will ask each participant.
- of responses that are coming back from participants are in fact the types of data that you wish to collect.
- You could approach a more experienced researcher who will guide you through the whole process so that when you're conducting evaluations it will hopefully provide a better outcome for the students that you are working with.

Consider

What type of interview is appropriate: individual or group?

Trial questions

Use open-ended questions rather than statements

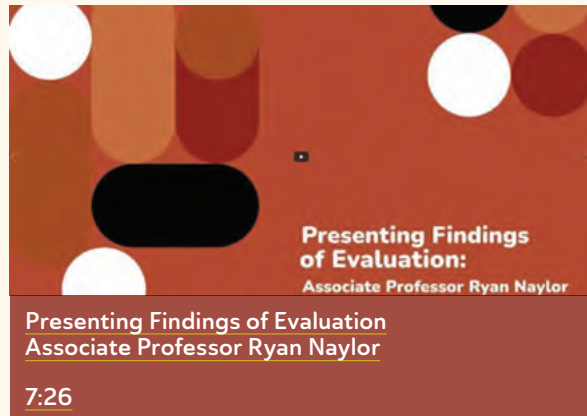
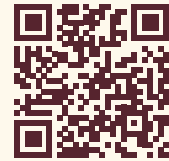
- You might want to limit your questions to between ten and 15 minutes, and you may wish to consider whether or not you conduct the interviews on an individual basis or in small groups of up to two to three students.
- When you're planning these questions, you might wish to trial them as well so that you ensure that the data that's on the top



PRESENTING FINDINGS OF EVALUATION

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR RYAN NAYLOR

Ryan Naylor is Associate Professor (Education) in the Sydney School of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney. His current research focuses primarily on understanding and addressing barriers to success in higher education. He has published widely on issues of access to higher education, equity interventions and their evaluation, and the experiences and expectations of students. He is also available for consultancies on these and related topics. Previously, Associate Professor Naylor was Core First Year Coordinator at La Trobe University, Lecturer in Higher Education at the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, and Visiting Fellow at the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education at Curtin University.



Key points:

- Good evaluation and disseminating findings well relies on having a good plan from the very beginning for evaluating a project.
- Make sure that you have robust, varied and appropriate data from the very beginning.
- Be aware of who your audience is – internal or external.
- Internal audiences: Presenting for university leadership or other practitioners:
 - An executive summary includes aims of the project, the background, or the context that you're operating in, a brief description of the initiatives and some justification for why you think it would be effective.
 - Include the findings, the implications, recommendations and any limitations.
- External audiences: Presenting at conferences and for media:
 - Have a strong theoretical justification.
 - Only present when you have something new to say.
 - You could collaborate with researchers to present at conferences – could contact researchers at your institution.
 - Presenting findings in the media is really important to help overcome the deficit discourses.
 - Ensure you get permission from your university and community to present.

Executive summaries

Aims

Background/context

Brief description of initiative

Brief description of evaluation criteria/data
• Limitations

Findings

Implications/recommendations

About NCSEHE

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) is a research and policy centre funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and based at Curtin University.

The NCSEHE provides national leadership in student equity in higher education, connecting research, policy and practice to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.

Diverse activities conducted by the Centre focus on strengthening Australia's research quality, capability and capacity to build a robust evidence base; and informing evidence-based policy design and implementation, and institutional best practice.

The NCSEHE conducts a broad scope of activities including:

- Research-based projects both independently and in collaboration with other organisations, funded through external grants or through Centre resources
- The NCSEHE Research Grants Program
- Equity policy and program evaluation
- Research Fellowships and Equity Fellowships
- Student equity data analysis, online resources and briefing notes
- Print and digital publications
- Collaborative and independent events
- Representation at national and international conferences
- An emphasis on effective communication through channels including: website, electronic newsletters, social media and general media exposure.

The Centre has established a strong national presence, engaging with key stakeholders and maintaining sector-wide partnerships to enhance outcomes and delivery of research and recommendations. The growing reputation and influence of the Centre has contributed to student equity becoming firmly incorporated into higher education policy.

