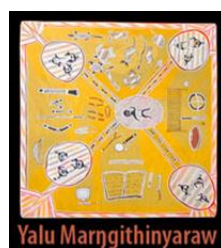




SUMMARY REPORT:

Ground Up Indigenous Evaluators Workshop

Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University
19 – 20th April, 2017



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Photo Credit: Belinda Snell

Back, left to right: Jen Macdonald, Gwen Rami, Vanessa Roberts, Denise Foster, Helen Verran, Rosemary Gundjarranbuy, Mercy Gumbula, Ian Gumbula, Kelly Pollard, Stephen Dhamarrandji

Front, left to right: Katelyn John Forrest, Beulah Munyarryun, Brandy Gumbula, Michaela Spencer, Keisha Wanambi, Gavin Dhamarrandji, William Dhamarrandji, Anita Golog

Not pictured: Dhawa Bukulatjpi, Paul Dhamarrandji, Matthew Campbell

Background

On 19-20th April 2017, a group of senior Indigenous researchers and junior mentorees came together at the Northern Institute, CDU, to discuss Indigenous-led evaluation in remote communities.

This workshop was funded by the NTG Remote Engagement Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research (REC-IER) project, and by a CDU LEBA small grant.

The purpose of this event was to bring together small teams of Indigenous researchers who are currently funded by the REC-IER project to design and deliver Indigenous-led evaluations of NT government engagement practices.

In this report, we detail the activities of this workshop, and showcase some of the strategies being developed by teams of Indigenous researchers seeking to provide evaluation and mentoring services in remote communities.

Indigenous Evaluators

The workshop was attended by senior researchers from Indigenous research organisations and emerging Indigenous research consultancies. Junior mentorees were also invited to watch, listen and learn about research work, and to participate in discussions about how young people may be supported to step into roles as Indigenous researchers.

Yalu' Marngithinyaraw, Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island - Indigenous Research Organisation
<http://yalu.cdu.edu.au>

- Rosemary Gundjarranbuy (Research Coordinator)
- Stephen Dhamarrandji (Senior Project Researcher)
- Anita Munyarryun (Project Researcher)
- Beulah Munyarryun (Mentoree)
- Dhawa Bukulatjpi (Mentoree)
- Paul Dhamarrandji (Mentoree)

Gumbula Consultancies – Indigenous Research Consultancy
www.cdu.edu.au/centres/iri/index.php/2017/02/16/gumbula-consultancies/

- Ian Gumbula (Research Coordinator)
- Gwen Rami (Project Researcher)
- Mercy Gumbula (Project Researcher)
- Brandy Gumbula (Mentoree)
- Katelyn John Forrest (Mentoree)
- Keisha Wanambi (Mentoree)

Tangentyere Council Research Hub (TCRH) – Indigenous Research Organisation
http://www.tangentyere.org.au/services/social_services/research/

Arrkweytje Therre (Two Ladies) – Indigenous Research Consultancy
http://www.tangentyere.org.au/services/social_services/research/

- Vanessa Foster (Project Researcher)
- Denise Roberts (Project Researcher)

Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University – Research Organisation
<http://www.cdu.edu.au/northern-institute>

- Matthew Campbell, Researcher
- Jen Macdonald, Researcher
- Michaela Spencer, Researcher
- Helen Verran, Senior Advisor

Designs for evaluation research

It was recognised by the workshop participants that too often research and evaluation work has occurred in Indigenous communities, where the knowledge and information provided by local people is taken away, and works for the benefit of external researcher and funders, but not for people on the ground.

The REC-IER project researchers suggested that to simply contract Indigenous researchers to administer ‘qualitative and quantitative evaluation research’ is likely to simply replicate this problem because the research tools would likely not be appropriate to the community and would likely not work towards an actual solution. Instead, it is important for Indigenous researchers to be involved in the design of projects, and the appropriate tools for doing the research. This enables a grassroots approach to research and evaluation which is about journeying together, and building something together that is better.

A paper previously published by three of the workshop attendees - Matt Campbell, Denise Foster and Vanessa Davis (2014) - outlines two general models for evaluation which help to identify basic differences between practices of good and bad evaluation as has been experienced coming through Tangentyere Research Hub.

Figure 1: Doing evaluation the right way

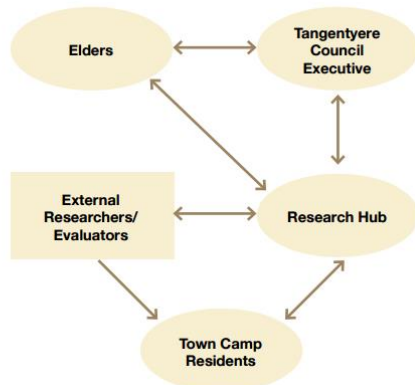
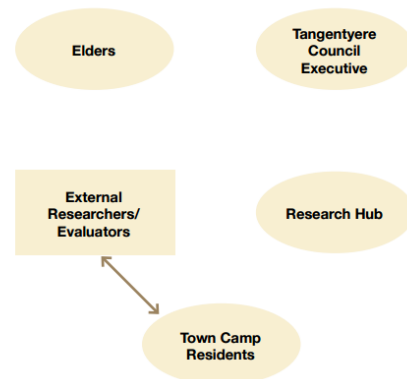


Figure 2: Doing evaluation the wrong way



(Campbell, Foster and Davies, 2014)

A poor model for evaluation research sees external organisations arriving in the community and speaking directly with residents. Such an unmediated approach offers little opportunity to mobilise local organisations or networks of decision-making in producing and negotiating information that will serve as the basis for evaluation research affecting community life. A more robust approach would see the identification of a network of interactions and points of contact through which external organisations can work with intermediaries such as an Indigenous research organisation with appropriate oversight from boards or elders working to identify researchers, approach community members and develop information supporting evaluation.

Recognising this distinction, each research team outlined the evaluation strategy, including a network of participating organisations, which will be the basis of their local evaluation work.

Galiwin'ku

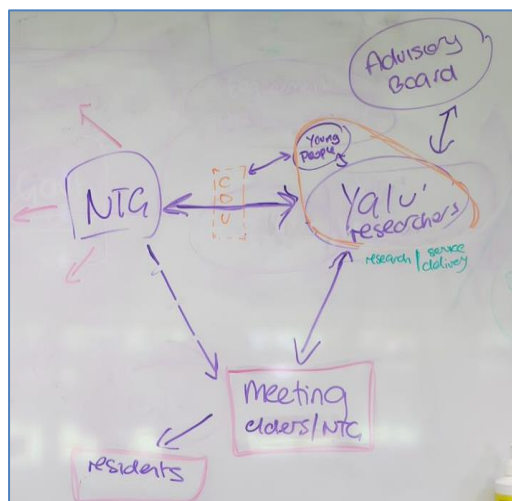


Figure 3. Arrangements for producing evaluation research in Galiwin'ku

- NTG has worked with CDU as an intermediary organisation to approach Yalu', and Indigenous research organisation
- Within that organisation, a team of researchers and young people has been identified to carry out the research work
- This team operates under the guidance of a local Engagement Advisory Board comprised of senior Yolngu supporting the project
- The local research team attend meetings and speak with residents to gather evidence of government engagement practices
- This evidence is discussed with the advisory board to ensure valid and appropriate information has been produced
- This information is provided via CDU as feedback to government on engagement practices in Galiwin'ku.

Ngukurr

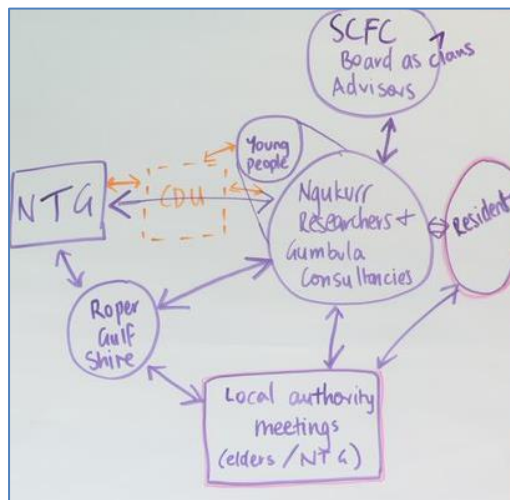


Figure 4. Arrangements for producing evaluation research in Ngukurr

- NTG, via CDU, has worked with Ian Gumbula to support the creation of the Gumbula Consultancies, as well as other senior researchers in Ngukurr.
- The strength of Gumbula Consultancies organisation is recognised as lying with young people as well as senior researchers.
- Gumbula Consultancies, senior researchers and young people speak with residents, attend meetings and liaise with the Roper Gulf Shire in generating information about government engagement in Ngukurr.
- The research carried out by this group (may) be overseen by the SCfC board of advisers comprised of 7 clan representatives.
- Developing networks of feedback and communication between Gumbula Consultancies, residents, Roper Gulf Shire and Local Authority meetings overseen by advisors enable the legitimate flow of information and feedback through CDU back to NTG.

Ntaria

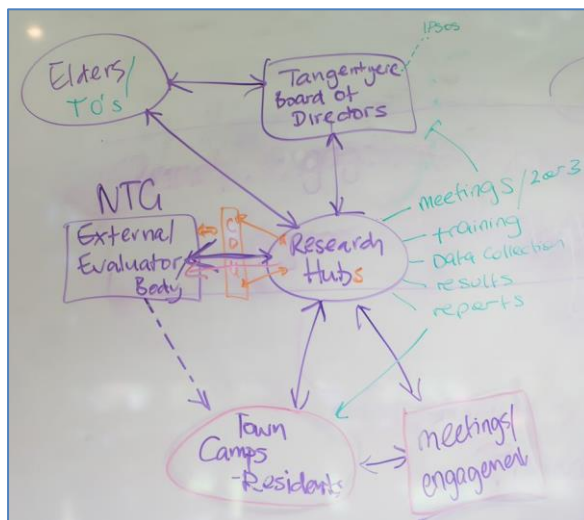


Figure 5. Arrangements for producing evaluation research in Ntaria

- It is anticipated that in Ntaria the network of research and information flow would correspond with that already mobilised by Tangentyere research hub in their existing work.
- It is also anticipated that researchers employed through the research hub will continue to work under the guidance of the Board of Directors in delivering evaluation research to government.
- They will mobilise research methods which they are familiar with in speaking with Town Camp residents and attending meetings for purposes of evaluation research
- The hub researchers also work under the guidance of elders and TO's developing feedback to send to government.

In each of these designs:

- External bodies are seen as going first to a research organisation rather than directly approaching community members.
- CDU is shown as an intermediary between external bodies and local research organisations. However, it was agreed that this would not always be the case.
- It was emphasised that the strength and sustainability of research organisations relied upon young people being involved in the work.
- It was necessary for researchers carrying out the evaluation work to work under the guidance of advisors, although the character of this advisory board might vary.
- Evaluation research involves talking with community members and hearing their stories, however, crucially, it also involves researchers attending meetings where government engagement is occurring, taking video and audio recordings, and working with advisors to produce interpretations of this research material.
- It was unclear how information emerging out of local evaluation research work would travel and circulate within the external bodies receiving these outputs, and the connection that this work would have back to the communities from which they were derived.
- It was recognised that if evaluation research is to connect with the experiences of people on the ground, and if its findings are to be legitimate, then these distributed networks of research and knowledge production are important research infrastructure that enable evaluation.

‘Evidencing’ evaluation and connecting with government

We had a visit from Peter Gamlin (NTG) who talked about ways that government people could hear messages coming from evaluation research. He talked about how information was passed through government departments, and sometimes up to the minister, and that short videos showing what was actually happening in communities was a good way to do this.

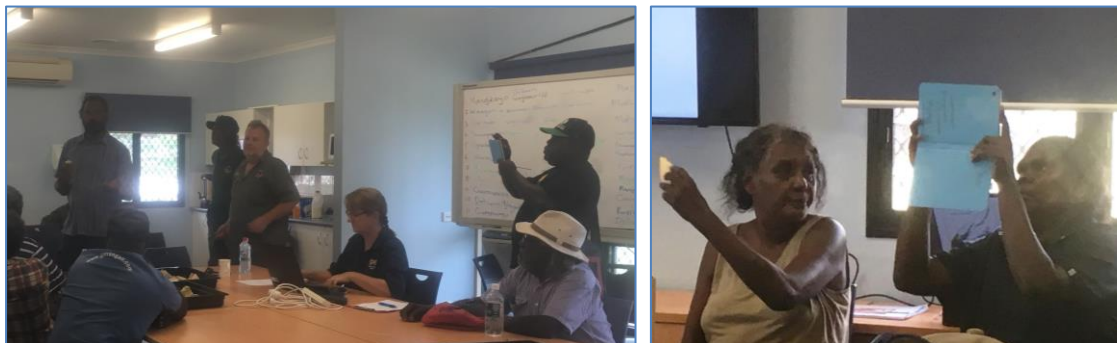


Figure 6. Yalu' researchers taking practice footage at an IPA meeting in Galiwin'ku

Looking at footage taken by Yalu' and CDU researchers, we developed ways of thinking about video footage as an evaluation services product being purchased by external funding agencies (e.g. NTG).

It is the local research teams, and young mentorees, who are likely to be taking video footage which might be used for evaluation purposes. On its own this footage does not present a message which can be heard by government.

However, discussing these videos with appropriate advisors, a story can be told about what is going on. The footage and the story together can send a message about what is being evaluated (e.g. government engagement). The video and story together provide evidence for an assessment of performance. They are a 'product' (like an orange), that external agencies have arranged to buy.

In the case of the REC-IER project, the NTG have not asked to buy evaluation products which are only sweet. They do not just want to hear good stories, or just hear bad stories. They are interested in seeing evidence of the reality of government engagement in communities, the good and the bad.

Arrangements for producing mentoring services products

The potential of Indigenous-led evaluation relies upon young people beginning to learn about, and be confident to take on, research work. Connecting elders, those who are middle aged, and the young ones coming through, maintains the potential for legitimate and properly negotiated both-ways knowledge work; work which pays attention to what has gone before when also advising or making decisions about what should come next.

While Indigenous researchers and research organisations might not ordinarily need to articulate the vision or practice of mentoring work, doing so helps make this work visible, and potentially fundable as a service, and a business and employment opportunity.

Each of the research groups at the workshop spent time detailing mentoring practices appropriate to the traditional and contemporary knowledge work which they are undertaking. They were presented, where possible, by the young mentorees themselves.

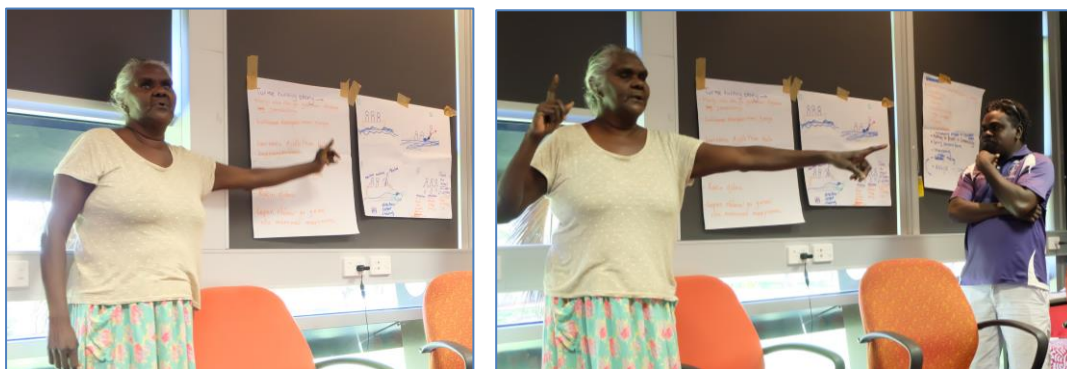


Figure 7. Gundjarranbuy and Dhawa show how young people can be mentored to become researchers through telling the Turtle Hunting story



Figure 8. Ngukurr mentorees presenting on mentoring shown as 'Melabat Journey: Learning to travel family way, cultural way, community way and business way'.



Figure 9. Vanessa and Denise talk about the process of learning to become a researcher, trusting your trainer, becoming comfortable talking to people you don't know and learning how to wear different hats.

Recognising these outlines as designs for the provision of 'mentoring services products' enables them to form the basis of future funding applications and/or be built into research projects and organisations.

Next steps

Each of the research teams on the REC-IER project are now moving into the final stage of project work where they have begun carrying out live evaluations and developing feedback to give to government.

They will be seeking opportunities within their communities to be welcomed to meetings and other engagement events, and to continue developing video and other materials able to evidence a discussion around good engagement practices in remote communities.

There is significant potential for this model of research to be mobilised in carrying out other evaluations of government and other programs in communities. There is also potential for

these practices to connect with existing work in communities around the development of local decision making practices to be carried out on the ground by countrymen, and in connection with government and other organisations.

All of the researchers involved in the REC-IER project are being supported to develop their research profiles and employment credentials so they may be able to offer their services carrying out research and evaluation work in the future. Through this initiative, they are also begin supported in efforts to generate a loosely connected network of place-based Indigenous researchers working across the Northern Territory.

References

Campbell, M., Foster, D., & Davies, V. (2014). Looking back, moving forward: the place of evaluation at the Tangentyere Council Research Hub. *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts [Special Issue: Evaluation]*, 14, 144-153.
<http://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/the-northern-institute/10.18793-lcj2014.14.10.pdf>

For more information, please see:

- Remote Engagement Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research
<https://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/recier/>
- Indigenous Researchers Initiative – www.cdu.edu.au/centres/iri
- Ground Up – www.cdu.edu.au/centres/groundup
- Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance Team, Northern Institute, CDU – <http://www.cdu.edu.au/northern-institute/our-teams/601>
- Spencer, M., Christie, M. and Verran, H. (2017) *Indigenous Languages, Culture and Knowledge Services Workforce: Business Opportunities in an Emergent NT Services Economy*. http://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/the-northern-institute/docs/working_paper_02-2017_final.pdf