Evaluation in Indigenous Contexts

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I am pleased to introduce this special issue, guest edited by Robert Shepherd and Katherine Graham. The guest editors have assembled a number of important contributions for this volume, which provide a legal and epistemological framing for evaluating in Indigenous contexts as well as examples of how this translates into practice. There is still much to learn and to construct in this domain of evaluation, and Shepherd and Graham articulate quite clearly what actions are needed to advance our collective knowledge and practice. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the guest editors, authors, and reviewers who made this special issue possible, and I hope that our readers take away its important messages.

Isabelle Bourgeois
Editor-in-Chief
Un mot de la rédactrice

Je suis heureuse de présenter ce numéro spécial pour lequel Robert Shepherd et Katherine Graham sont les rédacteurs invités. Ces derniers ont rassemblé des contributions importantes portant notamment sur un cadre juridique et épistémologique pour l’évaluation dans un contexte autochtone, de même que des exemples de la façon dont cela se traduit en pratique. Nous avons encore beaucoup à apprendre et à établir dans ce domaine de l’évaluation, et Shepherd et Graham articulent très clairement les gestes qui doivent être posés pour faire progresser notre pratique et nos connaissances à cet égard. Je remercie du fond du cœur les rédacteurs invités, les auteurs et les évaluateurs qui ont rendu possible ce numéro et j’espère que nos lecteurs et lectrices se trouveront enrichis par les messages importants qui y sont communiqués.

Isabelle Bourgeois
Rédactrice en chef
SETTING A BETTER DIRECTION FOR EVALUATION IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS

Indigenous evaluation as a field of inquiry and finding culturally appropriate and responsive ways to evaluate Indigenous programs and services are receiving increased attention (Cram, Tibbetts, & LaFrance, 2018). One important catalyst has been the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s admonitions regarding the cultural damage caused by residential schools, where recommendations focus on the need for governments to pay greater attention to culturally relevant approaches to research, including program evaluations (TRC, 2015). More generally, Western governments are struggling to evaluate programs in Indigenous communities in ways that serve both governmental interests in accountability and quality assurance, while at the same time serving Indigenous needs and interests for program effectiveness and respecting local autonomy (Shepherd, 2018).

During the 2015 federal election, Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau called on Canadians to support change through reconciliation and a renewed nation-to-nation relationship between the federal government and the Indigenous peoples of Canada. The government has since committed to reforming the nation-to-nation relationship, which has been evident in the Prime Minister’s 2015 mandate letters to his ministers and the Principles respecting the Government of Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous Peoples made public by then-minister of justice Jody Wilson-Raybould in July 2017 (Minister of Justice, 2017). In the mandate letters, the Prime Minister calls for a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples “based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership” (Trudeau, 2015). More recently, the Prime Minister has said that recognition is necessary so that we can “get to a place where Indigenous peoples in Canada are in control of their own destiny, making their own decisions about their future.” The Principles say that this is the promise of Section 35 of the Constitution and that they commit the government to advancing the UNDRIP’s “call to respect and promote the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples.”

In practice, the federal government committed to focus on supporting Indigenous peoples’ governance initiatives in a way that can enable Indigenous governments and the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work as partners within Canada’s constitutional framework. This commitment extends to First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. This is again consistent with UNDRIP, which maintains, “it is the mutual responsibility of all governments to shift
their relationships and arrangements with Indigenous peoples so that they are based on recognition and respect for the rights to self-determination, including the inherent right to self-government for Indigenous nations” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2013). This is where Indigenous evaluation enters as a source of evidence in the context of recognition and respect, efforts to build capacity among all parties to the relationship, and development of models of reflection and control in the areas of programming, finance, and governance.

So far, little has been offered in the academic literature regarding the transformation of evaluation in light of this new paradigm of relations. A recent edition of New Directions in Evaluation on Indigenous evaluation makes the case for innovations in evaluation that meet the contextual needs of Indigenous peoples (Cram et al., 2018). Its focus is on contextual differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to evaluation. This is an important contribution, but it is only part of the greater discussion needed to advance evaluation practice in this area. Specifically, this CJPE volume attempts to examine evaluation at the community and regional/organizational levels, along with the challenges inherent in governmental evaluation in these varied contexts. Aside from acknowledging that there are indeed conceptual differences in approach at the broad level of epistemology, there are also challenges of axiology, ontology, and methodology, as determined by such factors as language, cultural norms and practices, governance of evaluation and research, community decision making, and what is accepted as evidence in decision making.

In terms of past performance, it has been noted that the contribution of evaluations of Indigenous programs to better public policy making have been limited at best (Cram, Chilisa, & Mertens, 2016; Cram & Mertens, 2015). This has been seen as a result of the imposition of Western post-positivist approaches (Bowman, 2017; Chilisa, 2012; Mertens, 2018; Shepherd, 2018). Indeed, evaluation in many Indigenous communities is seen as something done “to them” rather than “with them” or even “for them” (Cram et al., 2018, p. 8; Wehipeihana, 2018). As a consequence, there have been many calls from outside the field of evaluation to do better (Bowman, 2017; Pasternak, 2017) and to recognize the participation of Indigenous community members in any research and evaluation endeavour that affects them. This message has been reinforced by the recent calls of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to shift the balance of focus from Western approaches to Indigenous ways of knowing (broadly defined).

Within the past decade, the evaluation literature has begun to categorize Indigenous approaches to evaluation. Some scholars such as Mertens and Wilson (2012) frame it in the transformative school of thought, given the focus on understanding power dynamics within program designs, and who interventions privilege. Likewise, Chilisa (2012) and Cram (2016), and most recently Mertens (2018), refer to Indigenous evaluation as a separate paradigm given the distinct history of colonization in many settler countries, which includes, but is not limited to loss of land, resources, exclusion from governmental policymaking, and
outright policies of termination. More broadly, differences in spirituality and collective identity among Indigenous peoples and between Indigenous peoples and settler populations have been recognized. One result is that Indigenous relations have been treated uniquely in the academic literature compared with those of other marginalized groups (Kymlicka, 2009). More specifically, there is burgeoning recognition not only that evaluation in Indigenous contexts must be thought of as distinct from other forms of evaluation inquiry but also that the ontology and epistemology of evaluation in these contexts merit a different way of conceiving of evaluation designs, data gathering, and reporting results.

For non-Indigenous governments that work with Indigenous communities and organizations, there is a struggle given new ethical and ontological imperatives that emanate from public commentary, such as the TRC’s call for better ways to carry out evaluations that meet local needs for evidence, rather than a focus on fiscal or programmatic accountability at the donor government level. Evaluation as a field has yet to figure out how to make a contribution to evidence that aligns with Indigenous ways of knowing and also meets the varied purposes of donor governments. This special issue explores this challenge as well.

Therefore, the papers in this volume are about understanding the role, approach, and application of evaluation in Indigenous contexts using several policy fields as a reference. Each of the authors has worked in the Indigenous space for many years, either as an Indigenous or non-Indigenous evaluator, and has observed the strengths and limitations of Western-based approaches across several Indigenous contexts. The idea behind the volume is to highlight where the different policy fields and contexts may be converging and diverging in practice and experience. However, central to each of the papers is the common understanding that there are fundamental differences in ontology and epistemology between working in Indigenous contexts and other contexts, and how these can be balanced with governmental expectations for performance. The key sources of difference explained in the next section underpin the articles that follow.

IDENTIFYING ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

There are many factors and risks to consider when bringing or bridging Indigenous cultural knowledge into Western research spaces such as evaluation. These include the potential for cultural dominance and appropriation, misinterpretation, and the dismissals that come with introducing Indigenous ways of knowing into the academy (Smith, 1999, pp. 99–103). Nonetheless, the admonitions of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in 1996, and more recently the Truth & Reconciliation Commission in 2016, have resulted in growing acceptance in the academy and governmental policy circles that Indigenous nations and communities are different in their understanding and approach to identity and ways of knowing. There is further recognition that this identity should be
understood if reconciliation is to have any probability of success in policymaking or the results of evaluations. There is growing acceptance that to be Indigenous is, by definition, to be culturally, socially, and politically distinct (Battiste, 2007; Bowman, 2017).

The basis of difference between Western and Indigenous ontology and epistemology can be traced to what Groh (2018, p. 56) refers to as the “Tenets of Indigeneity,” which serve to provide context or points of reference. These tenets should inform the work of evaluation in Indigenous contexts. The first tenet is that Indigenous people regard themselves as descendants of those who lived on their lands well before colonization (historical continuity). Second, it is accepted that Indigenous peoples are inextricably linked to their territory through having lived there before others with a relationship to those lands. Third, Indigenous peoples, by virtue of their own perseverance, maintain certain cultural features and value these as worthy to pass to future generations. It is further accepted that each Indigenous society is different from other peoples and even that communities vary one from another, further influencing self-identity. Fourth, Indigenous peoples have experienced a collective suppression of their cultures, expressed through discrimination, subjugation, dispossession, and various forms of cultural or other diminishment. Although defining Indigenous identity is highly contestable by virtue of the fact that it is not homogenous (Kovach, 2009, pp. 23–39), it does not minimize the need or the collective will to recognize difference and find appropriate approaches to bridge ontological and epistemological constructs in a way that enhances social collective understanding.

In Western ontological and epistemological paradigms, there is an underlying assumption that knowledge is understood individually and is superior, and that conveyance of that knowledge is also done on an individual basis in ways that privilege Western ways of knowing (Bortolin, 2011). By contrast, in most Indigenous ontologies, “knowledge is relational” (Wilson, 2001, p. 176). Wilson (2008, p. 73). Wilson maintains that most Indigenous ontologies value multiple understandings of reality as emanating from individuals and communities but that each has its own relationship with that reality. By contrast, in Western understandings of constructivism, each individual has a relationship with the object, policy, program, or social construct. That is, Indigenous ontologies regard reality as a process of relationships, and “Indigenous ontology is actually the equivalent of an Indigenous epistemology” (Wilson, 2001, p. 176). Language can reflect this difference. In English, objects are named (e.g., chair, house, lawn), whereas in many Indigenous languages, verbs are more prevalent to describe the uses of the object or one's relationship to it rather than labels. In Indigenous epistemology, it is likewise with people: relationships are multiple. Someone can be an aunt to one person, and a sister to someone else—knowledge is relational, and knowledge creation is shared. As Wilson (2008, p. 74) explains,

They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas. Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our
worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship.

At the ethical (axiological) core of such relationships is respect. Respect for self and each other is most certainly a base principle. However, also core to Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies is a respect for relationships between people, places, and objects that does not impinge on what is considered appropriate boundaries in representation, authorities, sovereignties and social and political contexts. As Wilson (2008, p. 77) describes it, “Indigenous axiology is built upon the concept of relational accountability. Right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy; value judgements lose their meaning. What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship.” Such conceptions extend beyond traditional Western notions of constructivism, where there remains the idea that there be an appropriate separation between the researcher and the “object” of research. More contemporary notions of constructivism in transformative evaluation epistemologies would maintain that researchers must have points of reference within the relationships being built, which involves helping to build the relationships through the process of knowing. The researcher, therefore, develops respect in the relationship by creating a vested interest that the results are useful to both the community and research endeavour: there must be respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Weber-Pillwax, 2001).

PAPERS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS SPECIAL EDITION

The articles in this special edition are intended to frame the core context and issues pertaining to shifting the paradigm and practices of evaluation from Western and colonial models to approaches that reflect the reality of Western-Indigenous relationships and transformational needs. The first three articles in this volume frame the issues, while the latter four contributions provide more applied insights into the realities of the moment and the assets and challenges associated with moving forward in a good way. We then offer a brief conclusion that attempts to identify priorities for moving forward.

Pamela McCurry’s article sets the scene from a legal perspective. The constitutional and legal context of Indigenous policy and programming is Canada is crucial. The evaluation community must understand that Section 35 of the Constitution Act, which affirms Indigenous rights, has been consistently interpreted by the courts to affirm specific rights related to Indigenous governance. McCurry demonstrates how this sets the foundation for reform of relationships and practices in the evaluation of Indigenous programs and in development of future policy.

Michelle Firestone has contributed a practice note that illustrates in a very concrete way how a group of respected Indigenous health and social service
advisors were able to use relational practices to develop decolonizing principles and protocols that support community self-determination, centralize (but not homogenize) Indigenous cultures and worldviews, and provide guidelines to inform health and social service evaluation going forward.

Larry Bremner and Nicole Bowman share the theoretical and methodological roots of EvalIndigenous, established in 2012 under the global EvalPartners initiative to connect legislators and academics with practitioners. They discuss the theoretical and methodological roots of EvalIndigenous, which are grounded in tribal critical and Indigenous theories and methods and which consistently respect local Indigenous community agendas and philosophies. They highlight the implications of the work of EvalIndigenous for future evaluation policies and strategies.

Robert Shepherd and Katherine Graham contribute a piece that highlights some of the gaps in the evaluation literature about ways to improve evaluators’ understanding of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and how to bridge these in practical ways with Western ways of knowing. They illustrate the challenges of doing this based on their own experiences with the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership, a community-based project designed to improve the resilience of and prospects for youth in northwestern Ontario First Nations. They conclude that trust is a fundamental condition that is needed to move the evaluation effort forward and that serves the reciprocal needs of communities and other users.

Gerald McKinley reflects on his continuing journey as a learner as a community-based partner in child and mental health programs in several Anishinaabek communities in Ontario. He focuses on the implications and impact of Mertens’s work, which underpins evaluation with a foundation of social justice and human rights principles, on his practice as a medical anthropologist doing evaluation.

Kim Scott focuses on the recognition of Indigenous moral authority and how to recognize the assets and strengths of Indigenous communities in transformational times. She deals specifically with how to build an asset-based approach to policy and program development and evaluation in the transition of Indigenous communities from dependence on diesel for heating and electricity to renewable energy.

Debbie Delancey rounds out the volume by contributing a history of evaluation in the Northwest Territories (NWT). She analyzes the impact of the ever-changing governance landscape in the NWT, as the territorial government develops new and evolving relationships with First Nations and Inuvialuit governments and organizations emerging out of modern treaties. This has significant implications for evaluation, including an emerging interest in the practical working relationship between Indigenous evaluation and Western approaches.

This edition of the journal concludes with a call to action. It argues for Indigenous evaluation to be a separate branch on the “evaluation tree” (Alkin, 2012) from Western and transformative evaluation (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Based on the other contributions to this volume, we begin the process of identifying an
agenda for the Canadian Evaluation Society to move forward. There have been some positive and foundational developments at the national level, particularly as part of CES national conference proceedings since the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including a policy commitment to better respect Indigenous ways of knowing in fieldwork. We argue, however, that real work is required at the CES chapter level to build practical knowledge and provide the foundation for the new relationships that are essential if the field of evaluation is to contribute positively to our reality. The process begins with awareness-building and the need to relinquish some control over evaluation projects.

REFERENCES


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Robert P. Shepherd is associate professor at the School of Public Policy & Administration at Carleton University. His research spans public management and governmental reform, Indigenous public management, ethics, and policy and program evaluation. He is interested in how public accountability and oversight systems intersect to improve overall public management and governance systems. In addition, his research extends to understanding how governmental program evaluation functions can improve public policy and decision making.
Katherine A. H. Graham is professor emerita at the School of Public Policy & Administration at Carleton University. Her research interests concern Indigenous and northern development policy, urban and local governance, and institutional reform in government. Community-based research is an important pillar of her work. She is the founding co-ordinator of the Carleton University Institute on the Ethics of Research with Indigenous Peoples (CUIERIP). Katherine is currently working on youth and community capacity building in northwestern Ontario.
Abstract: Developments in Canada’s constitutional and legal framework since 1982 set the stage for the current Liberal government’s nation-to-nation policy, which recognizes Indigenous rights and seeks to build a relationship of respect and partnership through reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. These developments have important implications for those engaged in policy and program evaluations who are now called upon—not only by their own professional ethics but by the legal principles flowing from Section 35—to reimagine their approach and work as partners with Indigenous nations based on the recognition of Indigenous rights, reconciliation, and the Crown’s duty to act honourably in all of its dealings with Indigenous peoples. There are no off-the-shelf answers for how this can be done. Evaluation professionals will need to be guided by these key legal principles and the progressive view set out in the Liberal government’s Principles respecting the Government of Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

Keywords: evaluation, first peoples, reconciliation, Section 35

Résumé : L’évolution du cadre juridique et constitutionnel canadien depuis 1982 a ouvert la voie aux politiques de l’actuel gouvernement libéral pour les relations de nation à nation, qui reconnaissent les droits autochtones et visent à établir une relation fondée sur le respect et le partenariat, par l’intermédiaire de la réconciliation avec les peuples autochtones. Cette évolution a des conséquences importantes pour les personnes qui font de l'évaluation de programmes et de politiques et qui doivent maintenant — non seulement par éthique professionnelle, mais aussi pour des raisons juridiques découlant de l'article 35 — revoir leur approche et travailler comme partenaires des nations autochtones, en tenant compte des droits des Autochtones, de la réconciliation et du devoir de la Couronne d’agir de façon honorable dans toutes ses interactions avec des personnes autochtones. Cependant, il n’existe pas de procédure claire décrivant comment cela doit s’accomplir. Les professionnels et professionnelles de l’évaluation devront se laisser guider par ces principes juridiques clés et l’approche progressive décrite dans le document Principes régissant la relation du Gouvernement du Canada avec les peuples autochtones du gouvernement libéral.

Mots clé : évaluation, Premiers peuples, réconciliation, article 35

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Canada's Indigenous peoples are distinct peoples. They were here first, and they lived in communities/nations that governed their own people, their lands, and their resources according to their own cultural norms and legal traditions. The colonial objective was to take that power away, and, in practical terms and over time, it succeeded. But the 1982 introduction of Section 35 in Canada's Constitution acknowledged that underlying Indigenous rights were not extinguished. Over the intervening 40 years, the Courts have filled a policy vacuum by giving meaning to Indigenous rights and constructing the essential scaffolding upon which the Crown's relationship with Canada's Indigenous people rests. The current Liberal government's nation-to-nation policy position is built on that and is informed by The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [UNOHCHR], 2013), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (TRC, 2016). It represents a transformational shift from policy “denial” to clear “recognition” of Indigenous rights, including the right to self-determination, and a focus on building a relationship of respect and partnership through ongoing reconciliation. This is a significant transition that has important implications for those engaged in policy and program evaluations.

FROM SHARED POWER TO CROWN CONTROL AND BACK TO SHARED POWER: FROM TREATIES TO S. 91(24) TO THE PROMISE OF S.35

By the time Canada's Constitution came into force in 1867, the Crown-Indigenous relationship had already evolved from one of recognition and “peace and friendship” to one marked by efforts to transfer Indigenous rights and power to the Crown through land cession and other means targeted at undermining Indigenous cultures and societies. The journey from the Royal Proclamation, 1763 (which recognized that Indigenous peoples had occupied land prior to European contact and committed to achieving the cession of that land through treaties) to the pre-Confederation treaties, including the Peace and Friendship treaties signed in the Atlantic colonies, the Robinson-Huron treaties, and early land cession treaties in what is now Ontario, showed that colonialist interests had shifted. In the early years, alliances with Indigenous peoples were needed to ensure settler survival. As time passed and focus turned toward settler migration to the west, the primary objective was to ensure the availability of land. The treaties signed between 1871 and 1923 operated to reduce the land base held by Indigenous peoples. Control over “Indians” and their lands was seen as a matter related to Canada's “nation building,” and, through Section 91(24), the federal government obtained jurisdiction over “Indians and lands reserved for Indians.”

Initially, the jurisprudence took a very narrow view of Indigenous rights. The earliest interpretation of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 was that Aboriginal title was a “personal and usufructory right,” which acted as a burden on the Crown's underlying title. The source of Indigenous rights was the Crown's sovereignty. In
other words, those rights existed at the Crown’s discretion (*St. Catharines Milling and Lumber Company v. The Queen*, 1888).

Under the authority of s. 91(24), the federal government enacted the *Indian Act*, which created a “wardship” system, controlling the lives of Indigenous peoples from cradle to grave. It created the land reserve system and related band system, dictating the features of governance and controlling all aspects of Indigenous societies, from membership to movement and beyond. While traditional Indigenous governments were not expressly abolished, those who continued to exercise their inherent right to self-government often did so covertly (*Centre for First Nations Governance, 2011*). There was a prohibition against pursuing land claims, and Indigenous social and spiritual practices were outlawed until the 1950 (*Centre for First Nations Governance, 2011*). Residential Schools, which operated from the 1800s through to the mid-1990s, were created with the express purpose of taking the Indian out of the child.

The Crown’s predisposition to interpreting claimed rights in line with its own interests and legal construct largely denied the Indigenous point of view. Cumulatively and over time, these attitudes and practices buttressed Crown control and manifested a colonialist view that led to the widespread marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

But Indigenous peoples did not give up on their rights, cultures, and nations. Largely as a result of their unrelenting commitment and mobilization, we have observed a mix of significant policy and jurisprudential developments occurring over the last half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first that have dramatically changed how their place in the country is regarded by Canadians.

**A modern legal framework: Section 35**

By 1970, Indigenous peoples were energized by their effective opposition to the federal government’s 1969 White Paper (which called for the repeal of the *Indian Act* and a strategy of assimilation) and by their success in establishing Indigenous title as a legal right to land, not having as its source Crown sovereignty but preexisting it¹ (*Calder v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, 1973). Indigenous leaders secured the inclusion of Section 35 in the 1982 amendments to the Constitution, which was a critical turning point in Canadian history, although not obvious at the time.

Section 35 (1) reads, “The existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.”² This wording is broad, and it was to be the work of Constitutional conferences to settle its meaning. Unfortunately, those conferences failed to close the deep and wide gap between the differing perspectives held by the Indigenous and non-Indigenous negotiators. Indigenous leaders regarded s. 35(1) as a “full box” of rights that would be used to redefine their place in Canada. Non-Indigenous leaders saw it as an “empty box,” more symbolism than substance, changing nothing.

Indigenous peoples returned to the courts, and the courts responded in an iterative but highly significant way, creating a constitutional legal framework
based on s. 35 that has fundamentally redefined the Crown’s relationship with Indigenous peoples. It is a framework that will continue to evolve over time but, at its core, recognizes that Indigenous peoples have collective rights derived from their ancestors’ presence prior to the assertion of Crown sovereignty and that those rights include the inherent right to govern themselves in relation to those rights (R. v. Van der Peet, 1996; Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997; Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia, 2014). It recognizes that the inclusion of s. 35 in the Constitution represented “the culmination of a long and difficult struggle in both the political forum and the courts for the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal rights ….” Also, it is guided by s. 35’s “call for a just settlement for Indigenous peoples, one that renounces the old rules of the game under which the Crown wielded absolute power to its own advantage”3 (R. v. Sparrow, 1990).

Time and again, the Supreme Court has returned to the core objective of Section 35 both as a means of grounding the interpretation of Indigenous rights and as a means of guiding the conduct of both the Crown and Indigenous peoples within the special relationship they share under the Constitution. The “fundamental objective of the modern law of Aboriginal and treaty rights is the reconciliation of Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples and their respective claims, interests and ambitions.” It “provides the constitutional framework through which the fact that Aboriginal peoples lived on the land in distinctive societies, with their own practices, customs and traditions is acknowledged and reconciled with the sovereignty of the Crown” (R. v. Van der Peet, 1996).

The court has advanced this core objective of reconciliation by adopting a progressive vision: it calls for a “purposive analysis” of Section 35(1) to be applied, having regard to a set of general principles that the Court has developed over time and used to characterize the legal relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples. The starting point is that the relationship is a fiduciary one. The Court has said that foundational finding demands that a generous and liberal interpretation be given in favour of Indigenous peoples, with any ambiguity as to the scope and definition of s. 35 being resolved in favour of them (R. v. Van der Peet, 1996).

In line with that, when Indigenous rights are assessed based on the tests the courts have developed4 (Delgamuuk v. British Columbia, 1997; R. v. Van der Peet, 1996), they can be regarded as occupying a place along a spectrum of rights, from Aboriginal title at one end to rights that are not necessarily connected to the land. And they must be understood using an approach that is culturally inclusive. For example, in the case of Aboriginal title, the Court has said that occupation can be proved by physical presence and Aboriginal law and needs to be evaluated in accordance with the way of life of the people in question (Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997). The approach must take into account the dual perspectives of the Aboriginal group in question (i.e., its laws, practices, size, technological ability) and common-law notions such as, in the case of land and title, possession as a basis for recognition (Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia, 2014). In support of this balanced approach to the analysis, the Courts have expanded the legal rules of evidence not only to accept the oral histories of Indigenous societies but also to
place them on an equal footing with other forms of evidence the courts are more accustomed to (Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997). The critical point is that in getting to recognition of a particular Aboriginal right, both sides’ views must be respected, as expressed through their own means.

The process of reconciliation begins with this act of recognition that rights exist and continues throughout the relationship. Inherent in the principle of reconciliation is the notion that no rights are absolute. Thus, at its core, reconciliation demands a principled approach to balancing the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples with the broader Canadian community (Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997, p. 161). Grounded in the fiduciary nature of the relationship, a principled approach to reconciliation means that proposed limits on Indigenous rights must meet a “justification” test. The Crown must demonstrate that the action it proposes to take is “in furtherance of a compelling and substantive objective” and that infringement of the Indigenous right is consistent with the special fiduciary relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples (Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997, pp. 161–168). As part of that, the Crown must minimize the impairment of the right and, importantly, consult with the Indigenous group to obtain its perspective. Consistent with the fiduciary relationship, the Crown is held to the standard of acting honourably in this exercise—and in all of its dealings—in order to achieve the reconciliation of pre-existing Indigenous societies with the sovereignty of the Crown.

The court’s commitment to the purposes of s. 35 and this principled standard of conduct has been tested, particularly in the regulatory context, by governments that, still influenced by pre-Section 35 norms, have often taken a technocratic and minimalist rather than progressive or purposive approach to their dealings with Indigenous peoples. The courts have responded with increasingly clear direction.

For example, in its 2004 decision in Haida (Haida Nation v. British Columbia (Minister of Forests), 2004) the Supreme Court articulated the principle of the honour of the Crown which has emerged as the primary standard for both guiding and assessing Crown conduct in managing its relationships with Indigenous peoples. The Court identified the honour of the Crown, otherwise put, the Crown’s responsibility to act honourably, as the source of the duty to consult with Indigenous peoples and to accommodate those rights, where appropriate. The duty arises when the Crown contemplates taking action that may have an impact on claimed Indigenous rights. The practical parameters of the duty to consult and accommodate depends on the strength of the claim and potential impact of Crown actions on it.6

This was a significant and foundational decision. It introduced the idea of general recognition of Indigenous rights, which do not have to be “proved” or established by a court in order to command acknowledgement and respect. And it gave heft to the Crown’s duty to act honourably in all its dealings with Indigenous peoples. That includes a duty to engage respectfully with Indigenous peoples and give full account to their perspectives. This has been the Court’s way of saying that it’s all about the relationship.
The Court's careful articulation of the principles of reconciliation, the fiduciary relationship, the honour of the Crown, and the duty to consult has provided the Crown and Indigenous peoples with a range of tools to respectfully and constructively manage their relationships. Aligned with that, the Court has repeatedly encouraged principled processes of honourable negotiation over reliance on the courts to resolve differences. It is “only through negotiations with good faith and give and take on all sides, reinforced by the judgments of the court, that we will achieve what is said to be the basic purpose of section 35 (i.e., the reconciliation of the pre-existing Aboriginal societies with the sovereignty of the Crown). Let us face it. We are all here to stay” (Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997, p. 181).

THE GOVERNMENT POLICY AGENDA: NATION TO NATION

The federal government’s nation-to-nation agenda, as expressed in the Principles respecting the Government of Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous Peoples (Minister of Justice, 2017) rests on this legal and constitutional framework. It advances an ambitious and progressive view that is founded on the promise of Section 35 and informed by RCAP, the TRC, and UNDRIP.7

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, saying that the Crown-Indigenous relationship reflects a sacred obligation founded on constitutionally protected Indigenous rights, has called for a renewed nation-to-nation relationship, “based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership” (Trudeau, 2015). The Principles say that the promise of s. 35 and UNDRIP’s call to respect and promote the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples mean that all governments should “shift their relationships and arrangements with Indigenous peoples so that they are based on recognition and respect for their rights to self-determination, including the inherent right to self-government for Indigenous nations”8 (Minister of Justice, 2017) (Principle 1). In other words, recognition of these rights is at the heart of reconciliation, and in order to give life to a new post-colonialist relationship we must build new structures and make decisions in new ways. We must move from control to collaboration (Webber, 2017).

The principle of reconciliation under Section 35, with its objective of restoring mutually respectful relations between peoples and nations, is large enough to accommodate all of that. In fact, it demands it. And the Court reminds us that what it looks like in practice “must be devised by means that are more participatory, cross-cultural, flexible and varied than are possible in proceeding before the courts”9 (Webber, 2017). What we are looking for is institutional mechanisms that are accepted as legitimate by all constituent groups and are capable of working together10 (Webber, 2017). Both Indigenous nations and governments must work at this across the range of their many interactions.

MAKING THE NATION-TO-NATION RELATIONSHIP A REALITY

Progress toward turning the “nation-to-nation” vision into a reality remains slow and tentative because many of the key structural impediments, including biases,
have remained intact. Nonetheless, the steps the federal government has taken may be seen as progress toward establishing the conditions within which Indigenous peoples can resituate themselves by rebuilding their nations and reas­suming their role as full partners in the country’s constitutional order. A critical next step will involve Indigenous leaders and the federal government working together, on a nation-to-nation basis, to develop shared understandings of what Indigenous “self-government,” “nationhood,” and “co-existing sovereignties” mean. It is through this collaborative effort that the terms upon which—and the institutional arrangements through which—ongoing nation-to-nation relationships can be developed and maintained. Evaluation professionals should be both keen observers of and participants in these efforts, which will necessarily reshape and enrich both their work processes and the value of their contributions to making the nation­to-nation relationship a reality. Along the way, Canada’s constitutional framework will continue to evolve as the courts are called upon to provide further guidance.

For their part, Indigenous leaders will necessarily lead the work of nation building. Stephen Cornell, a specialist in political economy and cultural sociology and co-founder of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, has spent decades working closely with Indigenous nations and organizations in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, on governance, economic development, and tribal policy issues to help them do just that. Cornell (2008) encourages Indigenous leaders to dedicate themselves to rebuilding the fundamentals, that is, identifying their citizenry, developing independent governments and independent economic institutions, and securing territory and sources of revenue. He underscores the magnitude of the challenge that Indigenous leaders face in this work, acknowledging that they will have to look after present social, economic, cultural, and other needs of their people (for example, housing, education, social services, water) while building toward a future in which their nation’s relationships with other orders of government are put on a fundamentally different footing.

This is highly complex work that engages challenges on three broad fronts: political, fiscal, and administrative. For example, while the legal and constitutional framework is in place, the political challenges Indigenous leaders face are both internal to the community (e.g., community readiness, will and resilience, confidence and trust) and external (securing willing and committed partners in other orders of government). The fiscal challenges include breaking out of structural obstacles in the existing model and finding sources of funding for rebuilding governance, while constructing new fiscal relationships with other orders of government. And the administrative challenges are equally fundamental and daunting. Indigenous leaders must realign their nation’s administration and help it develop the new tools needed to support and implement new models and political directions.

Cornell (2018) argues that at the core of this nation rebuilding is the task of building good governance (i.e., how the community organizes itself to pursue its own objectives, through “sustained, effective, organized action today”). He describes three major elements that should be dealt with by communities as priorities.
First, the community should identify its core principles (i.e., the fundamental understandings of the community that come out of its own experience and culture that reflect what the community is about, what its purposes are, the basis of authority in the community, and the appropriate organizational use of that authority). And it should define what the community is trying to protect, change, and achieve. It should then use those core principles to guide the building of practical, effective mechanisms and robust tools (such as written constitutions, designated offices, laws, and the mechanisms for enforcing those laws), agreements with other governments, and a range of other practical tools, including evaluation, that will form the machinery that gets things done on a daily basis.

Second, the community must build a bureaucratic administration that is grounded in sound management practices and is capable of supporting political decision making, implementing government direction across a range of sectors, and, in line with its values, evaluating progress.

Third, the community must build new relationship mechanisms with other orders of government. With the assumption of jurisdiction in place, these will be the mechanisms through which Indigenous nations can negotiate the spheres within which they will operate, and related issues of subsidiarity, and the support they need to manage a broad range of social needs while sorting out critical issues of lands, resources, and fiscal arrangements on both a transitional and ongoing basis. These will also be the mechanisms through which Indigenous governments working collaboratively with other orders of government can evaluate the success of their efforts.

Similarly, guided by the legal and constitutional principles that are part of what is required by Section 35, recognition of rights, reconciliation, and the duty to act honourably, and in line with the commitments articulated in the Principles respecting the Government of Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous Peoples, the federal government will need to strengthen its own capacity to respect and accommodate Indigenous nations’ core principles, constitutions and laws, agreements, and other tools; adjust its own bureaucratic administration; and be a willing and committed partner in the co-development of mechanisms that will effectively support the nation-to-nation relationship in both the immediate and long terms.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR POLICY AND PROGRAM EVALUATION?

The evaluation function is part of the apparatus through which non-Indigenous governments engage with Indigenous peoples. While there is a notable and developing history of Indigenous evaluation professionals who continue to engage effectively with Indigenous communities, in general, relationships have suffered from the same structural impediments and pre-Section 35 biases that have slowed the country’s progress toward making the nation to nation vision overall. But that must change. The legal and constitutional framework developed by the courts since the introduction of s. 35 of the Constitution makes it clear that non-Indigenous governments must work as partners with Indigenous nations.
based on recognition of Indigenous rights, reconciliation, and the Crown’s duty to act honourably in all of its dealings with Indigenous peoples. If the evaluation function is to remain truly effective in supporting both non-Indigenous and Indigenous governments in working together on the basis of these constitutional principles, evaluations professionals must find ways of reflecting those principles in their work as well. The question is, however, how the field can move forward to accomplish this. How will it change the approach to evaluation in practical terms?

To begin, and at the broadest level, evaluation professionals may wish to consider three questions. First, in light of the Section 35 legal framework, how can evaluation models accommodate the fact of co-existing sovereignties? How will objectives be articulated, and responsibilities and accountabilities sorted out? Second, what is important to an Indigenous nation as a measure of success may be different from what is important to another order of government. The same may be true of what is considered “valid evidence,” including questions of what knowledge can and should be gathered, and how it should be gathered and communicated. What steps can be taken to ensure that evaluation models respectfully and substantively reflect Indigenous cultures, traditions, and laws? And finally, how can evaluation professionals develop a strategy that will help them do their jobs through what will, inevitably, be a long transition period as Indigenous nations rebuild? How can these professionals prepare themselves to respond to the variety of forms that nation building will take and the varying timelines within which it will occur?

Unfortunately, there are no clear, cookie-cutter or “off-the-shelf” answers or evaluation models to offer. The nation-to-nation agenda is transformative and without precedent. It is about decolonization and making self-determination and self-government for Indigenous peoples real in the twenty-first century. It is “a project of disorder,” not mild adjustment (Cram, 2018), and it is—at its very core—a project of co-creation with non-Indigenous and Indigenous governments working together. It is thus inherently difficult, and it will take time.

Evaluation professionals can prepare themselves to support the nation-to-nation agenda by looking to the key legal principles flowing from Section 35 and the progressive view of those principles set out in the government’s Principles respecting the Government of Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous Peoples to be both their guide and their “minimum standard”12 for evaluations. This will require a fundamental re-think of the purely accountability-focused purposes of governmental evaluations that extend from funding agreements.

It begins by recognizing Indigenous rights, including the rights to self-government and self-determination. This calls for a critical and profound shift in thinking and an acceptance that, in Canada, pre-existing Indigenous sovereignty and Canadian sovereignty must find ways of co-existing (Webber, 2017). Evaluation professionals could then work toward building new relationships and new evaluation models that rest on that foundational reality. For example, advancing the principle of reconciliation would mean committing to deep collaboration that begins with understanding and sharing a commitment to Indigenous objectives
and continues through a willingness to share knowledge and co-build new frames and tools. Part of acting honourably would mean being transparent about government's expectations and interests and working with Indigenous nations toward a balanced approach that takes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests and values into account. It would mean ensuring that evaluation conceptual frameworks/inquiry paradigms are open to the Indigenous worldview, using Indigenous ontological frameworks as guiding evaluation practices. And it would mean demonstrating commitment to realizing the vision of self-determination and self-government by working to strengthen Indigenous capacity.

Taken cumulatively, this goes well beyond thinking about the “cultural responsiveness of methodology.” Just as Section 35 and the “nation-to-nation” agenda call for a complete reframing of the government’s historic colonialist relationship with Indigenous peoples (Webber, 2017), so also do they call for a complete reframing of the knowledge and methods used in evaluations (Bowman & Dodge-Francis, 2017).

Bowman’s CRIE model (Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation) offers a picture of what the desired “blended” approach might look like. The model sets out the “Western” or non-Indigenous paradigm for what evaluations look like (strength, skills, and capacities; challenges and barriers; gaps and needs; solutions and strategies). It sets out an Indigenous paradigm (relations and community building; using your teachings; humility and balance; visioning and pathfinding). And then it offers what could result by bringing the elements of the two paradigms together into a “blended” or balanced approach. The blended elements would be the following: building community through shared strengths and a strengths-based approach; using challenges as opportunities to use teachings; addressing needs and gaps by humbly asking for help and restoring balance; and using experiential knowledge to develop evidence-based solutions for a future vision (Bowman & Dodge-Francis, 2017).

**DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP**

The recognition of Indigenous communities as self-governing nations, enjoying sovereignty within the Canadian constitutional order, means that the nations will determine their own objectives and the means for achieving those objectives and will be accountable for achieving related results. That is the transformation that Indigenous communities want: decolonization, self-determination, and self-government. Although they will continue to work with other orders of government as partners, the instruments and mechanisms employed will necessarily be adjusted over time in order to accommodate the shared power that will characterize the ongoing reconciliation of Canada’s co-existing sovereignties.

Bowman argues that “evaluation should be a tool of transformation, improvement and empowerment” (Bowman & Dodge-Francis, 2017). But existing evaluation tools have been externally imposed and do not reflect the worldviews, values, and goals of Indigenous peoples. Decolonizing the relationship with Indigenous
people will require decolonizing evaluation models and frameworks. It is about moving from evaluations that are framed and controlled by non-Indigenous governments to evaluations that are characterized by “collaboration, co-design and capacity building toward the central objective of ensuring that Indigenous evaluations are, ultimately, designed and led by Indigenous people” (Cram, 2018).

The journey will be challenging. Funding governments may at times be intransigent in their focus on their own accountability needs. But the larger constitutional vision for the country is clear, the work is important, and evaluation professionals can welcome this moment of opportunity to support governments in advancing it. Taking that broader view, governments know they need the help. Guided by the legal and constitutional principles of recognition, reconciliation, and the honour of the Crown, as well as by their own professional ethics, evaluation professionals can make an enormous contribution to rebuilding self-determining and self-governing Indigenous nations so that those nations can reassert their rightful place in our constitutional order. Achieving that will ensure the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada (UNOHCHR, 2013).

NOTES

1 In Calder, the Supreme Court of Canada found that Aboriginal rights, and specifically Aboriginal title, existed in Canada before the Royal Proclamation of 1763, were not derived from colonial law, and had not been extinguished by Crown sovereignty. The federal government had had a policy against negotiating land claims since the 1920s but after Calder it introduced the Comprehensive Claims Policy to deal with land claims. It also introduced the Specific Claims Policy to deal with disputes over land issues and treaty implementation.

2 Part 2 of the Constitution Act, 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act, 1982 (UK), c.11. Section 35(2) of the Act defines “Aboriginal peoples” as including Inuit and Métis.

3 In Sparrow, making the point that the Crown controlled all the conditions within which Aboriginal rights and interests are judged, the Court noted that the Crown “established courts of law and then denied those courts the authority to question sovereign claims by the Crown.”

4 The test for Aboriginal title is evidence that the land was exclusively occupied at the time of the Crown’s assertion of sovereignty (Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997). The test for Aboriginal rights apart from title is that the particular activity claimed as a right must relate to a practice, custom, or tradition that was integral to the Aboriginal group’s distinctive culture prior to contact with the Europeans (R. v. Van der Peet, 1996).

5 It is also consistent with the approach taken in the Charter of Rights, where individual rights may be subject to reasonable limits in a free and democratic society. See Section 1.

6 The duty to consult is also a procedural requirement in relation to treaty rights (Mikisew Cree First Nation v. Canada (Minister of Heritage), 2005).

7 RCAP meticulously made the legal and policy case for Indigenous rights to self-government and provided extensive recommendations on how recognizing Indigenous nations as a third order of government could work. UNDRIP identifies the rights of
Indigenous peoples to develop and maintain their own political, economic, and social institutions, including juridical systems (Articles 5, 20 and 34), as among the “minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well being of the Indigenous peoples of the world” (Article 43). The TRC Report, informed by UNDRIP and adopting its human rights frame, effectively argued for self-government on the same basis and reflected that in its 94 Calls to Action.

8 So far, the Supreme Court has not been faced with a situation that has required it to decide self-government rights, but it is difficult to disagree with those who argue that the Court has implicitly and at a general level recognized the existence of those rights based on its acknowledgement of pre-existing Indigenous societies, cultures, traditions, and laws that help determine the modern existence of other rights that are collective and include control over territory. In fact, the Court has even acknowledged “the pre-existing Aboriginal sovereignty, along with Canadian sovereignty, and said that the Aboriginal rights and s. 35 are about the search between societies, each of which is entitled to be included in the Constitutional order” (Webber, 2017, p. 289). Nonetheless, the Court has demonstrated characteristic patience in the belief that these questions and other questions between the parties, both large and small, are best sorted out by the parties (governments) through principled negotiation.

9 The SCC most recently underscored this view in its December 2017 decision in Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation et al v. Government of the Yukon, [2017] 2 S.C.R. 576, commonly referred to as the “Peel Watershed” case.

10 One can argue that, although the process has been painfully slow and discontinuous, at some level, competing views of Indigenous self-government have been in “negotiation” since the mid-1990s. Preceding RCAP and the TRC, the Penner Report and Charlotte-town Accord both supported the right to self-government for Indigenous peoples. And the federal government’s 1995 Inherent Right Policy, a companion piece to the Comprehensive Claims Policy, set out the parameters within which the federal government has been prepared to negotiate terms of self-government with Indigenous communities.

11 The mechanisms should include dispute-resolution mechanisms that will support good relationships and reduce overall reliance on litigation.


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Abstract: A group of Indigenous health and social service evaluators called the “Three Ribbon” panel came together in Toronto in 2015/16 with the goal of informing a set of evidence-based guidelines for urban Indigenous health and social service and program evaluation. The collective knowledge and experiences of the Three Ribbon panel was gathered through discussion circles and synthesized around the following areas: barriers to conducting Indigenous health and social service evaluation; decolonizing principles and protocols that support community self-determination and centralize Indigenous culture and worldviews; and guidelines to inform health and social service evaluation moving forward. The wisdom and contributions of the Three Ribbon Panel creates space for Indigenous worldviews, values, and beliefs within program evaluation practice and has important implications for evaluation research and application.

Keywords: decolonization, guiding principles, Indigenous, Indigenous experience, self-determination

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Résumé : Un groupe d’évaluateurs et d’évaluatrices dans le domaine de la santé et des services sociaux autochtones, appelé le groupe « Three Ribbon Panel » s’est réuni à Toronto en 2015-2016 avec l’objectif d’établir des lignes directrices fondées sur la recherche pour l’évaluation de programmes et de services en contexte autochtone. L’expérience et les connaissances collectives du groupe ont été présentées lors de cercles de discussions et portaient sur les domaines suivants : les obstacles à l’évaluation des programmes de santé et services sociaux en contexte autochtone; la décolonisation des principes et des protocoles afin d’appuyer l’autodétermination des communautés et centraliser la culture et les points de vue autochtones; et les lignes directrices qui orienteront à l’avenir l’évaluation en santé et services sociaux. La sagesse et la contribution du groupe contribuent à la diffusion des points de vue, des valeurs et des croyances autochtones et permettent une réflexion au sujet de leur place au sein de la pratique évaluation. Cette réflexion pourrait avoir des conséquences importantes pour la pratique et la recherche sur l’évaluation.

Mots clé : décolonisation, principes directeurs, autochtone, expérience autochtone, autodétermination

BACKGROUND

In Canada, evaluations of programs and services that are tailored for and/or include Indigenous peoples are often under-resourced, poorly designed, and fail to take community evaluation priorities into account (Grover, 2008; Scott, 2008). Mainstream evaluations also tend to exclude Indigenous-specific needs from their performance assessments (Grover, 2008). While there has been a movement toward strengths-based, holistic, and “culturally responsive” evaluations, Indigenous scholars have called for evaluations that are grounded in Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing and informed by locally defined values, such as sovereignty, reciprocity, and place (Cram, 2018; Lafrance, Nichols, & Kirkhart, 2012; Waapalaneexkweew & Dodge-Francis, 2018). The Well Living House is an action research centre focused on building and sharing evidence to support Indigenous infant, child, and family health and is located at St. Michael’s Hospital within the Centre for Urban Health Solutions (C-UHS) in Toronto, Canada. The Well Living House is co-governed by St. Michael’s Hospital and a Counsel of Indigenous grandparents (Well Living House, 2017b).

In 2015/2016, the Well Living House and partners brought together a group of experienced and respected Indigenous health service evaluators known as the “Three Ribbon Panel.” The Three Ribbon research project was implemented as a partnership between four Indigenous health service partners: Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto (SGMT), Dedwadadehsney>s Aboriginal Health Centre in Hamilton, the Southwest Ontario Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) in London, and Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe’yewigamig Health Access Centre in Kenora. The guiding intention of the Panel was to support the development of “wise” practice guidelines for high-quality Indigenous health service and program evaluation through transformative, shared learning by way...
of discussion circles. The term “wise” is used in place of “best” or “evidence-based” to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and practice, which often relies on experiential proofs, is included as a core source of information in addition to evidence emerging from universities and/or non-Indigenous sources. (Well Living House, 2017a)

The name “Three Ribbon” was chosen to honour Indigenous teachings and ceremony. The threefold braid can represent mind, body, and spirit. Braids can also hold prayers and intentions; symbolize strength and wisdom; and illustrate the wholistic, inter-relational nature of Indigenous knowledge and practice (Abelson, 2010). Ribbons are a common and important element of many Indigenous communities’ ceremonial protocols and clothing.

In this paper, we present a synthesis of the collective knowledge and lived experiences of the Three Ribbon Panel, which spanned multiple dimensions of Indigenous program evaluation practice. This innovative synthesis challenges and extends program evaluation research and practice and fills a knowledge and practice gap in ways that align with the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, including the call to action for the federal government, in partnership with Indigenous communities, to identify and close gaps in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (TRC, 2015).

**FACILITATION OF THE THREE RIBBON PANEL**

Panel members were identified and recruited by the Three Ribbon project leads with the aim of selecting a mixed and representative group of Indigenous and allied evaluation researcher specialists, public health and health service practitioners, Indigenous health service managers, and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers/Elders. Eight identified potential members agreed to participate as Panelists. Panelists were then invited to a one-day meeting, with arrangements made for travel and logistics. Panelists represented tribal councils, local Indigenous health services, and various government bodies from across Ontario.

To provide background information and focus the content of the Panel discussion, the research team circulated the initial findings from a recent international systematic review (Maddox et al., Under Review) and the following pre-meeting questions:

1. In your knowledge and experience what are the major problems or challenges that arise in the evaluation of Indigenous health services and programs?
2. What approach(es) are you aware of that have been successfully used in Indigenous health services and program evaluation? How was/were/they successful?
3. The American Evaluation Association (AEA) has outlined guiding principles for evaluators (American Evaluation Association, 2007): systematic inquiry, competence, integrity/honesty, respect for people, responsibilities for general and public welfare. How do these need to be
modified for Indigenous health service and program evaluation? Are there underlying assumptions that also need to be added/modified?

During the panel, the Three Ribbon Project lead facilitated a discussion circle that drew on Indigenous-specific methods, such as dialogue circles (Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, 2002; National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2006) and talking circles (Weber-Pillwax, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous protocols were followed, with the day starting with a smudge, prayer, and traditional teaching led by an Elder. The discussion circle began with roundtable introductions, followed by progressive go-arounds to explore the pre-meeting questions. The facilitator tracked discussion ideas on a flip chart, summarizing and encouraging additional thoughts after each question. As mutual agreements and common ground emerged, the facilitator invited further reflections. Syntheses were emerging during the conversations and the process. Before closing the circle, Panelists were asked to share final thoughts, and the Elder closed the panel with a song.

Three months later, a follow-up videoconference was held to review and refine the summary report of the discussion circle and develop preliminary recommendations for Indigenous health service and program evaluation. Emerging recommendations were shared electronically, and a final videoconference was held to finalize the report and recommendations.

INSIGHTS FROM THE THREE RIBBON PANEL

Challenges and issues with dominant evaluation systems

Reflecting on the major problems or challenges that arise in the evaluation of Indigenous health services and programs, there was strong agreement among Panelists that existing non-Indigenous and dominant systems, processes, measures, and tools for evaluations are being externally imposed on Indigenous communities. Consequently, this divides the goals and methods of the evaluations from community utility and relevance. Much of this disconnect can be traced back to the funding agencies that control the flow of resources and commonly prescribe evaluation theory and primary outcome measures. Indigenous health and social services and their evaluations are systematically under-resourced (Lavoie, Forget, & O’Neil, 2007). Inadequate resourcing hinders the development of service and program infrastructure and limits capacity for sustainability, evaluation quality, and collection of sufficient data to support wise health services and programming in Indigenous communities (Smylie, Anderson, Ratima, Crengle, & Anderson, 2006; Smylie & Firestone, 2015). The explicit and/or implicit evaluation goals of funding bodies may also be in tension and outweigh those of Indigenous communities, making evaluations theoretically faulty. As Heather Manson from Public Health Ontario stated, “evaluations that describe activities justify funding, but don’t tell us if we are doing a good job.” This has resulted in what Sara Wolfe from Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto described as “evaluation fatigue” and Indigenous health practitioners and communities having an “allergy” to evaluation.
When evaluation processes, tools, and measures are designed and implemented without input, involvement, or governance from Indigenous communities, it fosters false narratives about Indigenous people. As Sara Wolfe noted, “often, consultation happens at isolated points during evaluation rather than as an iterative process.” If the “measuring stick” is externally developed and imposed, inappropriate measures are applied and the result can be an incorrect assessment of program failure.

Drawing from her lived Indigenous experience and many years in Indigenous health management and executive roles, Gertie Mai Muse identified a high level of “inherent community accountability” as fundamental to the success of the health centre she directed. This community direction was the result of an integrated and comprehensive community engagement process and strong, reciprocal community member-service provider relationships. It would be easy for an external evaluator unfamiliar with Indigenous social systems and the robust nature of local Indigenous knowledge and practice to miss or even dismiss these critical processes and relationships. Panelist Vicki Van Wagner offered similar reflections on the evaluation of midwifery in Nunavik, Canada:

The teams I have worked with have focused on the outcomes and we left the story of how untold. It is more clear to me now, that when evaluating Indigenous health services, the stories of community engagement in defining the project, the outcome measures, doing the work of the research and owning the results and even the tools that are developed is very important.

An additional challenge was the need to address different literacies, interpretations of language, and understandings of core concepts between evaluators and Indigenous communities. Mainstream evaluation terminology as expressed in oral and written English may not translate into local Indigenous languages or represent familiar concepts and local ways of knowing and doing.

**Decolonizing principles and protocols for evaluation**

Panelists confirmed that Indigenous communities want to define, decolonize, and prioritize Indigenous knowledges and processes in their own service and program evaluation. Decolonized evaluation centralizes Indigenous knowledge and values, ensures that processes and outcomes are aligned with Indigenous community goals and worldviews, includes active participation and leadership of Indigenous communities, and focuses on relevance as defined by Indigenous communities (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; Johnston-Goodstar, 2012). According to Roger Boyer II, “There is a fever, a thirst for our own [Indigenous] data and evaluation.”

While many evaluation methods are rooted in non-Indigenous, mainstream approaches to science and public health, there are examples that bridge Indigenous ways of knowing and doing and enable effective evaluation. Panelists recommended the use of stories (Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2013), Photo-Voice (Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008), and concept mapping (Firestone et al., 2014). Elder and Knowledge Keeper Jeanne Hebert shared her experiences.
drawing on the medicine wheel as an evaluation tool for wellness planning and understanding where people are at throughout their healing journey.

**Emerging guiding principles for Indigenous evaluation**

Building on the findings of an international systematic literature review and the principles of the AEA, Panelists identified the following emerging principles:

**Indigenous governance:** The program evaluation must be community-led and governed. Local Indigenous communities must drive the entire process, set the priorities for evaluation, and lead or co-lead program and evaluation implementation. This supports community self-determination and upholds program evaluation rigour, leading to more positive program outcomes. Indigenous communities must also be central in decision-making and governance processes at broader institutional and systemic levels to achieve effective and community-relevant evaluation.

**Clarity of purpose:** “Who wants to know and why?”: The integrity of an evaluation in an Indigenous context is dependent on the disclosure and transparency of the evaluator. Whether the evaluator is external to or a member of a particular community, they must be self-reflexive about their position and relationality to those using, delivering, and funding the service. Evaluators must also acknowledge their limitations, motivations, and purpose for conducting the evaluation. Bringing a clear purpose, along with an understanding of the unique local context, can inform and enhance sharing of the evaluation within and between Indigenous communities. We use the term local context understanding that Indigenous communities are self-defined groups of Indigenous peoples linked together by diverse characteristics that can include kinship, land ties, language, culture, geographic residence, historic and/or current governance systems, and other collective causes. By Indigenous community context we mean the whole situation, historical, economical, and socio-political background, and/or environment relevant to a particular Indigenous community.

**Indigegogy:** The term “Indigegogy” reflects approaches that are foundationally grounded in Indigenous knowledge and practice, simultaneously recognizing innate colonial contamination (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). Indigenous knowledge and practices include the diversity of current and lived Indigenous knowledges, skills, values, and beliefs relevant to the Indigenous community or population involved in the evaluation. They should not be externally inscribed; such an imposition process could be considered a recolonization. Respect for local protocols and culture, then, is required. The use of Indigenous languages is important, but not always essential to this foundational integration of Indigenous culture in its multiple and varied expressions. Indigegogy will influence how evaluations are developed, implemented, analyzed, reported, and utilized and can ensure that findings are culturally sensitive and accurate.
Inter-relationality: Inter-relationality, or the connection and interdependence between all things including information, is an important and cross-cutting concept in Indigenous knowledge systems and practice (Carjuzaa & Fenimore-Smith, 2010; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Applying the concept of inter-relationality to program evaluation requires significant adjustment to mainstream methods and measures that privilege and categorize questions and outcomes. An inter-relational approach is deeply concerned with the interconnection between and across domains of inquiry and bits of data.

Minobimaatisiiwin — Living the good life and other holistic concepts of good living: Holistic models of wellness such as Minobimaatisiiwin, the Anishnaabe worldview of living a good life, represent the application of inter-relationality to health and to Indigenous service and program evaluation. Panel Elder and Knowledge Keeper Jeanne Hebert spoke about the Indigenous Peoples’ Great Law, which is the oral constitution that bound the Iroquois Confederacy together. Iroquois laws were recorded using wampum symbols to support narratives that specified laws and ceremonies to be performed at specific times. One of the main principles of the Great Law was peace and the balance of mind and body in life. Vicki Van Wagner explored these ideas with her colleagues in Nunavik who explained the Inuit concept of Qanuinngisiarniq, which means “everything is okay” in the broadest sense of everything and the most meaningful sense of “okay,” and also “wellness,” taking care of yourself and “living well in a healthy way.” Evaluations committed to understanding how Indigenous community governance, laws, and ceremonies affect health outcomes would be wise to build on local Indigenous governance frameworks such as these.

Collectivity: Local community leadership is intrinsic to community well-being. Collectivity requires the meaningful engagement and participation of the local community across service domains and subpopulations. Broad-based Indigenous leadership and community participation linked directly to evaluation activities (e.g., the hiring of Indigenous staff, consultants, advisory boards, reference groups, and working groups, or mentorship by Knowledge Keepers and Elders) are essential.

Responsiveness: Evaluations must reflect local community context and should be flexible to respond to the specific needs and environment within that community. Responsiveness demands an understanding of the historical and current socio-political context in which a person, community, program, or policy operates (e.g., scheduled evaluation activities may need to be postponed/adapted to accommodate emergencies and other circumstances that arise, such as unexpected death).

Wise protocols for Indigenous evaluation

The protocols that uphold Indigenous evaluation principles vary across community settings and are adhered to and recognized in different ways. Reflecting
on the literature and the insights from the Panelists, the Panelists identified the following core protocols:

- **ethics and governance** (e.g., establishing Indigenous/trial ethics boards, community advisory boards, research, and data-sharing mechanisms; following Indigenous research ethics frameworks);
- **integrated evaluation frameworks** (i.e., ensuring that evaluations build on individual, community, organizational, and system-level capacities, and multi-dimensional understandings of health);
- **cultural safety** (e.g., training and support for evaluation team, community-defined measures and tools); and

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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Indigenous health service and program evaluation guidelines</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrate Indigenous leadership and a commitment to self-determination, including but not limited to the processes by which the evaluation is funded.</td>
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<td>2. Demonstrate community governance and leadership at every phase, using OCAP® or other relevant Indigenous community governance and management principles and protocols.</td>
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<td>3. Have a majority of Indigenous members on the evaluation team.</td>
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<td>4. Contribute to an enhancement of relevant, useful, and sustainable evaluation skills and capacities that stay in the Indigenous community in which the evaluation takes place.</td>
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<td>5. Demonstrate reciprocity for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members.</td>
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<td>6. Demonstrate methods, analysis and dissemination approaches that overtly reflect the Indigenous contexts, values, skills, knowledge, and practices of the communities in which the evaluation takes place.</td>
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<td>7. Desired by participant communities.</td>
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<td>8. Demonstrate responsiveness to participant community needs and contexts.</td>
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<td>9. Reflect participant community priorities both generally and with respect to health and wellness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Contribute to holistic Indigenous concepts of good living, such as Minobimaatisiwin, the Great Law, and Qanuinnngisiarniq.</td>
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<td>11. Support the recognition and sharing of what is working and what is not.</td>
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<td>12. Use accessible language to communicate evaluation plans, methods, and results.</td>
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<td>13. Be appropriately budgeted by funders to support relevant and high-quality community leadership, participation, methods, and dissemination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Recognize the value of and build on existing intrinsic Indigenous community systems of knowledge and practice. We have always had systems of evaluation and accountability in our communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Leave no community or community member behind. All communities can participate in evaluation activities as long as we start to work with them where they are at and recognize contextual constraints.</td>
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leadership and engagement (e.g., ensuring local leadership and involving in decision making across all stages of evaluation development, implementation, and knowledge translation).

This is not an exhaustive inventory of protocols, but it highlights tangible, culturally appropriate, and effective applications of the principles. Detailed explanations and examples of each protocol are included in the Summary Report (Well Living House, 2017b).

Guidelines for Indigenous health service and program evaluation

The Panel drew on their collective knowledge and experiences to put the following guidelines forward (see Table 1). The statements below can be understood as a set of “trail-markers,” defining several unique evaluation pathways that are relevant and useful to diverse Indigenous communities.

CONCLUSION

We have highlighted principles, protocols, and guidelines for Indigenous health service and evaluation that draw on the lived experiences of an expert Panel and what is known about working with and building relationships with Indigenous communities. Commonly, governmental evaluations have been and continue to be the source of negative experiences. However, as the Three Ribbon Panel confirms, there is potential to do evaluations in a meaningful way that benefits Indigenous communities. The collective wisdom and contributions of the Panel creates the necessary space for Indigenous worldviews, values, and beliefs to be centred within evaluation practice and lends insight that ought to be considered by evaluators, funding agencies, and Indigenous communities moving forward.

While efforts were made to ensure that the Panel was comprehensive and inclusive, it is anticipated that ideas and strategies for specific contexts may have been missed. There may also be community contexts, constraints, and priorities that will result in choices and actions that differ from what are proposed here. This paper is thus a living document. This approach to Indigenous knowledge development and sharing is well aligned with the “wise” practice of health service and program evaluation, which must be holistic and iterative to adequately reflect contextual complexity and dynamism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Three Ribbon Panel gathering were Dedwadadehsnye>s Aboriginal Health Centre (DAHAC), Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto (SGMT), Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC), Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe‘iyewigamig Health Access Centre (NIHAC), and Well Living House (WLH).

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The Three Ribbon Panel, whose members co-authored this paper, represents a diverse group of Indigenous and allied experts who came together to share experiential knowledge and to identify exemplars, principles, and protocols around Indigenous health and social service and program evaluation. As a result of existing, long-standing relationships among members and through an Indigenous-led and -governed process, the Three Ribbon Panel facilitated shared learning, information exchange, and transformative knowledge translation.
EvalIndigenous Origin Story: Effective Practices within Local Contexts to Inform the Field and Practice of Evaluation

Larry Bremner
Proactive Information Services Inc.

Nicole Bowman
University of Wisconsin

Abstract: EvalIndigenous began in November 2015 as a global network of EvalPartners. This origin story of EvalIndigenous is shared to describe some of the work being carried out today by Indigenous evaluators in the Global North and South. EvalIndigenous is rooted in tribal critical and Indigenous theories and methods, as well as the legal and political distinctions of Indigenous peoples and Tribal/First Nations. EvalIndigenous shares how evaluation is done “by us and for us.” The article concludes by highlighting key strategies that the field of evaluation can consider in the future when working with Indigenous populations and sovereign Tribal/First Nations governments and communities.

Keywords: EvalIndigenous, EvalPartners, evaluation, governance, government evaluation, Indigenous evaluation, Indigenous theory, systems evaluation, tribal critical theory, Tribal/First Nation, truth and reconciliation, United Nations


Mots clé : EvalIndigenous, EvalPartners, évaluation, gouvernance, évaluation gouvernementale, évaluation autochtone, théorie autochtone, évaluations des systèmes, théorie tribale critique, tribu/Première Nation, vérité et réconciliation, Nations Unies

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EVALINDIGENOUS: THE ORIGIN STORY

The International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) represents international, national, sub-national, and regional Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) worldwide. EvalPartners was launched in March 2012 by the IOCE and the United Nations, in partnership with several other international development organizations. The past-president of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) serves as treasurer to the IOCE and is a member of the EvalPartners Management Group (EPMG). As a global partnership, EvalPartners supports Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and VOPEs in their use and practice of evaluation at the regional, national, and international levels. This support is intended to increase the likelihood that public policies will be informed by evidence and that considerations of equity and effectiveness will be incorporated into public policy decision making. The work of EvalPartners takes many directions, one of which has been the formation of global networks, each of which has a specific focus. The networks are EvalGender+, EvalYouth, EvalSDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), the Global Parliamentarian Forum, and the newest network, EvalIndigenous.

The origin story of EvalIndigenous is shared to describe some of the work being carried out by Indigenous evaluators in the Global North and South. EvalIndigenous is rooted in tribal critical and Indigenous theories and methods, as well as the legal and political distinctions of Indigenous peoples and Tribal/First Nations. EvalIndigenous shares how evaluation is done “by us and for us.” The article concludes with highlighting key strategies that the field of evaluation can consider when working with Indigenous populations and sovereign Tribal/First Nations governments and communities.

The desire for a global Indigenous network resulted from the reality that Indigenous peoples are often directly affected by evaluation results, which inform decisions regarding merit, worth, and value. However, many evaluators do not take into consideration the cultural context, complexities, or histories of the communities in which they are working. As noted by Kirkhart, LaFrance, and Nichols (2011, p. 3),

Merit and worth are the culmination of a lifelong journey towards self-actualization that is realized within the shared meanings and cultural parameters of community. Historical trauma must be addressed, and evaluation must contribute to learning that supports cultural renewal and revitalization. Self-determination must be understood by the evaluators as a necessary condition of good evaluation.

In February 2015, during an EPMG meeting, the CES past-president raised the need for an Indigenous global network. It was argued that many evaluators working in Indigenous communities were unaware of Indigenous evaluation approaches and enter communities as transients, unfamiliar with community protocols and contexts. The Indigenous network was initially conceptualized by the EvalPartners Management Group as EvalCulture. The intent was to bring together individuals...
and organizations across the various organizations and communities. This network would identify and share best practices and lessons learned when undertaking evaluation with marginalized peoples, oppressed populations, and Indigenous communities. Considering the scope of EvalGender+, which is focused on equity- and gender-responsive evaluation, it was decided that issues related to many of the marginalized populations originally included in EvalCulture could be addressed by EvalGender+. Therefore, the focus and name of EvalCulture was revised in August 2015 to become EvalIndigenous; this name change more clearly stated the intent of the network. For First Peoples who have been colonized, and in many cases experienced cultural genocide, it was argued that too often they are incorporated into broad categories where their unique histories and contexts are not accurately captured and recognized. Therefore, EvalIndigenous was launched as a global network in November 2015 in the Parliament of Nepal. As noted in the revised EvalIndigenous concept paper (Bremner & Were, 2016), EvalIndigenous was intended to involve Indigenous peoples in leading and contributing to global evaluation practice and endeavours. Furthermore, EvalIndigenous was intended to increase the awareness of individuals engaged in evaluation with Indigenous communities by documenting the evaluation protocols developed by Indigenous communities and organizations, facilitating learning and sharing of experiences, promoting innovation in approaches and methods used in Indigenous evaluation, and disseminating information regarding lessons learned. Finally, EvalIndigenous facilitates the creation of spaces that promote Indigenous peoples’ self-determination of their evaluation agenda, cultivating an understanding and use of different evaluation approaches and methods to ensure that evaluators and evaluations are culturally responsive and inclusive.

EvalIndigenous is a multi-stakeholder partnership that includes representatives from VOPEs such as the American Evaluation Association (AEA), African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), African Gender and Development Evaluators Network (AGDEN), Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA), Australian Evaluation Association (AES), Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), Cameroon Development Evaluation Association (CaDEA), Māori Evaluation Association (Ma te Rae), Latin American Evaluation Association (ReLAC), Red Nicaraguense de Seguimiento y Evaluation (ReNicSE), and Zambia Measurement and Evaluation Association (ZaMEA). Currently, EvalIndigenous receives funding through the IOCE from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Membership has been growing as awareness of EvalIndigenous increases. Membership is open to both Indigenous individuals and non-Indigenous allies and, to date, EvalIndigenous has approximately 80 members around the world.

Through the recognition of different Indigenous worldviews and valuing the strengths of Indigenous evaluation practices, EvalIndigenous sets out to advance the contribution of Indigenous evaluation to global evaluation practice. As noted in an EvalIndigenous Pop-Up-Note (PUN):

EvalIndigenous seeks to bring awareness to, include, and celebrate the cultural traditions and values, languages, legal/political governance practices, and ways of life of
Indigenous peoples wherever they live. Our focus is to ensure that policies and evaluation practices for Indigenous peoples are based on equity, fairness and justice. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) frames our work, moving from an evidence-based focus towards a shared global understanding of good practice for Indigenous peoples and our rights within the field of evaluation. (EvalIndigenous, 2019a)

When discussing Indigenous peoples, EvalIndigenous aligns with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which states:

The most fruitful approach is to identify, rather than define Indigenous peoples. This is based on the fundamental criterion of self-identification as underlined in several human rights documents . . . . In some countries, there may be preference for other terms including tribes, first peoples/nations, Aboriginals, ethnic groups, adivasi, jana-jati. (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, n.d. a, p. 1)

In 2017, EvalIndigenous sent a link to a web-based survey to the global VOPEs to better understand VOPEs’ engagement with Indigenous evaluators (IE) and Indigenous communities (IC) in their countries and regions. Additionally, it was expected that survey results would support VOPEs in developing awareness and support for Indigenous evaluation, Indigenous evaluators, and Indigenous communities. This survey revealed several challenges and the opportunities they present.

It was found that most VOPEs do not collect ethnicity-related information about their members. This presents a challenge when considering the Briefing Note: Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and the 2030 Agenda: Sustainable Development Goals, from the United Nations (2017, p. 3), which states,

Data-disaggregation according to Indigenous or ethnic identity across all sustainable development goals must also be included to monitor progress for Indigenous peoples. A critical priority at national level is, therefore, to ensure that data disaggregation includes “Indigenous identifiers” (for instance language or self-identification) in official statistics to capture the inequalities Indigenous peoples face across all the sustainable development goals.

In fact, some VOPEs did not believe Indigenous peoples were in their countries. Thus, preferred treatment of Indigenous peoples was unnecessary, in their context, because most of the population was Indigenous. As noted by one VOPE, “We are not sure that the Indigenous agenda applies to our country as it would apply to other countries, like US, Canada, Colombia, Argentina, etc. Not sure of how relevant it is to us and it definitely feels that it is more relevant to (advanced) countries” (Goodwin & Bremner, 2018).

Further, while approximately half of the 27 VOPEs work with Indigenous communities, few had guidelines for how to work with them. This could provide other challenges as there is a need to understand that Indigenous evaluation approaches are “inherently rooted in community and cannot be conceived of otherwise” (Easby, 2016, p. 1). EvalIndigenous is attempting to address these
challenges by increasing VOPEs’ and evaluators’ understanding through vehicles such as presentations at conferences, webinars, and brief publications. Examples are available at the EvalIndigenous Google drive shared space, are regularly posted on the EvalIndigenous Facebook group, and are available upon written request by e-mailing EvalIndigenous members.

EvalIndigenous advocates for evaluation approaches that support the improvement of community well-being in terms of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of individuals and families. According to Chilisa (2012), postcolonial Indigenous theory “gives researchers [evaluators] the tools to theorize Indigenous research [evaluation], Indigenous research [evaluation] paradigms, and culturally integrative research [evaluation] approaches” (p. 50). There is a need to understand that Indigenous evaluation has at its core enrichment, development, learning, celebration, and reconciliation (Alfred, 2009; Bowman, Dodge-Francis, & Tyndall, 2015; Chilisa, 2012; Easby, 2016; Kirkhart et al., 2011; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Rowe & Kirkpatrick, 2018; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Almost a quarter-century ago, Rigney suggested that “Indigenous people are at a stage where they want research [evaluation] and research [evaluation] design to contribute to their self-determination and liberation struggles, as it is defined by their communities” (as cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 54). This call has been renewed by Cram, Tibbetts, and LaFrance (2018, p. 11), who state: “the time is now for Indigenous Evaluation (IE) . . . the time is right for asserting Indigenous paradigms, methodologies, and methods for evaluation, evaluation capacity building, and research on evaluation.” It is the intent of EvalIndigenous to advance these Indigenous paradigms and processes.

**EVALINDIGENOUS: OUR ROOTS**

There are multiple Indigenous, critical, and decolonization theories that inform the work of EvalIndigenous (Bowman, 2018; Bowman et al., 2015; Chandna et al., 2019; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2010; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Mertens, Cram, & Chilisa, 2013; Smith, 2012; Wehipeihana, Bailey, Davidson, & McKegg, 2014). EvalIndigenous is firmly rooted in community-centred and culturally responsive Indigenous foundations that apply to the communities and nations in the Indigenous Global North and South. Indigenous theories and practices being done “for us and by us” are the community bedrock upon which EvalIndigenous was founded. Tribal Critical Theory (TCT) (Brayboy, 2005) provides a living Indigenous framework that is seen in much of the work of EvalIndigenous. Succinctly, the TCT tenets are as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. or other nation/state policies toward Indigenous people are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous identity is both political and cultural.
4. Indigenous people have rights to tribal sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. Culture, knowledge, and power have different meanings through Indigenous lenses.

6. Government and education or other policies for Indigenous people are linked to the problematic goal of assimilation.

7. Cultural traditions and philosophies are central to the lived realities, differences, and adaptability of Indigenous people.

8. Theories and stories are not separate but are legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways, so scholars must work toward social change.

EvalIndigenous recognizes continual impacts of colonization (past and present) and intentionally privileges Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, cultural, and traditional protocols. Also, the linguistic and clan or family practices help to carry out and sustain meaningful evaluation within local contexts. Beyond the cultural, traditional, and community-centred foundations, EvalIndigenous also recognizes and incorporates the legal, political, and human rights components of conducting effective evaluations with Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous populations (Barker, 2005; Bowman & Dodge-Francis, 2018; Echo-Hawk, 2013).

Not all Indigenous populations globally have Tribal or First Nations governments. However, all Indigenous populations have unique human rights as outlined in article 43 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2008). Therefore, more recent scholars have called for “nation to nation” evaluations (Bowman, 2019; Shepherd & McCurry, 2018) that call for a co-production framework as part of a broader global call to action for protection of treaty rights (Reinhardt, 2008) and data sovereignty (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016), where Tribal Nations create resolutions and ordinances for protections in research, policy, evaluation, and government studies (National Congress of American Indians, 2006–2019).

Building on TCT, nation-to-nation evaluations can be applied to systems, processes, and governance arrangements. They theorize how to conduct the work of EvalIndigenous when working with sustainable development goals (SDG), EvalSDG and EvalPartners’ global efforts, and/or other evaluation parliamentarians and related VOPE initiatives (e.g., Blue Marble Group, CES’s Diversity Working Group, AEA’s Evaluation Policy Task Force). Working in a “nation-to-nation” orientation should be a professional, inclusive, and ethical effort for all VOPEs and/or global EvalPartners initiatives. One way of approaching this relationship is through Tribal Critical Systems Theory (TCST), which is described below (Bowman, in press). This theory may present an opportunity for non-Tribal partners to reflect and reconsider how they design and implement their future evaluation work:

1. The political power of public governments (i.e., nation/states) was achieved and is sustained through illegal, unjust, and unethical means.
2. Public government (i.e., nation/state) constitutions and policies are founded on Christianity and the Doctrine of Discovery. Neither considered Indigenous people as humans. Currently, both ideologies continue to manifest through directly related federal, international, and case law.

3. Tribal/First Nations governments and people are the only racial/ethnic group that has inherent political and legal rights equal to U.S. federal and international governments through treaties and constitutional law.

4. By United Nations (UN) Resolution, the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2008) provides 46 articles that outline the global rights of Indigenous people and Tribal/First Nations, which most countries have formally adopted.

5. Culture, knowledge, and power are defined uniquely and locally through both traditional Indigenous governments and contemporary Tribal/First Nations constitutions, ordinances, policies, and community practices.

6. Tribal/First Nation government and educational policies are strengths-based rather than critical or focus on deficits, and locally defined. Most importantly, these policies carry equal (or more) influence in federal (or state and municipal) public policy decision making and non-Tribal federal (or state and municipal) government contexts.

7. Traditional, cultural, and community-based philosophies, knowledge, and practices are the foundation of contemporary Tribal/First Nations governments who are working with non-Tribal governments to create responsive, effective, and sustainable systems, institutional policy changes, and implementation strategies.

8. Traditional history and knowledge that are orally transferred are essential to the scholarly and culturally responsive development and implementation of more effective policies, programs, and models.

9. Evaluating, generating, and replicating more effective Tribal/non-Tribal governance models that theoretically and practically provide better supports, improvements, and outcomes for sustained positive changes in Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous communities is a professional and ethical responsibility for all government, nonprofit, and academic partners.

Traditional knowledge and culture embedded in a community context along with the unique legal and political rights of Indigenous people are the guiding foundations to the work that EvalIndigenous carries out daily. These principles are actively applied through two working groups, which are described next. The broader EvalIndigenous membership works to implement the 2020 Agenda and current strategic plan that considers epistemologies and methods in all of their work.

In 2016, EvalIndigenous work helped create a draft foundational document as part of the “Global Context for Evaluation” work group. The foundational document is updated regularly and includes ongoing discussions and annual updates culminating in the EvalIndigenous 2020 Action Plan. Currently, this document is being reviewed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
Organization (UNESCO) as a potential paper to be published for the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages initiative (UNESCO, n.d.).

Additionally, a second “Global Practitioner” working group was formed so that the voices from grassroots Indigenous communities could be heard. Facilitated by EvalIndigenous members, the Global Practitioner group interviews Indigenous evaluators and documents evaluations conducted in the field. This groundbreaking *Indigenous Voices Project* commenced in 2016 (EvalPartners, n.d.) and is ongoing in an effort to better understand community-led evaluation activities in the Global North and South. The perspectives of the local evaluators in community and cultural contexts are being documented and understood through the *Indigenous Voices Project*. This is a critical aspect missing in practitioner or academic conversations and publications. Information is used not only to celebrate the diversity of Indigenous evaluators and their varied ways to design and implement studies “by and for” Indigenous communities globally, but also to value and celebrate the community context, cultural protocols, and traditional knowledge as the foundation to all aspects of an evaluation. It connects the academic or global policy work that EvalIndigenous carries out with VOPEs and the Global Parliamentarian Forum. Furthermore, the information collected from the *Indigenous Voices Project* interviews will be used to educate funders about how and who they could potentially fund to conduct evaluations in Indigenous communities. This will likely take many forms, such as person-to-person conversations, information pamphlets, social media, and webinars.

In the next section, several examples of current EvalIndigenous activities will be shared, including more information about the *Indigenous Voices Project*. They are intended to highlight how valuing and utilizing evaluation in Indigenous contexts and epistemologies can improve the appropriateness of evaluation designs and methods.

**EVALINDIGENOUS: OUR PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

_Indigenous Voices Project_

Gaudry (2011) describes evaluation as an “extractive” process in which individuals are viewed as being “participants” or “informants” and where knowledge is “extracted.” Contrarily, EvalIndigenous wants to build on the foundation of the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous peoples around the world through the *Indigenous Voices Project*. This project provides stories that document and promote the use of different Indigenous evaluation approaches. To date, 27 interviews have been recorded. Eight countries are represented, including: Australia, the continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, South Africa, Cameroon, New Zealand, Canada, Papua New Guinea, and China. The intent of this project is to showcase the voices of Indigenous evaluation practitioners in the field.

For example, one participant in the *Indigenous Voices Project*, a member of the Yanakuna people from Colombia, described how they as a people are “recovering
their roots” which were lost due to slavery and colonization. The recovery process has included regaining their symbols, fighting for their autonomy/sovereignty, and “recovering and healing from the pain caused by colonization.” When evaluating from a “Yanakuna cosmosvision” perspective, it was explained that they use a system of chacana, which is the star of the south, as a model of life. The chacana has four quadrants that are divided into two: the world above and the world below. The world above is the spiritual world and the world below is the material world. It was explained that, in contrast to Western approaches to evaluation, the Yanakuna approach includes the values of unity, autonomy, and culture. Specifically, the respondent said,

“It is not like western evaluation, which is before, during and after. Instead we are revising ourselves constantly in order to strengthen that unity and the autonomy. . . . When we think of something that can transform our existence that is why we evaluate, to reflect, to change our existence and to strengthen ourselves. We must look at ourselves in a comprehensive way; where do we want to lead our well-living existence in relation to the material well-being and the spiritual well-being . . . so evaluation for us is not just a moment as it is conceived from a western perspective. (EvalIndigenous, 2019b)

A respondent who is Pastos (Pastos communities are located in Ecuador and Colombia) highlighted the importance of relationality, which is similar to the Yanakuna people:

The Pastos Indigenous cosmosvision sees everything holistically . . . we talk about harmony and an equilibrium which should exist in our community and within our people. Dissonance and imbalance are to our Indigenous people an indicator, a bad symptom which tells us something is wrong. (EvalIndigenous, 2019c)

The importance of spirituality, harmony, culture, unity, and sovereignty and how they are related are highlighted in these two interviews. These voices and others involved in the Indigenous Voices Project will be used to increase awareness of Indigenous practice, processes, and protocols. Additionally, this project will inform and educate funders about the importance of Indigenous worldviews and Indigenous-led evaluation in Indigenous communities.


In February 2019, the Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Evaluation took place in Rotorua, New Zealand. EvalIndigenous was a sponsor for the conference, and several members of EvalIndigenous attended this global evaluation gathering. Approximately 120 individuals attended, the majority being Indigenous. Participants came from Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, the continental United States, Hawaii, Alaska, Cameroon, Canada, Samoa, and within the Arctic Circle. There were over 100 tribes/Tribal Nations represented. There were four keynote speakers, 18 presenters, and four Elders (the Kahui Pakeke). The importance of traditional knowledge was stressed throughout the conference, and all of the conference presentations can be seen on the Mā te Rae Facebook page (Mā te Rae – Māori
Participants centred, re-awakened, and upheld their traditional knowledge. It was not only an act of celebrating the timeless wisdom of ancestors but also an intentional act of decolonization. As Indigenous evaluation grows, rooted in traditional teachings and cultural/linguistic practices, capacity is being built, as well as a practical legacy nurtured and sustained for the next seven generations.

**United Nations and Indigenous populations activities (2019)**

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) was established in 2000 and is headquartered in New York City (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, n.d.b). The 18th session of the UNPFII was held in April 2019 (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2019). Prior to the session, a group of Indigenous leaders and evaluators gathered to develop indicators of success for UNPFII environmental and community-led activities. Over 20 Indigenous members from nine different countries gathered. They shared models of success, discussed and developed ways to gather data to measure it, and continue to work toward developing a response to the sustainable development goals and programming being carried out by the UN nations/states globally. The gathering emphasized the requirement to include culturally responsive indicators) and to ensure the visibility and inclusion of Indigenous voices and First Nations governments in global activities regarding sustaining the planet and natural resources. EvalIndigenous asked three of its members to attend and participate in this meeting. Piloting of models, metrics, and a UNPFII Indicator Convening Report will be completed in 2019, through the leadership of Dr. Eleanor Sterling, Chief Research Scientist, Center for Biodiversity and Conservation, American Museum of Natural History in New York City (American Museum of Natural History, n.d.). These performance metrics, Indigenous evaluation strategies, and nation-to-nation advocacy efforts, for the inclusion of Tribal/First Nations, are an ongoing part of EvalIndigenous members’ work in their national VOPE activities. They are also highlighted in the work of EvalIndigenous with global EvalPartner and EvalSDG activities, and as part of an intentional outreach strategy at annual conferences of national evaluation societies. Consistently, EvalIndigenous strives to present, publish, and call meetings with global leadership to ensure that Indigenous voices and Tribal/First Nations continue to be included in these field of evaluation and policy discussions.

A second major activity with the UN is the submission of an EvalIndigenous language paper. This is in response to UNESCO’s 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) (United Nations, n.d.). Political, cultural, and geographic diversity of the membership and work of EvalIndigenous underscored the necessity to be responsive to IYIL. The paper highlighted genuine community-centred and language-driven projects that weave together evaluation, traditional ecological knowledge, and effective practices of local Indigenous evaluators. The paper, *EvalIndigenous Dreamweavers: Embedding Language, Culture, and Community in the Global North and South*, was submitted in March 2019. It contains case studies.
that illustrate the work of EvalIndigenous and members using language, cultural protocols, and traditional knowledge for evaluation. If selected, the EvalIndigenous Dreamweaver paper will be published and shared as part of UNESCO’s 2019 IYIL. The purposes of submitting this paper are to

1. provide an awareness of, access to, and inclusion of multiple geographic contexts (Indigenous Global North and South), thereby illuminating the intersectionality and diversity that Indigenous scholars, practitioners, and community members bring to language and evaluation activities;
2. build awareness and appreciation of the collaborative and effective work of multiple Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners and stakeholders through culturally responsive evaluation and language projects;
3. provide a multidisciplinary evidence base to document how the use of tribal critical and Indigenous theories, methods, and practices lead to more effective policy, studies, and practices of evaluation leaders, scholars, and practitioners;
4. utilize evaluation case studies and activities to better support the implementation, governance and policy understandings, and evidence base regarding the 2008 UNDRIP; and
5. offer new global paradigms from diverse Indigenous perspectives and language/evaluation practices to inform the gaps in the literature base so that the broader global society can utilize more effective and responsive human rights, peace, and reconciliation efforts when working with Indigenous peoples and Tribal/First Nations governments, in the future.

Given these examples of EvalIndigenous activities, the next section concludes with key discussion points for the larger field of evaluation to consider. There are concrete ways to get involved right away. Some mid- to long-range thoughts for active and strategic participation with partners and allies of EvalIndigenous are provided. These short- and longer-term suggestions for professional practice, partnership building, developing policies, and systemic capacities are then shared.

**EVALINDIGENOUS: FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE BROADER FIELD OF EVALUATION**

The VOPE survey indicated work that should be undertaken with VOPEs. In some cases, it may be to increase understanding of who Indigenous peoples are in their jurisdictions. This may be a complex and long process, given the systems, subsystems, and governance and practice by each Indigenous community or First/Tribal Nation, but it is possible, as demonstrated by the work of EvalIndigenous and the published scholarship of the EvalIndigenous global work group members.

Next, there is work to be done to introduce VOPEs to Indigenous approaches to evaluation, building reciprocal and sustainable partnerships, and including appropriate cultural and legal protocols, policies, and processes. Using the VOPE
survey data intentionally, in publications, initiatives, policy position papers, or for policy and leadership planning discussions, is an important step forward. We believe that continued use of this survey will help document whether Indigenous people and Nations are becoming members of VOPEs. Furthermore, the survey will indicate if VOPEs working with Indigenous peoples and communities are using guidelines in their work. It is also important that the work of the *Indigenous Voices Project* must be disseminated and used as a resource by VOPEs to cultivate better understanding and use of different evaluation approaches and methods. This will help to ensure that evaluators and evaluations are authentic and inclusive. Dissemination must occur through a variety of vehicles, such as presentations at conferences, webinars, person-to-person conversations, information pamphlets, and social media.

It will be an excellent start to get to know the existing data and testimonials of the *Indigenous Voices Project* participants. Utilizing the leadership and political motivation of VOPEs to continue gathering data would provide a deeper level of commitment to Indigenous inclusion in nation/state efforts. Having testimonials become part of the election process for leadership and key policy or evaluation task forces is critical to relationship building and effective evaluation leadership, policy, and practice.

A long-term goal of EvalIndigenous is also to promote Indigenous peoples’ self-determination of their evaluation agenda. This may be a locally created agenda, within Indigenous populations belonging to a VOPE, or broadly as part of EvalIndigenous and EvalPartners’ 2030 work. Alternatively, it may be developed by Indigenous organizations and/or Tribal/First Nations as they see fit, which may exist outside the confines of the evaluation professional groups. The work of the *Indigenous Voices Project* will provide evidence to funders that Western approaches to evaluation are inappropriate for Indigenous peoples living in Indigenous communities.

Using the UNDRIP articles within governance, evaluation standards, professional credentialing, and evaluation policy and planning (e.g., EvalSDG) is very important to supporting a longer-term reconciliation agenda. For example, direct inclusion of sovereign Tribal/First Nations (over 1,000 in North America) and Indigenous communities/organizations in the EvalSDG 2030 plan is warranted. It may also be possible to include UNDRIP as a crosswalk, capacity-building, and monitoring effort in all EvalSDG publications and activities regarding the 2030 agenda or other global initiatives. This would build the institutional and systemic capacities of the field of evaluation leaders, VOPEs, parliamentarians, academics, and practitioners. Resources must be appropriate to build capacity; this will take time. Inclusion in organizational strategic planning and operational practices support this intentional effort by VOPEs. Evaluation can build on the communities’ spiritual cultural and social values, while supporting cultural resurgence. The focus of an Indigenous approach should not be individuals, competition, and independence (i.e., positivist and western or colonized approaches) but should be about relationships, interdependence, and the community/collective vision...
for what counts as success, evidence, and important to document and learn from. While many different methods can be utilized, it must be based on an Indigenous evaluation paradigm. As noted by Wilson (2008), Indigenous evaluation must leave behind the dominant paradigms and follow an Indigenous evaluation paradigm:

This paradigm is a circle made up of four interrelated entities: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. The entire circle is an Indigenous research paradigm. Its entities are inseparable and blend from one to the next. The whole paradigm is greater than the sum of its parts. . . . Relationality seems to sum up the whole Indigenous research paradigm . . . an Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability. (Wilson, 2008, p. 70)

In conclusion, a joint effort of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners is needed to create positive and sustained change at the individual, policy, and systems levels (i.e., nation-to-nation means Tribal Nations being included and treated equally, as the UN does for any nation/state work) regarding Indigenous evaluation. Intentional relationship and systems development (i.e., international, national, and tribal governments) must occur in order for sustained change to be realized. To begin, UNDRIP must be included in all EvalPartners activities, and Tribal Nations must have representation as part of VOPEs, EvalPartners, and UN-related evaluation work. Evaluation culture and practices must move beyond typical networking to more non-Indigenous leadership (e.g., Global Parliamentarian Forum, VOPE leaders, EvalPartners), explicitly including Indigenous people and Tribal/First Nations. The colonial Conquer Model (Newcomb, 2008) of doing our work must not continue to be replicated by ignorance or exclusion of EvalIndigenous and Indigenous people and governments. Failure to equally include Indigenous participation politically, culturally, and practically in evaluation policy and initiatives means that the same negative practices of the past are being reinforced and will continue. Together the field of evaluation can move forward and start a new era, using a reconciliation lens, working collaboratively and more effectively for a better future.

NOTE
1 The views expressed in this article reflect those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of EvalPartners or EvalIndigenous.

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**AUTHOR INFORMATION**

Larry Bremner is a Métis man whose great-grandmother, Rose Boucher, was born in 1867 in St. Francis Xavier, Manitoba. She moved with her parents by ox team to St. Louis, Saskatchewan, in 1882. In 1883, she married Moise Bremner. On November 19, 1883, Moise, his father William, and 28 other Métis signed a petition, protesting the 1883 Order in Council transferring the Métis lands at St. Louis to the Prince Albert Colonization Company; the petition was ignored by the Canadian government. During the 1885 Métis Resistance at Batoche, Moise was a member of Captain Baptiste Boucher’s company, one of the 19 dizaines (groups of 10 people) led by Gabriel Dumont. After the resistance at Batoche, the family moved to the United States, returning to what is now Saskatchewan after the Canadian government granted amnesty. They homesteaded in Domremy, Saskatchewan, in 1905. Larry is a former Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) National President, CES Fellow, and award-winner. Larry established Proactive Information Services Inc. in 1984 to provide evaluation services to the not-for-profit and public sectors. He has worked across Canada in urban, rural, remote communities, Indigenous communities, as well as in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Mongolia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Larry was the driving force behind the creation of EvalIndigenous and its first Chair.
Nicole Bowman-Farrell is a traditionally practicing Mohican and Lunaape (Delaware) Indigenous community member. Her spirit name is Waapalaneexkweew (wah-pah-lah-nay-wook; Flying Eagle Woman) Neeka ha (knee-kah-ha; she is) Newetkaski (Nah-wet-tah-kah-see; accompanied by) Newa (nay-wah; four) Opalanwuuk (oh-pah-lun-knee-aye-wook; Eagles). For over two decades, Dr. Bowman has utilized traditional Indigenous knowledge and theories to inform her policy, evaluation, and professional practice at a project and nation-to-nation level between Tribal and non-Tribal Governments. Dr. Bowman received AEA’s 2018 Robert Ingle Service Award (first Indigenous awardee) and works in services to build the capacities, knowledge, and skills of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders so that mutual and respectful relations result in more impactful and sustainable changes. She is a member of the Blue Marble Global Evaluators (2019) and has served as the American Evaluation Association’s (AEA) Chair or Co-Chair for the Indigenous Peoples in Evaluation since 2015. Since 2016 she has been serving as AEA’s representative for the International Working Group (IWG) and has an appointment on EvalIndigenous (sub-task force of EvalPartners). Dr. Bowman received her PhD (in 2015) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she was on academic fellowship. Currently, she is employed by the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a culturally responsive evaluator. She is also the President/Founder of Bowman Performance Consulting in Shawano, Wisconsin.
Identifying Key Epistemological Challenges
Evaluating in Indigenous Contexts: Achieving Bimaadiziwin through Youth Futures

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Abstract: The evaluation field’s understanding of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies must improve in ways that do not serve to privilege Western ways of knowing or governmental priorities for accountability. The literature has not identified ways to bridge these in practical ways, or to move the field to balance community and government needs. This article describes some prevailing epistemological and methodological issues related to evaluation and then identifies practical challenges bridging Western and Indigenous approaches, using the example of the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership project (IYFP), a seven-year SSHRC-sponsored grant. It is suggested that there are approaches that work well in these contexts but that agency is vitally important to establish reciprocity.

Keywords: community-based evaluation, Indigenous epistemology, Indigenous evaluation, Indigenous youth, transformative evaluation

Although there has been an increased demand for effective evaluation practice in Indigenous contexts (Cram, Chilisa, & Mertens, 2016; Cram & Mertens, 2015), the imposition of Western post-positivist approaches has been predominant in
governmental evaluations, with the result that the value of evaluation for policy-making conducted in these contexts is limited at best (Bowman, 2017; Chilisa, 2012; Mertens, 2018). Kovach (2009) argues that Indigenous research, including by extension Indigenous evaluation, is premised on Indigenous ways of knowing that are not homogenous but rather based in tribal cultures. She explains that Indigenous identities must be acknowledged in the research effort out of respect. Although Indigenous epistemologies vary by context and conditions, Kovach suggests that there are commonly held, enduring beliefs that provide a picture of a holistic worldview that values relations over science and values cultural protocols and norms. Such worldviews are distinct from other worldviews, even for other cultural minority groups.

This article focuses on the need for, and the associated challenges of, bridging Indigenous and Western evaluation methods in Indigenous contexts. We provide a theoretical exploration of these differences and illustrate some of the issues through a discussion of the work of the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership (IYFP), which is a community-based research project that aims to understand how to create sustainable conditions for First Nations youth to flourish and become leaders in their own communities. We are both co-investigators in this project. We are academics of settler background with collectively over 60 years of experience in community-based research with Indigenous peoples, including research intended to inform public policy. The authors have worked with communities in trauma in the past, and with the necessity of connecting or bridging community experiences with public policymaking so that better approaches can be designed and considered for implementation. We understand that policymaking with respect to Indigenous communities often lacks the benefit of context, and we recognize difference as important.

The first section of the article describes key challenges when evaluating in Indigenous contexts that extend from epistemological and ontological difference, as described in the introduction to this volume. We use the literature to provide a generalized understanding of the key differences and indicate where Western post-positivist scientific approaches may not always be compatible or even desirable in the practice of evaluation in Indigenous contexts. We then provide a description of the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership project and a glimpse into some of the challenges and lessons we have learned carrying out evaluation practice in Indigenous contexts through our experience at the mid-point of our seven-year project. In particular, we explore how the social sciences understand power relations and how co-production approaches have an influence. We highlight the way in which instrumental concepts such as building trust, generating strength-based community capabilities, and working with patience and different conceptions of time make a difference in realizing evaluation results. We conclude our paper by outlining where we see the IYFP project moving, based on our experiences thus far.

**RECOGNIZING METHODOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE: KEY IDEAS**

The literature identifies several areas where there may be challenges in bridging Western and Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in the conduct of evaluations.
in community contexts. Some of these are described as framing research designs in the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership project.

In order to bridge difference and fully embrace the fundamental principles underlying Indigenous epistemologies, Smith (1999[MM1], p. 4) maintains that for Indigenous nations and communities to survive, research and evaluation must ultimately serve the purpose of remaking those communities “within a wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice.” Part of this space-making involves the establishment of local research protocols and the creation of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2001) that adhere broadly to the following:

- building respectful relationships between the topic of research and the researcher;
- ensuring that methodologies are respectful of relationships with participants;
- creating stronger joint relationships with the ideas being shared;
- defining carefully the roles and responsibilities of the researcher;
- ensuring self-awareness as a researcher regarding relationships with participants; and
- determining the reciprocal benefits of the research, including creating the conditions for growth, learning and sharing. (Wilson, 2008, p. 77)

In addition to these considerations that apply especially in Indigenous contexts, universal scientific research principles also hold that researchers have to comply with what is legally appropriate, ethical principles must be respected, data must be gathered according to sound methodological rules (Groh, 2018). The unique challenge of accomplishing this with respect to evaluation in Indigenous contexts is that, as researchers and evaluators, we may interpret perceptions of difference in ways consistent with our own cultures of origin, which may lead to erroneous conclusions because we lack an understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing. As a result, vigilant self-scrutiny regarding the premises of those interpretations must occur, and we must invest time to understand local contexts. Equally important, correlations that may be regarded as obvious in one’s own context may not be applicable in the other as a result, especially in Indigenous contexts (Groh, 2018, p. 108).

Some important methodological choices have to be acknowledged when working in Indigenous contexts, each of which will be illustrated in our discussion of the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership project. First, there are many ways to understand cultural insights, but a common point of reference is recognizing different epistemological traditions with respect to a focus on the specific versus the general. Groh (2018, p. 109) explains that a central objective of cross-cultural research “is the search for culturally specific versus universal phenomena,” meaning that the researcher must be able to distinguish between what characteristics can be explained in some cultures versus in all cultures. The advantage is that this allows researchers to detect social and other cultural patterns with the objects of
study that may be used to examine whether these exist in other cultures. However, this is a Western approach that treats culture as an independent variable, rather than an approach that views relationships as something to be explored (Bortolin, 2011). One resulting weakness in applying Western approaches in this context can be observed in sampling techniques. Sampling subsets of populations according to Western approaches is based on the assumption that some subset would characterize the whole, given an appropriate sample selection and size (Chilisa, 2012; Hofstede, 2001). However, in colonized subsets of populations such as Indigenous communities in Canada (Borrows, 2016[MM2]), any assumptions regarding application to the whole most likely would not hold, even between one nation or community and another (Bowman, 2017).

Second, choices and means of data collection are a fundamental consideration. In Indigenous epistemologies that value relationships, qualitative empirical data is more likely to be valued more highly than quantitative data, which may be at odds with what constitutes sound evidence in post-positivist or other forms of Western-based evaluation. Realistically, quantitative data may not be available or may be considered less reliable. If quantitative data can be collected, then it must be based on full, free, prior and informed consent as it respects UNDRIP (United Nations, 2008, p. 32) and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethics in Research (TCPS-2) (Canada, 2014). Communities should therefore be involved in the design of data collection that matters to them. Even in qualitative studies, the means of data collection must be considered carefully so as not to destabilize traditional cultures, must be as non-invasive as possible, and must respect the tenets of informed consent.

Third, notions of validity may be considered by Western-trained evaluators as important when one considers that “all the psychological mechanisms are at work that have an influence on perception, interpretation, and resulting behaviour” (Groh, 2018, p. 115). For Groh (2018[MM3]), researchers with globalized experience are highly valued by Indigenous communities and leaders, and their mere presence exerts influence. Being vigilant about one’s own influence is critical for building respectful relationships, as local populations may subjugate their own influences due to beliefs of their own inferiority and thinking that they cannot compete with globalized researchers on their terms, which may contribute validity problems (Groh, 2018, p. 116). Researchers trained in the Western tradition must be mindful that their actions are not neutral. Careful thought must be given to balancing reactions to one’s presence and behaviour in a dynamic and constantly changing series of interactions in a community. Various forms of internal and external validity should be addressed insofar as real-life situations can be regarded as valid (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). As indicated in the introduction to this special issue, there has to be a change in mindset on the part of Western researchers to work with communities, and not to identify these as research objects in the positivist sense (Wehipeihana, 2018).

Fourth, Western notions of reliability reflect a post-positivist idea that repeated investigations yield the same results regardless of context, circumstances, measurements, and other factors. This is particularly important when designing
and assessing program interventions that hold the promise of supporting local priorities. Although the prevailing literature on Indigenous approaches to evaluation highlight the importance of local context over generalizability (Cram et al., 2016) or even suggest that attempts at generalizability are not a major goal or consideration (Bowman, 2017), Western approaches would suggest that if reliability is ignored, then Groh (2018, p. 119) maintains that “this could lead to a case of false alarm, so that interventions would take place, which interfere with the Indigenous people concerned and, in effect, destabilize their social system; or the necessity of interventions could be overlooked, so that the chance of intervention would be missed and the suffering of the Indigenous community would continue or even worsen.” Governmental evaluation still places great value on the attempt to generalize so that there is some coherence in public policymaking and the design of appropriate programs that serve as many communities as possible. The value of generalizability may be tempered by repeated visits to local contexts in order to mitigate the effects of desires to generalize in ways that might harm communities. Local precision thus becomes a shared learning opportunity.

Fifth, the objectivity of findings is important for supporting whether research findings pertain fully to the issue or object of study. Objectivity is said to be established when the researcher has no influence on results, and it is a necessary condition of any scientific study (Shadish et al., 2002). In Indigenous contexts, objectivity means reducing the cultural influence of the researcher. For example, one would not want local participants to behave any differently whether the researcher is there or not, which would also be an internal validity consideration. Another validity consideration is being clear about the evaluative criteria being applied in the study, so as to reduce comparability errors across researcher interactions. Properly and accurately describing the research methodology is critical to valid research in Indigenous contexts (Battiste, 2007).

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCE: THE INDIGENOUS YOUTH FUTURES PARTNERSHIP

The Indigenous Youth Partnership project (IYFP) was established in 2016 and funded by the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for seven years. The IYFP project team is composed of several university researchers, First Nation communities and organizations, and nonprofit groups. It began working with self-identified communities in the Sioux Lookout zone in northwestern Ontario: Bearskin Lake First Nation, Kasabonika Lake First Nation, Fort Severn First Nation, and Mishkeegogamang First Nation. The project is being led by Carleton University and a principal regional partner—the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA).

The project’s principal aim is to work with communities and First Nation organizations to understand the conditions necessary to create resilient communities that enable the next generation to address the effects of intergenerational and other traumas, to lead a good life, and to become the next generations of leaders,
in the broadest sense. The project understands “resilience” to mean the “ability of systems and people to effectively respond and adapt to changing circumstances and to develop skills, capacities, behaviours, and actions to deal with adversity.” As a process, resilience means the ability to withstand significant social and other shocks (IFRC, 2014). From an evaluative standpoint, such shocks can be mitigated through the strength of programmatic interventions, partnerships, effective communication and education strategies, community-based and community-led projects, and longer-term programs that build on past interventions. Each of these elements can be evaluated with the singular goal of creating stronger communities along theories of change that are community designed and guided. Ultimately, the point of resilient communities and youth is to reach a state of bimaadiziwin (Toulouse, 2001) an Ojibwe word that translates roughly into a lived notion of the good life in the most holistic sense. The concept embodies the ideas of both becoming healthy in spirit and body, and living a healthy life, having achieved balance through well-being and nurturing healthy relationships.

The research component of IYFP works to understand two equal and parallel inquiries: a set of framing research questions that focus on knowledge about bimaadiziwin, and a set of community-focused questions that deal with what communities do to create bimaadiziwin, why they make the choices they do, and how they evaluate progress. Figure 1 shows our research questions and the relationship among them.

At the same time, the project is very engaged with communities on a practical level. IYFP was founded on the idea that a multidisciplinary team of researchers (including anthropologists, geographers, public policy and administration specialists, and psychologists, just to name a few) teaming up with a variety of health and social service organizations in the Sioux Lookout region could offer expertise and resources that communities could access to assist them as they proceed along their path to bimaadiziwin. IYFP researchers have, for example, been working to support communities as they develop the concept for a youth centre, while others are creating strategies to engage youth in developing the confidence and social skills to pursue their aspirations, and others are making salient the linkages among youth to be peer supports.

At yet another level, the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership has a policy component. The objective is to build on community initiatives and experiences to contribute to improving institutional and program arrangements and achieving better public policy over the longer term. This will be achieved by holding a series of policy forums with key partners in the project, and with the federal and provincial governments to move conversations about community-based governance and programming forward in policy dialogues.

The project is governed by a Steering Committee of policy and community experts (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), whose role is not necessarily to direct the project but rather to flag any epistemological and methodological opportunities that could be pursued to promote the project’s goals, or any concerns it believes could cause harm to the project’s participants and partners.
committee has been meeting twice annually. The routine work is guided by a Program Committee that pays attention to matters of research planning, research streams or activities, data gathering and analysis, reporting, and evaluation. It meets three times annually. There are sub-committees that meet on an as-needed basis, including an evaluation committee that has contributed to ongoing research planning, research metrics, and providing advice on appropriate evaluation approaches. Most notably, it created meta-theories of change that provide guidance on the various streams of research. Each major theory of change is further elaborated by more detailed sub-theories of change, as shown in Figure 2. The meta-theory of change is described generally as follows:

- If the team can create understanding of ways of knowing and understanding (as appropriate in the communities we are working with), then an appropriate relationship can be established between the team and communities to work with youth.
- If such relationships can be established, then the capabilities of communities can be better understood from a youth perspective at the social, economic, and collective levels of analysis.
- If these capabilities can be captured using various tools such as asset mapping (Haines, 2015), then youth can be empowered through good
information to create opportunities for greater engagement with programs, services, and community leaders to build for their futures.

- If capabilities can be strengthened for the future, youth are better positioned to assume effective community roles and contribute to the well-being of youth in their communities.
- If such capabilities and participation can be generated, then the conditions for resilience can also be strengthened.

The challenges of working through such theories of change from the standpoint of the research project are significant, and the research challenges raised earlier are pertinent; this is the subject of the next section, based on our evaluation experiences so far. As resilience is our major focus, the subjects of evaluation (evaluands) are several. At this point in our project, the most significant of these is youth engagement and intersections with youth programs at the community level.

To understand engagement, two communities (Fort Severn and Kasabonika Lake) have established youth apprenticeship programs. These aim to recruit and work with youth in their late teens or early 20s who have, at a minimum, graduated from high school. Their role is to establish the means to gather information and work with youth in their communities. Their main role in the early stages of the IYFP is to help guide community mapping of the assets within communities.
(e.g., programs, places, people) that contribute to community life. This element of the project provides some epistemological, methodological, and ethical challenges in identifying what youth consider to be their main points of programming and contact. Separating the evaluation function from the identification function has been important at this stage.

Each of the two communities has approached the governance of youth apprentices in different ways. In Fort Severn, the Chief has taken direct interest in the work of two youth apprentices and has established informal means to guide their work through a mentor who was associated with the project and had familial ties to the community. The youth regularly consult with and are guided by the mentor and a faculty member from the project, who regularly visit the community and take part in their efforts.

In Kasabonika Lake, four youth have been engaged: two through IYFP and two funded by the Choose Life program (a federally funded but community-based program designed to provide youth at risk with activities). Two faculty members are responsible for guiding their research activities. In addition, the work of the apprentices is assisted by a community-identified “mentoring committee” comprising six leaders from various social program areas and the councillor responsible for youth programs. The role of the mentoring committee is twofold: to provide ongoing support to the youth when faculty members are not in the community, and to ensure that the youth activities have the support and commitment of the wider community.

In both communities, the youth apprentices use various tools to access other youth, including social media platforms such as Facebook, attending various community events and festivals, organizing activities and events that attract youth from different age groups to participate in data gathering, and working regularly with the school through organized events or organizing their own events. Information about what programs youth regularly know about and access is obtained from various age groups. The data from these different cohorts are treated separately for the time being, until they can be analyzed. The apprentices participate in regular discussion and training sessions with faculty in areas such as research ethics (e.g., consent, confidentiality, and data storage), basic qualitative research methods, PhotoVoice (i.e., as a data-gathering approach), and approaches to communications (between the team and fellow youth, as well as community leaders). In Fort Severn, youth apprentices have been engaged in an extensive training program on media.

The apprenticeship program, and larger efforts by the team to work with community leaders and representatives on youth programs, is the focus of the next section. It attempts to highlight the challenges already identified, as well as the evaluative approaches and tools that have been or could be used potentially to work through them. It is important to note that the project’s evaluative activities are still in their infancy in these communities, which means that a great deal of experimentation is occurring around the choice of evaluative tools and approaches, and their strengths and limitations in Indigenous contexts.
NAVIGATING DIFFERENCE: APPLYING EVALUATION APPROACHES

Addressing the challenges of cross-cultural research and objectivity

Several challenges have been observed and experienced by the IYFP team in their efforts to establish their research programs within communities. These challenges relate to evaluating programs and services, governance arrangements, tools and instruments, engagement, protocols, or relationships of various sorts depending on the community’s needs.

One of the main challenges of the IYFP partnership, which comprises both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, is gaining knowledge and understanding of the communities themselves. Most of the principal researchers have several years of experience with Indigenous communities and organizations, but it still takes time to create effective working trust relationships.

A major challenge of cross-cultural research is addressing the notion that all research has to be generalizable in some way in order for it to be considered valid epistemologically and methodologically (Chilisa, 2012). However, this thinking is limited and limiting in the sense that research and evaluation in Indigenous contexts both within and between communities are about understanding coherence and balance between body, mind, and spirit (Wilbur, 2000), or what some Indigenous scholars have called the “interior” and “exterior” (or “outside”) to life and its experiences (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; DeChardin, 1959), while others refer to understanding, perception, and intelligence (Cram, Pipi, & Paipa, 2018), and still others to the “holographic universe” (Meyer, 2016). The outside is the physical, empirical, and objective side, whereas the interior is the mental, hermeneutic, and subjective side.

The concerns of Meyer (2016) that one has to understand what is distinct before one can compare are well founded, but there is a predisposition on the part of Western positivist science to create sampling plans in advance of fieldwork that account for ways to compare. In the IYFP project, such plans are not possible until the “distinct” is determined by understanding culture, context, and conditions. That said, some planning is possible to adjust to Indigenous epistemologies, including building theories of change in a dynamic way over several community visits. This is contrary to practices outlined in the literature that often call for these to be created in advance, with assumptions pre-identified through pre-consultation efforts and tested in the field (Funnell & Rogers, 2011).

In order to bridge these approaches, the IYFP has created research agreements with communities, including protocols for collaboration and data collection. At a minimum, such efforts have ensured that expectations are calibrated between the researchers and community leaders and that there are ways to address potential problems when they arise, as they invariably do. In this respect, research and evaluation are regarded by the IYFP team as dynamic, flexible, and subject to regular amendment. This is a reality of the work that IYFP does. The approach raises the possibility that theories of change are themselves dynamic.
and are living constructs to be explored and amended as new insights arise. This makes testing more challenging for various reasons, not least of which is the multiplicity of evaluands. These must be thought of in relational terms, meaning that individuals and groups will each have their own particular relationship (constructivist) but that there is great weight also assigned to community value judgements, which must also be accounted for in the evidence chains (Mertens & Wilson, 2012[MM5]). Balancing both collective and individual perspectives from a physical, intellectual, and spiritual point of view creates highly sophisticated conversations, often through narrative storytelling that is not always easily translated into Western understandings.

Also at the community level of analysis, Western notions of relying on models and constructs to understand “reality” is practically ineffective, as these force or privilege compartmentalized thinking, especially in evaluation where one must always stay focused on the evaluand(s) by scoping the targets or objectives and then measuring or validating whether these are being met programmatically. In our own work, such ideas do not always hold as community engagement is not a program to be researched, but multiple relationships to understand and nurture. As indicated in the introduction to this edition, how engagement is conceptualized is critical to determining the strengths and limitations of the relationships involved (youth.gov, 2019). By extension, youth engagement with leaders, elders, or other youth is not understood simply in terms of the results of that engagement, but rather in terms of the value (i.e., constructivist underpinnings) associated with the purpose and means to generate other relationships that build toward a collectively held and valued idea or project (Cram et al., 2018). In practice, according to “Indigenist” thinkers, this places greater value on the naturalistic versus humanist ontological frame (Smith, 1999). That is, it places the Indigenous voice at the centre; values gender-based perspectives and the special role that women play in community; relies on oral knowledge, memory, and tradition; values personal gifts that benefit all, as well as narrative storytelling in the first person, where personal truths are held in higher esteem than universal truth. This is in fact the Anishnaabe value system to knowledge and sharing that guides the IYFP project (Gehl, 2017). This is such a contrast to positivist and humanistic Western approaches to understanding that it has led to “data collection” meaning having deep conversations with many people before one can articulate a finding in the traditional sense.

As an extension of this last point, understanding the subjects of evaluation between community contexts is also difficult and poses many of the usual challenges of comparisons among samples (e.g., competing external validity problems). All of the communities in the IYFP partnership demonstrate different approaches to governance, decision making, and involving youth. Community context is critical for understanding the differences between knowledge, knowing, and understanding—or what Meyer (2016)[MM6] calls the “third laser” that illuminates an object or idea. For him and others, including Bowman (2017), one must first get to know what is distinct about individuals and communities in
order to draw comparisons, including incorporating spirituality in evaluations (Luo, Liu, & Liu, 2018). That said, this requires a research approach that values the flexibility and dynamism that this perspective implies. It also requires evaluative approaches that give agency to communities to hold the levers of control from design to implementation, such as participatory evaluation (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998) or culturally responsive evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Hood, Hopson, & Kirkhart, 2015), the latter of which ensures that cultural context is acknowledged in the selection and treatment of the evaluand. Drawing comparisons among the subjects of evaluation between these community contexts poses research challenges for generalizability. One is compelled to look for key themes at the meta-level in terms of the process of research and evaluation, yielding perhaps some findings that point toward higher-order evaluands such as resilience. However, many of these higher-order findings can themselves contribute in some way to end states such as resilience. The IYFP is not yet at the point where it is able to design applicable analytic models for engaging youth and communities, which remains a preoccupation. This is not to say that this is of principal concern presently to the team, but for funding agencies that look for generalizability, there is some pressure to come to such findings in whatever form these may take, based on the evidentiary trails that are created.

In addition to these challenges cited by Groh (2018), the IYFP team has learned that it takes a certain amount of humility and patience to approach Indigenous organizations and communities. Although this may appear an obvious point, and indeed is well described in the literature (Cram et al., 2016), it is much more difficult to practise in reality. A key consideration is the pace at which relationships are developed. It can be painstakingly slow, especially as the time needed to fly into remote communities is a major investment physically and mentally, not to mention financially. Patience is a virtue that is tested continuously, as trips to communities cannot often be planned in advance, given limited communications or even the ability of the busy local leaders to even respond. Furthermore, plans are often subject to change based on the reality of circumstances at the time—previously agreed-to aims of research trips may not be a priority in the moment they actually occur. Practising humility and patience is a real challenge, especially when it is not always apparent whether progress in the Western sense is being made. Measurable progress in terms of creating a spark of interest in one’s research or evaluation, intentions, or plans is sometimes difficult to determine until some time in the future when, for example, someone remembers a comment, action, or conversation that garnered support, which then turned into a commitment to follow up.

In addition, most on the research team have learned Western approaches to research and evaluation that have limited efficacy in these communities (Hornung, 2016). It is often the case that Western approaches are regarded as superior in some ways to local ones, which can manifest in presumed acceptance, especially when limited feedback is provided (e.g., in Anishnaabe communities, feedback may not be given directly out of respect for the visitor). Hornung’s (2016) approach of consulting before acting, negotiating use of tools or approaches, and
creating understanding for their benefits, while respecting the land, peoples, and culture (e.g., valuing local knowledge systems) that leads to agreed outcomes, has been key in the project’s approach in all four communities, and with Indigenous organizations and services. In our experience so far, the perspective of community leaders and regional partners has been noteworthy. There has been acknowledgement that Western tools may strengthen reliance on local resources and cultural traditions and initiatives. Acknowledging that Western-learned approaches are but one way to understand how communities work and address local problems/challenges has been instrumental. This acknowledgement also assumes fundamentally that it is not always appropriate or desirable for non-Indigenous researchers and evaluators to ultimately guide or even participate in the research and evaluation effort. Humility extends as far as recognizing a strength-based approach to working with communities, including perceived areas where control over research projects may get in the way of maintaining and respecting cultural integrity (Bowman, 2017). Co-creation and co-production of research and evaluation products means working with relationship-building talents and skills that can be used to advance important and sensitive conversations with local community members.

Addressing ethical choices in research and design constraints

Much has been written on the ethical considerations regarding the planning and conduct of evaluation studies in Indigenous contexts (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cram & Mertens, 2015), and much more can be gleaned from the literature on ethical evaluation practice that attempts to bridge Western and Indigenous ways of knowing. However, we focus here on the contextual issues that influence ethical research in IYFP communities.

Balancing and reconciling Indigenous and Western “scientific” perspectives is omnipresent for the IYFP project team. This extends to the governance of the project, which is guided by a Steering Committee consisting of First Nations, Métis, and settler members, all of whom have education based on the Western positivist paradigm and some of whom are steeped in Ojibwe, Cree, and Métis ontologies and epistemologies. The project requires self-checking and self-correcting to avoid both being overcome by linear thinking (Bowman, 2017) or time-bound plans (that rarely turn out) and relying completely on conceptions of evidence that are rooted in hard measures of performance for the purposes of maintaining accountability under the research grant. With bimaadiziwin as the anchoring goal, the team has had to learn to take a holistic perspective, think about a long timeline (Seven Generations), and recognize that “evidence” may be a deeper concept. In this respect, the idea of “two-eyed seeing,” or Etuaptmumk in Mi’kmaw, as coined by Elder Albert Marshall (2005), plays a key role in framing research and evaluation ideas. The notion is that we must learn to see out of one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and out of the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledge and ways of knowing, acquiring the ability to see and use both eyes simultaneously.
Achieving this two-eyed balance is made difficult by the overwhelming influence of the *Indian Act* and program-funding regimes that privilege governmental (First Nations Band-based) and invariably Western approaches (Smith, 1999). With some exceptions, the federal and provincial programs that offer the prospect of new funds to support community needs have rigid, template-driven application processes that are based on a single program purpose. Furthermore, reporting and accountability are aimed upward to the funder with little, if any, thought to community accountability. The result within First Nations communities is the creation of targeted-funding silos, supported by micro-bureaucracies that create barriers to cooperation among program officials (Borrows, 2016; Shepherd, 2018). Such arrangements often complicate choices with respect to the identification of research and evaluation questions, as managing up for program reporting and evaluation purposes can tend to preoccupy community leaders, eroding relevance for youth.

References have been made to important time elements associated with the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership. It is a seven-year project (which had a gestation period of over two years). As is normally required in a research funding application, milestones were identified with associated timelines. Evaluating the project’s progress has proved to be notional at best. In reality, adaptation and elongation have characterized the project. There are good reasons for this, including the fact that communities have to move at their own pace in becoming familiar with the project and in thinking through what they want to do and what would constitute positive momentum in creating better futures for youth. Given the day-to-day demands on community members and First Nations leadership, this does not happen quickly, which can complicate funder ideas about accountability for the use of grant funds. As such, there is always a fine line between reporting progress toward results that are in constant flux with the project’s long-term perspective. A decision had to be made in this regard not to intervene in the crises that too often arise in communities. The approach when bad things happen in a community is to respectfully keep distance until it is appropriate to re-engage. None of this is predictable and can cause some ethical challenges, as there are sometimes requests for help to intervene.

The foundation for work in these northern communities is the commitment of First Nations leaders in the region to their communities and the persistence of youth in believing that their First Nations are their home and that *bimaadiziwin* is possible. The youth apprentices believe strongly that they can make a difference in their communities but communicate that they have to be the ones to determine how best to work with their people given the context described. The challenge in communities is diverting energy, talent, and resources to a project that is aimed at the long term, rather than focusing on the immediate. This invariably involves choices to evaluate process toward *bimaadiziwin*, rather than immediate or short-term results that address crisis points. Ethical choices have been made in the project to remain focused on long-term aims and remaining steadfast on testing theories of change, but it means also demonstrating reciprocity to community leaders who often demand short term help.
Addressing the validity and reliability of the evidence

As with many of the issues raised to this point, there are technical considerations related to the validity and reliability of evidence and evidence claims, and as with any major research project where evaluation is concerned, precautions are taken to preserve the integrity of evidence (Groh, 2018). However, in Indigenous contexts it is often the relational or epistemological aspects of what constitutes evidence and the appropriateness of that evidence in Western thought that pose challenges, particularly from an ethical perspective.

First, validity considerations, such as what constitutes evidence, were carefully considered by the IYFP team, at both the proposal and data-collection stages. To begin, community leaders were asked individually in the early stages of the project what they felt was important to understand about their communities. These queries were then extended to larger group discussions with public officials and community members, including youth, implying that reliability of what the team heard could also be ensured through repeated testing. What we heard led to initial attempts at theories of change and the desire to create or generate resilience in programs, systems, and procedures, especially as these relate to youth needs. These helped to frame initial attempts at developing research questions. These conversations were invariably dynamic, involving the community over several months of repeated visits, documenting both individual and group conversations and replaying those conversations on subsequent visits to validate them with others who may not have participated previously. The conversations were constructivist in the sense that inductive reasoning was used to frame them through broad and open-ended questions regarding community needs, especially those of youth. It meant that researchers’ hypothesis statements were not introduced in conversations, nor was there “planting” of ideas that the team, as outside observers, felt were important. The processes employed in the IYFP are often regarded as contrary to Western notions of coming to hypothesis statements a priori in research proposals and then testing them. Ultimately, this meant that many hypothetical statements in the proposal were abandoned or amended significantly to account for ongoing community conversations and visits to arrive at broad notions of resilience.

Second, the role of the research team in communities was a fundamental consideration in the research design. As Bowman (2017) suggests, there is a strong need for Western-trained researchers to engage communities in designing research and evaluation questions, but imposing research approaches in ways that could supplant local preferences is to be avoided. This includes current trends toward co-production or co-creation of research and evaluation products whereby the central idea is that the academy in particular must collaborate more with various communities to improve the relevance and usefulness of its work.

Ersoy (2017) argues that in an Indigenous context, co-production implies that there is a level playing field between Western and Indigenous approaches. From a practical standpoint, the IYFP team has learned that this is not the case. For example, in many conversations with individuals and groups, there is a
tendency on the part of community members to defer to academics, until there is sufficient trust developed to openly question. There is often the temptation to proceed with a Western approach in the absence of feedback, but this is far from valid. Likewise, there may not be a level playing field in terms of “scientific” understanding. The temptation is to proceed with the evaluation or research endeavour using the Western approach, despite what may appear to be co-production. Bowman (2017) suggests that the assumptions of co-production are erroneous and that Western researchers/evaluators must reduce their control and leave space for communities to determine, first, what space they would like to co-produce within and, second, to decide how they would like to take advantage of the space occupied by Western-based researchers. At a practical level, this means that the IYFP has had to continuously validate both its approaches and processes for evidence gathering in the community, aside from ensuring that these meet the standards of TCPS-2. Working with the apprentices in particular has meant striking a balance. Guidance is provided to them on ways to gather and assemble evidence along the theories of change. However, they have discretion about what to research and how to proceed. This may pose some challenges for ensuring the reliability of evidence in Western terms, but it is necessary in terms of the aims and ethical foundations of the project. In a very positive sense, providing the apprentices with some tools to carry out their work is necessary. However, they are empowered and encouraged to use the tools in ways they believe will be most effective because they know their community best. In this sense, they become the “experts” on evaluation in their community.

Third, bridging ways of ensuring reliability of evidence has been an ongoing challenge, both from the standpoint of internal reliability at the community level and between communities and organizations in the partnership. Although there is recognition in the project’s overall design that communities drive the design and implementation of the research and evaluation effort, it is not yet resolved how reliability of evidence will be safeguarded when it is aggregated. The means for generating understanding and insights have been achieved mainly through “appreciative inquiry” approaches (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003) that focus on the strengths rather than the weaknesses in policies, programs, communities, or organizations. The IYFP team subscribes to the importance of beginning their thinking with what is working well in communities and then attempts to focus conversations on a desired future where the best of what is working can continue to occur more frequently. Communities in the Sioux Lookout zone have long experienced the consequences of trauma, whether it be in the form of removal of children, imposition of curricula, restrictions imposed by government programs and governance, or researchers who take without permission. Or, most importantly, there have been interactions with governmental officials or other agencies who take an expedient approach to “getting the job done” and disregard the value of local approaches and preferences. In this regard, appreciative inquiry forms the basis of the work with the youth apprentices who are encouraged to begin from a premise of strong community and that their judgement matters, and who
determine from other youth what is needed to bring about even stronger programs and services for them. To date, this approach has worked reasonably well, as it assumes humility to interact with community members without judgement. This is a change in mindset for many of these communities.

In terms of ensuring reliability of evidence between communities, the IYFP has expended considerable effort in ensuring the validity and reliability of local evidence using standard case-study approaches. At a minimum, comparisons will be possible with respect to the conditions that have to be in place for engagement and ultimately resilience to occur. Such an approach assumes that the particular research questions and projects are less important, an assumption that will continue to be tested over time. At the moment, the relationship with communities is the pre-eminent concern, since having reliable evidence when there is the ever-present incentive not to engage or trust the research team is crucial.

**CONCLUSIONS: CHARTING THE WAY FORWARD**

The aim of this article was twofold: to describe and acknowledge the challenges of bridging different ontologies and epistemologies in the design and conduct of evaluation in Indigenous contexts, and to explore how many of these challenges have played themselves out in the research and evaluation design and conduct of the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership. In particular, we are interested in the practical conflicts and overlaps between Indigenous and Western epistemologies in carrying out research and evaluation that is meaningful to advance our collective understandings of the circumstances that communities face daily. In this respect, the article has attempted to discuss practical areas where challenges have been experienced in the evaluative elements of the IYFP project, understanding that Western and Indigenous approaches converge in several respects but diverge in others.

As researchers and evaluators who have been in this space for some time, we have come to appreciate that self-questioning is always integral to research and evaluation design efforts. Likewise, we have also come to know that while many of the challenges discussed throughout the article are real and important, there are no tangible rules or steps that provide clear direction on how to conduct research and evaluation projects, given the differences in perspectives. Rather, these are merely dimensions of awareness that ought to frame one’s own awareness of epistemological bias and the external systems or cultural biases that privilege non-Indigenous preferences for research and evaluation questions and how to approach them. For many on the IYFP team, the intersection of Western and Indigenous epistemologies is not dichotomous, and each member has evolved in their own understandings and in how to apply these to the research and evaluation effort. For example, using strength-based approaches to data collection such as “asset mapping,” which takes account of how the community values the roles of people, places, and programs/services/events, is critical as a first step. Such techniques provide the evaluators with starting points of understanding that allows
participants to approach conversations with respect and sensitivity from multiple perspectives, based in an Anishnaabe understanding of relationships. Indigenous approaches to knowing, therefore, would recognize the value of understanding how communities understand the value of a program, for example. However, the manner in which such understanding is conceptualized and expressed would be much deeper, with many more layers of relationship of community being acknowledged. Given such convergences and divergences, however, and despite decades of experience working in and with Indigenous communities, there are always layers of personal awareness and practice that have to be revisited frequently in order to work effectively. The challenges posed here are mere starting points for any researcher and evaluator, including the team members on this project, to acknowledge.

What separates research and evaluation in Indigenous contexts from other contexts (Mertens, 2018) is that epistemology and local context are different and not easily compared. Understanding relationships to people and places is fundamentally different from regarding the subjects of evaluation as objects to be examined. That said, this is only the starting point for appreciating work in these contexts, and evaluation theory has yet to fully understand this crucial point. Even less available in the literature are approaches that can be described as effective or even appropriate. Repeatedly, meetings of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) have made this point clear, as more evaluators are entering this unique space. In particular, numerous presentations at the CES annual conference indicate that fundamental to working in this space is not always technical experience but rather understanding, a willingness to exercise humility, respect, and transparency, and relinquishing control over the evaluation project (Bowman, 2017; Cram et al., 2016; Kovach, 2009). Realist evaluation (Pawson, 2013) is one epistemological approach that may be useful, as it focuses on what works, under what conditions, and why. The importance placed on context and conditions and the testing of assumptions is critical to evaluation in Indigenous contexts. Realist evaluation in combination with appreciative inquiry could be one practical way of bridging Western and Indigenous approaches. Understanding “what works,” for example, goes beyond mere qualitative sampling and interviews. It involves recognizing that the value proposition of a program or service, or what it means for something to be working, for instance, requires extending conversations to a wide number of people in the community who may have different conceptions of that value in the constructivist sense (Mertens & Wilson, 2012[MM8]). These perspectives would provide indications of how the “community,” rather than individuals in the naturalistic sense, understand a healthy and vibrant community.

Groh (2018), Mertens (2018), Wehipeihana (2018) and Bowman (2017), among others, make the point that the use of the word “research” or “researcher” in Indigenous contexts has become tainted. This has resulted from the less than admirable history of working in rather than with communities in ways that further the aims of researchers as opposed to the communities they purport to serve. We suggest that “evaluation” as a word may be thought of in similar ways,
as governmental evaluation has tended to focus more on matters that are of interest to donors or funding agencies, such as accountability for use of funds, than on the interests of communities, despite the rhetoric to the contrary. In addition, evaluators have been accused of using approaches that presume some authority to evaluate without the need for permission or even being mindful of local authority or knowledge systems. Perhaps a new lexicon is needed that better describes the purpose of evaluation in an era of reconciliation (Shepherd, 2018) in order to move relationships among government, Indigenous communities, and engaged organizations forward by changing the intent and processes of evaluation. Several efforts by the Canadian Evaluation Society, American Evaluation Association (AEA), and the Australian Evaluation Society (AES), among others, are attempting to shift the nature and tone of evaluation in Indigenous contexts through ongoing national and regional conversations and workshops with practitioners. EvalIndigenous is also attempting to educate practitioners about the importance of culturally appropriate and strengths-based approaches. However, perhaps a shared and ethical space (Ermine, 2007) where all have a voice in the definition and framing of evaluation as a field that affects them is warranted. Fundamental to creating ethical space is active listening with Indigenous communities leading the conversation, including how to frame the conditions for co-creation and co-production.

Finally, we suggest, based on our collective experience thus far, that evaluation in Indigenous contexts must place a priority on multidisciplinary lenses in the design, delivery, and reporting of results. Indigenous epistemologies are holistic, and to work in these spaces means drawing on multiple ways of knowing and understanding. Many eyes, ears, and other senses are needed to fully comprehend experiences and relationships in Indigenous communities, which is why the IYFP draws on many disciplines and many types of expertise in order to capture the complex layers of insights that one invariably encounters. Indigenous contexts are exceedingly complex and imbued with many perspectives. This makes evaluation both challenging and exciting, and well worth the journey.

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Reflections on Being a Learner: The Value of Relationship-based Community Evaluations in Indigenous Communities

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Abstract: Drawing on Donna M. Mertens and Amy T. Willson's work on transformative paradigms in program evaluations, together with the author's experience working in partnership with First Nations communities in Ontario, this paper explores the lessons learned from the process of moving between assumptions and application using the transformative paradigm in First Nations evaluations; explores the relationships between power, discourse, and paradigms in the relationship between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and being; and asks what steps an evaluator can take to ensure that local epistemological and ontological perspectives are respected and captured.

Keywords: Canada, discourse, Indigenous, power, relationship-based, transformative paradigms

One of the greatest benefits and unnerving experiences of being a community-based researcher is having our way of seeing the world changed. Sometimes the process includes having our assumptions dismantled in front of us. Other times the process is a slow and growing appreciation for a new perspective. This paper

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Reflections on Being a Learner

The paper reflects my experience with personal and professional paradigm shifts. The paper is part of my continuing journey as a learner working with First Nations people, mostly Anishinaabek, in southwestern and northwestern Ontario. I am not an Indigenous person. I am immigrant from Northern Ireland, part of a settler tradition. Additionally, I do not use the term ally to describe myself. Instead, I continue to use the term “learner” to reflect the humility that I have been taught is necessary for the applied, relationship-based research that I do. I came to the process of evaluation through relationships and need rather than through my formal education. I bring a background in multi-disciplinary research to this paper, which draws on the disciplines of social sciences, humanities, and qualitative mental health methodologies. In the past few years I have been engaged as a community-based partner in child and adolescent mental health programs in several communities. During this time, it has become increasingly obvious that program evaluations play an important role in transforming and developing community-based programs. This paper will draw on what I continue to learn, from the process of working with my partners and teachers. Specifically, evaluations have been crucial for understanding the gaps that continue to exist between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing the world. As I continue to learn more about the complexity of Anishinaabek epistemology and ontology, I am growing to understand how evaluations can articulate complexity to funders and government policymakers in language that they understand.

Reflecting on the work of Christopher Keane (1998), I argue that at the most fundamental level, the concept of “health” can be assumed to be a normative understanding of how a society should be structured, which is maintained in powerful discourses. Working with this position, I further argue that we must be aware of the assumptions we place into the narratives we produce during the process of evaluation. This argument assumes that evaluations can carry an underlying normative exploration of the ability of a community to carry out activities that lead to health and that it is this normative aspect which determines merit, worth, and value. On the topic of merit, worth, and values, Donna M. Mertens and Amy T. Wilson (2012) ask where the criteria for evaluations come from and what they are derived from. This question serves to guide me in this paper as I consider the work I do with Indigenous communities across Ontario. This position leads me to question if an evaluation is a tool of normativity or whether we can speak to the power of established paradigms through new narratives? With this in mind, I ask if we can make meaningful advances in our willingness to accept Indigenous perspectives at a time when we, as a society, are engaged in a process of truth and reconciliation. Ultimately, I ask if program evaluations play a role in shifting existing paradigms of health through a process of community engagement.

Applying a critical ethnographic lens, this paper explores my experiences learning from the process of conducting evaluations on community-run, Crown-funded programs in Anishinaabek communities. In doing so, I reflect on my ability as an evaluator to create narratives that reflect the values of the community and measure the effectiveness of the program in ways that do not reduce Anishinaabek
knowledge to tropes of “Indianness.” Drawing on medical anthropology and the work of Mertens, which “prioritizes issues of social justice and human rights as overarching principles” to form the basis of any evaluation (Mertens, 2013, p. 27), this paper will explore

1. the lessons learned from the process of moving between my assumptions and application using Mertens’s transformative paradigm in First Nations evaluations;
2. the relationships between power, discourse, and paradigms in the relationship between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and being; and
3. the steps an evaluator can take to ensure that local epistemological and ontological perspectives are respected.

I ask the reader to consider the concepts of “health” and “healthy community.” From a theoretical position, my approach to the relationship between normativity and a social construction of what a healthy community looks like is based on work by Christopher Keane. In his paper “Globality and Constructions of World Health,” Keane (1998) makes two important arguments: first, we must consider our world as a system of societies where discourse about health establishes the meaning of the concept of health; second, an examination of the social construction of health will uncover multiple ideological discourses on how our societies can and should be structured. The power of discourses to shape normativity and thus create paradigms is important when we include the role of assumptions for a paradigm shift as called for by Mertens. I assume that discourses, particularly discourses located in power, maintain established paradigms and their normative expectations. Recall that Mertens’s transformative paradigm responds to Thomas S. Kuhn’s theory of the scientific paradigm (Mertens, 2009, p. 255). Kuhn was interested in normative perspectives and meanings within scientific discourse and focused on how changes in meaning signalled or were required for a shift in worldviews associated with scientific knowledge (Keller & Lloyd, 1992, p. 2). However, if, as Mertens (2009, p. 44) contends, members of a dominant culture continue to use language that contains culturally influenced terms that can exclude members of non-dominant cultures from the meanings held in the discourse, the consequence is that transformative actions are responding to “established” evidence and discourse in our attempts to engage in paradigm shifts.

It is through Mertens’s work that I hope to articulate the movement between theory and action. My end goal is to situate my role in the process of program evaluation within existing power structures and to see how I can apply evaluations and the authority I hold to be a tool for change. I do this to demonstrate how the process of learning from our community partners is an important step in the process of reconciliation. I will show through my applied experiences how an Indigenous concept of health that was once silenced can be voiced and valued within the existing power relationships to privilege Indigenous knowledges. Drawing
from Ronald Labonte and Renee Torgerson (2005), I consider the concept of a community as one level in a complex system. In this way, I remain theoretical but ground that theory in practical experience in order to see how change may happen.

THE NORMATIVE CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION NARRATIVE

Keane (1998) argues for the existence of a normative discourse in health research. “Normative,” in the context of this paper, is assumed to be a set of standards that establish current or dominant paradigms and that are maintained through existing discourses. Existing normative discourses can include forms that promote an ongoing focus only on negative health outcomes instead of being open to resilience and positives; or narratives that continue to promote damaging beliefs in the idea of an Indigenous monoculture in the place of the complexity that exists within diverse Indigenous populations. All of these narratives are false but take on the role of the simulacra where the story replaces reality (Baudrillard, 1983). As a result, there are important consequences that must be considered when one is engaged in evaluations that will challenge existing dominant paradigms. If, as Keane suggests, we articulate health as an ideologically bound vision of how the world should look, do we risk writing over First Nations narratives of wellness? Do we truly value Indigenous research methods within the academy, or are we in a constant process of translating them into accepted scientific models? Or do we continue to deny intellectual and local “sovereignty when it conflicts with what colonists and modern-day corporate or nontribal government partners” expect (Waapataneexkweew, 2018, p. 550)? How does a society value Indigenous knowledge during the process of reconciliation? Much of what I will argue in this paper works from the position that in order to enact meaningful change, we must work beyond dominant theoretical constructs and change the discourses that maintain powerful Western paradigms on health.

The transformative paradigm approach works to break down these discursive barriers by focusing on assumptions in four key areas: reality (ontological), the nature of knowledge (epistemological), the approach to systematic inquiry (methodological), and ethics (axiological) (Mertens, 2009, p. 45). Assuming that evaluations are a measure of the merit and worth of a program, then we need to be concerned about how we tell the story of the program we are evaluating, how we access information, what we do and do not share, and what that interpretation of data means (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 6).

I frame my argument and its connection to the transformative paradigm using two examples. The first comes from thinking about “what is,” with the conception of structural violence being a case in point. I draw on Paul Farmer’s efforts to connect structural violence with health services. Farmer (2004, p. 307) notes that “structural violence is violence exerted systematically—that is, indirectly—by everyone who belongs to a certain social order.” It is violence that does not depend on a single actor but instead exists at the systems level: the levels of privilege and inequality that benefit some while creating disadvantages for others. It is the
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system that Mertens wrote about in Kentucky in the 1960s as a child, which was explained away as the way things are (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 161). As a social mechanism, “structural violence is embodied as adverse events [and] is the experience of people who live in poverty or are marginalized by racism, gender inequality, or a noxious mix of all of the above” (Farmer, 2004, p. 308). Farmer holds that structural violence is, in part, dependent on the creation of a hegemonic narrative of history that legitimizes the system of inequality (Farmer, 2004, p. 308).

The current health inequalities facing First Nations people in Canada can align with this definition of structural violence. Current government policy and actions are not isolated ahistorical events. Instead, they are part of a long history that connects the health and wellness of Indigenous populations in Canada to Indigenous populations around the world via economic, political, and social policy. Before Canada existed as a state, it was a colonial appendage for England and France. The Staples Theory developed by Harold Innis holds that Canada has developed into its current economic, political, and social form because of the exploitation of a changing series of staples, including fish, fur, lumber, minerals, oil, and gas (Breau, Toy, Brown, MacDonald, & Cooms, 2018, p. 357). The administration of “Indians” by the Crown through this history, which continues through ongoing consultations and actions around minerals, oil, and gas, is about ensuring market access to staples rather than the welfare of a population. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, which is now enshrined in the Canadian Constitution Act, 1982, established a Nation-to-Nation relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples. Policies such as the Indian Act, Indian residential schools, and the selling of reserve land are an abuse of the fiduciary responsibility that the Crown adopted in the relationship and perpetuate the social inequalities that legitimize stereotypical views of Indigenous populations. Kirmayer, Gone, and Moses (2014) argue that these actions represent ongoing structural violence rather than past traumas that contribute directly to the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

My second example focuses on transformation. It is grounded in the global health model developed by Labonte and Torgerson (2005). As shown in Figure 1, the model acknowledges bidirectional connections between policy and action at multiple levels, which run from individual to superordinate categories. The model is important for understanding the transformative paradigm because it helps to locate our own actions and any potential connections across actors. The interconnected model allows me to think about how the economic, political, and social policies and the power that maintain a system of inequalities are connected to the communities I work in. By understanding these connections, I am better able to speak back against them. The modelling of a complex system allows for targeted steps within its mechanisms to voice connections to global policy and trade over simplistic assumptions of “that’s just the way they are.”

The production of an evaluation is, in its most basic sense, the creation of a narrative. As the authors of these narratives, we, the evaluators, make choices that are inherent in the power that we hold (Scriven, 2017). From the choice of methods to the design of our questions, to the outcomes on our logic models, we
are figuring out how to tell a story, which characters to use, and if that story will be a positive or a negative one. The power we wield becomes more important for us to recognize when we work with communities that are traditionally marginalized or silenced.

In the context of completing evaluations of Crown funded programs in First Nations communities, these powers can be accentuated. Consider the word “health” as a concept. The WHO definition is well known: “a state of complete
physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (International Health Conference 20027). In the English language, health is a state, a noun; however, in Anishinaabeemowin, the language of the Anishinaabek, there is no word for health. There is a word for a concept of living a good way: bimaadiziwin, which is based on the verb for “be alive”: bimaadizi. The distinction between a noun and a verb may seem small, but it is in language use that all events are converted into narratives. Having health be understood as something we do rather than something we have is important for the narrative. The difference in language harkens to the power of dominant groups to assume that everyone understands how they are speaking. Living a good way has important ontological implications and ties how we view knowledge, ethics, and data collection.

The process of understanding the connection between discourses that maintain structural inequalities and how program evaluations fit into a larger global system starts with ourselves. Within that in mind, I shift my attention to a case study demonstrating the application of the transformative paradigm. The purpose of the application is to demonstrate the bidirectional movement between theory to action within a larger context.

CASE STUDY
Between fall 2017 and fall 2018, I was actively engaged in the evaluation of an education-based program in a First Nation community in southwestern Ontario. It is a community that I have worked with for a number of years and where I continue to be mentored. Because the report was ultimately destined for Health Canada, my community partners and I decided to follow the evaluation guidelines set out by the Ontario Centre for Excellence for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (OCECAMH). The process of organizing the evaluation demonstrated the importance of trust in relationships that take years to grow. Working in multiple communities, I have learned that best practices in maintaining trust start with open communication. Through this process, the OCECAMH guidelines were determined to be flexible enough to allow local community values to be prioritized. It is an error to assume that resources originating outside of a First Nations context should be rejected outright. Instead, consultation and the accepting of our responsibilities in relationships allows us, as evaluators, to bring additional advantages to our partners. Unilateral application without a relationship reinforces power imbalances. However, ongoing consultation is an effective means of decentring power away from our institutions.

Early site visits with program administrators were used to develop an understanding of the structure of the program. These meetings also served as early stakeholder-engagement sessions. Because of the small size of the immediate program team, early stakeholder engagement was a relatively efficient process. In-person, one-on-one meetings allowed for the effective development of key evaluation questions. The sessions aided in the development both of search topics for the literature review and of the logic model. Stakeholder meetings, the literature review, and the logic model were then used to identify quantitative and qualitative
outcome measures. An online survey and focus group interviews were identified as methods for qualitative data collection.

The program provided in-school services for at-risk youth who, under regular conditions, are at elevated risk of not completing secondary school. The staff were trained in crisis intervention and were able to de-escalate situations safely and effectively. Services provided include access to social workers, psychological counselling, speech and language pathology, and occupational therapy. The program also brings traditional healers into the school in order to incorporate local Anishinaabek teachings into the school day. Overall, the program reduced total school suspensions by three quarters, increased graduation rates, and decreased crisis situations in school. The effects extended beyond the students enrolled in the program by making the school safer overall.

The learning for me came in articulating the “why” of the program. The program was supported and valued highly by students, staff, the families of students, and professional health-care providers who worked with the program. Quantitative data told only a small part of the story; the real value of the program was found in in-program relationships. Among many Anishinaabek people, relationships are of great importance. The funder of the program was comfortable with the quantitative data. The funding was to make the school safer and increase graduation rates. That job was done. However, in conversation with community members, it became clear that they wanted the evaluation to reflect Anishinaabek values such as the Seven Grandfathers’ teachings. The program has become a source of pride for many involved with it, and it was clear the more I worked with participants that they viewed the human resources and the Anishinaabek values used in the program as the reason for its success.

Based on the Labonte and Torgerson (2005) model, the interactions between levels of power start to become evident. The top-down funder expected results from the evaluation that reflected their normative understanding of value, merits, and worth. Community-level expectations, particularly from the host department in the community, reflected another set of values, including the impact of the program on local families. At the individual level, the role that each participant played in the program affected their expectations of normative values. It is in this interaction between levels that the transformative paradigm is important. If an existing construct of a paradigm contains within it a set of theories, and the theories are ways of thinking about the social construct that is the paradigm, changing the theory does not necessarily change the paradigm (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 34). What is needed, then, is a way of changing the paradigm to engage with the concept of “health” as a verb (bimaadaziwin), rather than remain rooted in the WHO definition.

If we recall that Mertens drew on Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) definition of paradigm as consisting of the four philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiological (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 36), the transformative paradigm then provides a means of exploring the larger picture that is the interaction of power, and power imbalances, in a multi-level system. It is here that I return to the importance of discourse in this argument. Paradigms
are social constructs, which can be transmitted between people only through language, and, to stick with a strict definition, discourse is defined as any use of language longer than a sentence. Here, the importance of the distinction between health as a thing versus health as an action becomes important. In the case study, I initially was interested in the outputs that the program produced in the form of better quantitative data. However, the lesson was that the community valued the way in which people behaved. Therefore, two paradigms, one evaluation report.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONTOLOGY

Mertens (2009) defines ontological assumptions as being socially constructed and notes that the social construction is based on a foundation of unequal power distribution. Power is a function of politics, economics, gender, culture, and ethnicity, to name but a few. Power and social forces, then, are an assemblage of factors. However, it must be considered as a fluid system of interactions, not a mere spectrum from powerless to powerful. Returning to Mertens’s quote about the state of schools in Kentucky, it is power that allows a social inequality to be articulated as “just the way things are,” but, I add, there is also power in evaluation to change how we approach those things.

The ontological assumptions are an important place to start when articulating my experiences working with First Nations communities. The nature of being, or of being a spiritual being experiencing a physical existence, will affect the other three aspects of Mertens’s transformation paradigm. The assumptions that I carry with me from my experiences as a non-Indigenous person can lead to invalid conclusions about the processes or effectiveness of a program. Factors such as politics, economic development, or culture play a much smaller role in my day-to-day life than they do in the functioning of the communities where I have relationships. In using the term “culture,” I do not wish to suggest that First Nations peoples are culturally bound: that would be an error. In Labonte and Torgerson’s (2005) model, culture functions differently at the individual, community, and government levels. We are all multicultural in the sense that we are all disciplined through various forms of education (home, school, work, larger social settings, etc.). To say someone is Anishinaabek, for example, should not circumscribe them into a narrow understanding of what that means, for the same person may also live the culture of a physician or a hip-hop fan. Instead, I argue that we should consider culture as a guideline for how we as individuals and communities manifest different cultures (Mertens, 2009, p. 62).

The first assumption that can be considered when working in First Nations communities is the nature of the self. It is clear that all societies and all cultures have ways of understanding, or questioning, what it means to be a being in this world. Interestingly, for many cultures their own name for themselves as a people is often translatable as “the people.” I am fortunate to have the opportunity to continue to learn from communities mostly consisting of Anishinaabek people in Ontario. One thing that has become clear is, regardless of whether individuals
consider themselves to be traditional or Christian or somewhere in the middle, for many the self still retains a significant aspect of responsibility-based actions.

The idea of responsibility-based, community-focused rather than deliverable-focused action is challenging to evaluate as a researcher. Largely it comes down to the scope of our evaluation and the interconnected layers of the community. One of my community-based teachers refers to projects in a quilt-like fashion. They all connect for the community. If our scope is limited to a single project, we lose sight of the quilt and of other responsibilities that our partners have. The scope, or scale, of the evaluation will reflect the different degrees of complexity that are present in a program (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 17). But this complexity can be lost if we are circumscribed by funder limitations on the scope of the program, which are usually concerned with accountability for spending.

A second key ontological element is that of language connotation. The nature of Anishinaabemowin is that where you are and who you are speaking with will affect how the language is structured (Valentine, 2001). It is a largely verb-based language providing an important context/place link. While the use of Anishinaabemowin has declined, it continues to influence how people speak English in Anishinaabek communities. It is in local connotational values that I have had an opportunity for the greatest learning and have made some of my greatest mistakes. The connection between what a word means and where you come from cannot be overstated. For example, I learned very early that having a PhD and being a university faculty member was not overly important to my community relationships. More importance is placed on how I act with humility and kindness than to titles that I hold. Social capital and the power that comes with it are assigned differently in First Nations contexts.

**EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

In Mertens’s transformative paradigm, epistemological assumptions focus on the nature of knowledge and how the relationship between the researcher and partners is developed in order to understand the context of the research (Mertens, 2009, p. 56). Working with First Nations partners has demonstrated that the relationship and trust aspect are most important. The action of building relationships ties the epistemological assumption to the ontological. When we engage in building relationships, we assume a set of responsibilities within that relationship. In addition, the quality of these relationships helps establish the quality of the evaluation itself (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, pp. 44–45). In an Anishinaabek context, relationships and responsibility are essential aspects of bimaadiziwin.

We are, as evaluators, also in a relationship with our knowledge systems. We socially acquire our understanding of knowledge systems during the process of disciplining ourselves in the education system. Positivist and post-positivist notions of neutral and objective researchers are greatly problematic and potentially damaging to the process of relationship building. With this in mind, the first epistemological assumption that I reflect on is that theory is external to the
community; it is an academic preoccupation. As discussed by Mertens and Wilson (2012), theories are contained within our paradigms. Our actions in evaluation are influenced by program theory, evaluation theory, and social science theory (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 34). And while there are some excellent and important theoretical approaches, we must consider the manner in which the narratives in our own reports are created. We all carry biases, positive and negative, which will influence how we construct the narrative of the report. On this, Mertens (2009, p. 175) argues that bias apply to all methods and can affect our choice of categories and variables for quantitative evaluations. For example, numbers, valued for their objective narrative of things, are little more than a language. Our bias in defining terms shapes what the numbers say. For example, a tool measuring resilience might provide a numerical representation of resilience, but a personal story of resilience captures another aspect. Our bias or preferences dictates how we value each.

The school-based program aims to keep students in school by implementing a proactive approach similar to the Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) program developed by Ross Greene (Greene & Winkler, 2019). CPS includes students and the context of their lives in building proactive solutions in response to what were traditionally seen as behaviours requiring discipline. The approach is time-intensive and slower relative to the “safe schools” approach. With the safe schools policy, schools are expected to take a zero-tolerance approach to violence in school, regardless of the context of the violence (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). My training in the social etiology of mental illness and my own ideological position inform me that the CPS approach is more likely to produce a positive outcome for the student. However, if I believed in the benefits of punitive response, my evaluation of the program would take a different form. My theoretical approach to the narrative could influence the future of the program, its funding, and its leadership.

The second assumption I work with is that the complexity of local knowledge is best understood in the context of the community. However, that context should be considered within a scope of relationships. The community context does not mean setting up boundaries around the geographic site of the community. Instead, it asks us to consider how flows of information and relationships are interpreted and acted upon within that setting. For example, Dean Jacobs, consultation manager at Walpole Island First Nation, speaks of the need to view the community in terms of the local ecosystem, the larger Great Lakes ecosystem, and the continental ecosystem (Jacobs, Darnell, & McKinley, forthcoming). Local knowledge must be considered as an essential component to research/evaluation programs. With that in mind, my experiences have been that local knowledge is not always scalable and requires a knowledge translation approach that responds to this challenge. During the development of a child and adolescent mental health program in a smaller Anishinaabek community in the near north of Ontario, our team set out to build relationships for a successful program. During this process, it became clear that program ideas that focused on teaching land-based or hunting
skills would not be appropriate because the youth were already skilled in this area. This contrasted with our observations in other communities, where youth tended to exhibit few land-based skills. The connections between community members that develop on the land were already in place in this particular context. Instead, through a process of listening and sharing, a program built on what we called “responsibility-based” actions was built. During the evaluation process, it became clear that the team’s willingness to listen and learn about local knowledge was an important factor in the success of the program.

**METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

Mertens’s transformative paradigm does not have a set list of methods that she recommends. Instead, it focuses on the establishment of a “philosophical basis” that can guide the development of a protocol, usually through mixed-methods approaches (Mertens, 2009, p. 59). For my own purposes, I utilize the program evaluation toolkit published by the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Mental Health (2013). The stepped program in the toolkit works effectively with the community-based knowledge translation approach that I will discuss shortly. It allows for a natural back and forth between community and researcher/evaluator, thus helping to reduce the degree of invisible normative assumptions that can find their way into an evaluation.

The first major assumption that I work with is the need to focus on assets rather than deficits (Waapataneexkweew, 2018). This is an appropriate place to return to narratives and their power to create. Consider how Indigenous health is discussed in Canada (and globally). Based on a history of division and marginalization, there remains a tendency to focus on what is lacking or damaged in First Nations communities: drinking water, housing, food security, to name a few. Crengle et al. (2014) call for the development of measures that focus on the development of strengths, knowledge, skills, and practices rather than on deficits. Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan, and Toth (2014) associate deficit-focused discourse with generalizations about Indigenous peoples.

The school-based program from the case study moves away from deficit-based programs and redefines asset-based programs as responsibility-based. The reason for this comes from the local knowledge of the Anishinaabek community where the idea grew. If *bimaadiziwin* is a way of living a good life and is different from health as a status, then it makes sense to have the measures used in the program focus on responsibilities as actions rather than measures as things. Methodologically, this is challenging to measure. For this reason, the mixed methods approach assumed under the transformative paradigm is beneficial. Narrative approaches are often more effective at capturing action-based measures than quantitative measures. Mertens (2009) reflects on the use of narrative in evaluation via critical race theory (CRT). Here, narratives have the potential to add the voice of populations that have had their voices removed from them. Drawing on Solorzano and Yasso, Mertens (2009, p. 286-287) describes how personal stories,
third-person stories, and composite stories all add increased perspective on the lived experiences of the people we work with.

Personal stories, or small stories, since the work of William Labov in the 1960s and 1970s, have made an important contribution to narrative analysis and sociolinguistics (Ingraham, 2016). Small stories, as defined by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), are the small, mundane narratives we tell in everyday conversation. Small stories are an example of non-literary discourse, which is used to articulate the day-to-day experiences of individuals. Within the larger model developed by Labonte and Torgerson (2005), small stories speak at the individual level and can be made into composites of a community level discourse. Small stories are not official perspectives but contain in them valuable local knowledge.

The second methodological assumption I work with is rooted in the increased call for Indigenous methodologies to be used in Indigenous research. Like many people, my first encounter with the concept of Indigenous research methodologies was through Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) Decolonizing Methodologies. It was an assigned reading in my undergraduate program in Native Studies (now Indigenous Studies) at Trent University. Over the years, as I have continued my learning process, I have become concerned about discourses that create a divide between Indigenous and Western methods within the academy. Practical experience has suggested that the best way forward is through a process that allows for the decentring of power from one paradigm toward the development of beneficial and lasting relationships. Joseph P. Gone offers two important take-away points on this issue: he sees it unlikely that the recovery of remaining pre-contact epistemologies will be well suited for university-based knowledge production; and the adaptation or decolonizing of research methodologies can be considered as a “metis” approach rather than a dichotomy of Indigenous versus Western (Gone, 2019, pp. 51–52).

Practically, this has meant that partnerships between First Nations communities and university-based researchers/evaluators can act as a method for sharing skills and building capacity on both sides of the relationship. As one of my partners has joked about the use of the two-eyed seeing approach, an approach that incorporates Indigenous and Western knowledge, by saying “of course we look with two eyes. If you don’t you bump into too many things.” Her point was that we make fewer mistakes when we think more openly. I have learned to listen when she jokes because the lessons contained in humour are often important. This example demonstrates to me how small stories can be applied to understand the variety of communication styles that we encounter in our work, including humour.

AXIOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

I will not spend much time on the axiological assumptions associated with the transformative paradigm. This principle is associated with respect, beneficence, and justice (Mertens, 2009, p. 49). My experience is that these principles are based in long-term, meaningful relationships. They develop when we stop seeing our
partners as objects of study and open ourselves up to be learners. I have experienced the greatest roadblocks related to this element coming from the institutions where our non-community-based team members are located. Just as health can be read as a way a society should look, so can research ethics be a standardized way of dictating how an ongoing relationship should exist. That is not the act of decentring power.

CONCLUSION

By situating myself as a learner, I open myself to see the relationships between power, discourse, and the paradigms that are supported by them acting across levels of social structure. Social inequality creates conditions where some members of the population are left in a relative state of disadvantage. Cultural and language differences interact with power in order to maintain discursive forces that normalize one version of health over another. In the process of evaluation, we must be willing to identify how these factors influence the work that we do and to engage in evaluations that incorporate transformative assumptions which will allow us to push back against the existing power structures.

The steps that are available to us are tied to our own actions and our willingness to engage in meaningful, bidirectional learning. My experience has been that humility and empathy are tools that benefit the evaluator when we are working with Indigenous communities. By engaging in the process of listening and learning with our Indigenous relationships, we are better able to shift the paradigms by exposing powerful, normative discourses that may devalue a local way of knowing. As discussed in the case study, the local value of the in-school program was not the quantitative data easily explained to the general public. Instead, the real value to the community came in the form of the relationships, and the responsibilities inherent in those relationships, which make the program effective. From a community perspective, they were interested in how the program changed how youth behaved.

Finally, I have learned the valuable lesson of listening, thinking, and then acting in the process of moving from assumptions to applications. The application of critical approaches allows us to expose the invisible, normative aspects of our assumptions and develop applications with our community-based relationship. Applying a mixed methods approach, including narrative or discourse analysis, facilitates the development of a more complex and effective evaluation program.

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Reconciliation and Energy Democracy

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Abstract: Indigenous clean-energy leaders are moving Canada’s sustainable development agenda along at an impressive rate and are setting the stage for the localization of goods and services. Indigenous communities that do not yet have enough energy security should be the first recipients of green infrastructure investments in order to bolster equity as a tenet of Canadian nationalism. A series of key policy drivers to amplify Indigenous inclusion in the energy transition are offered as well as a number of performance indicators that can determine the extent to which Canada is advancing on reconciliation and energy democracy.

Keywords: decolonization, equity, feed in tariffs, Indigenous community development, Indigenous moral authority, institutional completeness, renewable energy, set-asides, sustainable development, sustainable development goals

Résumé: Les leaders autochtones en énergie renouvelable font avancer le programme de développement durable du Canada à un rythme impressionnant et préparent la localisation de biens et services. Les communautés qui n’ont pas encore suffisamment de sécurité énergétique devraient être les premières à bénéficier d’investissements dans des infrastructures vertes pour renforcer l’équité comme fondement du nationalisme canadien. Pour augmenter l’inclusion autochtone dans la transition énergétique, certains appuis aux politiques publiques sont proposés, de même que divers indicateurs de rendement qui peuvent déterminer la portée du progrès réalisé par le Canada en matière de réconciliation et de démocratie énergétique.

Mots clé : décolonisation, équité, tarifs de soutien, développement des communautés autochtones, autorité morale autochtone, intégralité institutionnelle, énergie renouvelable, marchés réservés, développement durable, objectifs de développement durable

While ecological integrity and balance are roots of traditional Indigenous life, it has been a little over 30 years since sustainable development became mainstream with the report of the Brundtland Commission entitled Our Common Future (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Evolution of the sustainable development discourse over time has resulted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with clear targets that support monitoring and evaluation efforts globally. Very basically, the spirit and intent of the SDGs is to inspire all of us toward inclusive and sustainable prosperity; this paper explores

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how Canada’s era of reconciliation can be amplified by focusing on energy security (SDG#7), inclusive growth (SDG #8), reduced inequity (SDG #10), and climate action (SDG#13) led by Indigenous communities and their partners. Particular attention is paid to Indigenous power production and its links to the localization of goods and services (i.e., institutional completeness) as well as the reinforcement of energy democracy and Indigenous moral authority. Energy democracy is created when energy production is decentralized and there is movement away from monopoly ownership to community ownership, thereby increasing local and democratic decision-making power over profits, jobs, and investments. Detailed exploration of how the energy transition can advance both reconciliation and sustainable development is shared.

**RECONCILIATION IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION**

The need for reconciliation is born of a burdensome and often violent history of colonialism that isolated Indigenous peoples socially, culturally, economically, and geographically. Traditionally, abundant life on the land was replaced with purposeful dependence upon the state. Localized food and medicine harvesting were substituted with imported goods and services that sustain life, significantly altering the social and economic roles in the community. More specifically, dependence on imports eroded the power of internal moral authorities. For the sake of clarity, internal moral authorities include any traditional governance or leadership entities such as clan mothers, Elders’ councils, and Indigenous governance structures. Contemporary examples of Indigenous moral authority include women’s and health organizations as well as some, but not all, Indigenous governance structures created under colonial rule (i.e., the Indian Act) that function with collective interest at heart. Arguably, the disintegration of institutional completeness (or the ability to meet human needs for survival and cultural expression with local resources), together with the resulting associated decline in power of internal moral authorities, was the most devastating colonial impact.

Rendered dependent upon cash economies and federal transfers, by design, traditional moral authorities were left without sanctions for unethical behaviour. Along with the shift to cash economies and reliance upon an import model for all or most goods and services came an export model of accountability. Indigenous communities were required to be accountable to external authorities often situated in large bureaucratic glass towers in distant urban centers for funds over which they had no decision-making authority. No longer did leadership have to be accountable to local Elders, clan mothers, or other traditional Indigenous “law”-making authorities. Although there have been significant gains to reinforce Indigenous moral authority in monitoring and evaluation over the past decade, progress toward the measurement of morally independent and self-directing goals of Indigenous communities remains weak.

To truly work at purpose with any intervention that supports healthy or successful Indigenous community, evaluation and monitoring should heighten...
positive potential in a way that inspires imagination and design rather than spiralling negative diagnosis and account to the local community. The policy implications of focusing upon and measuring community strengths means that a fundamental shift toward optimizing potential rather than averting crisis is possible. While remedial interventions may save a life, they rarely change it. No matter how well designed and effective clinical and programmatic efforts are in the short term, environmental factors have enormous power to override gains. After all, people develop in family units and communities, and measuring the individual in community ensures that the inherent weaknesses of a singular focus (either clinical or social) are cancelled.

Reconciliation requires gathering meaningful information from an Indigenous moral authority’s perspective that decidedly shifts emphasis to outcomes that are germane to community, amplifies and focuses on its strengths, and offers a simple and reasonably broad way to tell a sustainable development story. Furthermore, measuring whatever makes Indigenous communities most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in human, ecological, and economic terms is long overdue and is the logical approach to understanding what allows Indigenous individuals to thrive. Because energy security and access are pivotal to human development, their roles in Indigenous community life require special attention.

The little known, rarely captured good news story in Canada is that some Indigenous communities are already generating wealth from a range of renewable energy assets and have full employment of their membership as a result. Decentralized and locally owned power generation has given some Indigenous communities morally independent, self-directing freedom and financial self-sufficiency. This kind of decision-making authority and wealth are extraordinary under the burden of colonial structures, and they guarantee a platform for Indigenous moral authorities to function. Indigenous-owned power production has also accelerated energy democracy in Canada, or the ability to choose energy sources and retain profits locally to be used and distributed as determined by internal moral authorities. Canadian firsts such as the fully integrated micro grid developed for Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek illustrate that energy participation and independence are possible for Indigenous communities with hospitable policy environments.

Nationally, as many as 152 clean-energy projects have Indigenous community involvement or are Indigenous-owned, and there are an estimated 50–60 projects in development. Indeed, roughly a fifth of all electricity produced in Canada has some Indigenous leadership or partnership. The current production capacity of these projects is 19,516 megawatts, with an estimated $2.5 billion in revenue for involved Indigenous communities over the next 15 years (Lumos Energy, 2017). It is estimated that $6.6 billion (B) will be invested in Indigenous renewable energy projects by 2020, and $33.8B by 2035 in Canada alone (Henderson, 2013). But not enough opportunity exists for other Indigenous communities to do the same, including the opportunity to build the capacity for community power production. This would form a solid foundation for economic reconciliation and inclusion in changing world economies.
As our energy decision making evolves, so too must our imagination about who can and should profit. At no time in human history has there been a larger divide between the rich and the poor. To achieve inclusive prosperity, Canada’s energy transition must move us away from centralized models of profit and gain toward distributed power generation and prosperity through community ownership. Amplifying set-asides for community-owned power production eliminates NIMBYism (i.e., not in my back yard) and sets the foundation for the localization of other goods and services, most importantly food production. Greater institutional completeness (or the ability to meet human needs for survival and cultural expression) in Indigenous communities also sparks the resurrection and reinforcement of internal moral authority. Indigenous-owned power production is not only an effective reconciliation opportunity but also powerful climate action and a foundation for energy democracy to flourish through rural and remote areas of Canada.

ADVANCING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION

Historically, Canadian climate action and leadership were found primarily at a subnational level, with provinces, municipalities, and communities leading the way. However, over the past three federal budget announcements, there has been a decided shift, with greater investments in green infrastructure and a longer-term view of Canada’s contribution to our shared climate reality. Carbon revenues will escalate these investments and markets will continue to see rapidly decreasing costs of many green infrastructure innovations. Globally, renewable energy policies have steadily increased regardless of whether states are high-, upper-middle-, lower-middle-, or low-income countries (Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century, 2019). The energy transition is under way and unstoppable, and the “Decade of Sustainable Energy for All” has arrived (International Renewable Energy Association [IRENA], 2013). Within reach is universal access to modern energy services, along with the creation of millions of jobs in the off-grid electricity sector alone. Hope is also fuelled by the incredible potential of renewable energy sources and disruptive technologies. For example, in under two hours, enough energy falls freely from the sun to replace the use of fossil fuels used by everyone everywhere for an entire year (Cleveland, 2014). Energy markets have been disrupted, with renewables outperforming and outpacing historical sources (Clean Energy Canada, 2018). This wave has significant implications for Indigenous power production everywhere.

If there is a niche for Canada in this transition, it is in coordinating the direct and tangential funding opportunities for small-grid energy advancements where Indigenous community ownership and engagement are maximized. Most remote Indigenous communities in Canada do not yet have enough stable, safe energy supply and stand to gain the most from green infrastructure investments. Similarly, in scenarios where government-backed monopolies dominate power
production (e.g., in Manitoba and Quebec), little room exists for Indigenous inclusion and contribution to stabilizing the grid. Such investments would amplify Canada’s contributions toward several sustainable development goals by reducing inequity, guaranteeing energy security, ensuring inclusive growth, and supporting climate action. Diesel imports from long distances are carbon-intensive and put local water supplies at risk for contamination. The use of diesel affects noise and air quality, and costs are well beyond what most Canadians pay for a kilowatt-hour of electricity. When supplies are delayed, essential services are put at risk and families are left without heat in sometimes harsh and isolated environments.

Ultimately, the characteristics of green infrastructure investments may be less important than the business models used to deploy them. Fair markets for Indigenous energy systems where local ownership and engagement are maximized have enormous reconciliation potential, particularly because this optimizes conditions for the localization of other goods and services and the resurrection of internal moral authority. The economic benefits of Indigenous-owned clean-energy generation are three times better than with absentee-owned systems, and the acceptance of clean energy is dramatically enhanced (Farrell, 2014). Improving prosperity and quality of life has been repeatedly linked to local energy-system ownership, and the transition toward clean energy will have the combined impact of greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions and improved air and water quality. The social, political, and economic reasons to advance the use of clean energy technologies include health, educational, and environmental benefits, improved energy access, security and democracy, poverty reduction, gender equality, as well as job creation and rural economic development (Fischedick et al., 2011; International Energy Agency, 2011; Sathaye et al., 2011).

In other parts of the world, ordinary people are driving the energy transition through cooperative action and have enjoyed the benefits of distributed power generation by reinvesting their profits into kindergartens, sports facilities, community gathering places, and other civic services. When energy democracy is allowed to flourish, everyone has sufficient and affordable energy that prioritizes public interest, fossil fuels stay in the ground, ownership is locally distributed (e.g., by municipalities or cooperatives), and fairly paid green jobs are created.

To follow the example of others who have advanced community-owned power and stabilized and significantly decarbonized their grids, Canada should focus on remote, small-grid, off- and fringe-of-grid applications of renewable energy, not only to reduce GHG but also as a reconciliatory effort to reinstate localized access to goods and services as well as reinforce energy democracy and Indigenous moral authority. Similarly, advancing Indigenous-owned power production everywhere is an excellent platform for economic inclusion in the inevitable energy transition. Enabling conditions for the deployment of renewable energy technologies in Indigenous communities require the following:

- understanding and awareness of renewable energy;
- stable enabling policy frameworks co-created with Indigenous communities, with credible and aspiring targets and clear responsibilities;
- community engagement and ownership;
- fair markets that create sufficient, stable policy with favorable pricing and ample financing products for Indigenous communities;
- rapid expansion of renewable energy mini-grids together with transparent, easy permits and grid modifications that absorb Indigenous renewable energy contributions;
- set-asides for Indigenous power production; and
- building capacity for installation and maintenance (IRENA, 2013).

**Understanding renewable energy**

Misconceptions about the cost, availability, and reliability of community-owned power production requires information campaigns and exchange to raise awareness and acceptance. Such campaigns are best supported by the example of community benefits for early Indigenous clean-energy leaders, including but not limited to the reinforcement of Indigenous moral authority, industry, and agency. These campaigns must include the costs related to fossil-fuel extraction, subsidies, remediation after spills, consequences of fracking, and the illness burden related to air and water quality of maintaining the status quo, not to mention the insurance costs of catastrophic extreme weather events

**Stable enabling policy**

A clear vision and stable policy commitments that articulate realistic and adaptable targets for Indigenous-owned power production and involve local enterprises are necessary. In scenarios where government-backed renewable energy monopolies exist (e.g., in Manitoba and Quebec), stable policy-advancing energy democracy through Indigenous community ownership and grid integration is necessary.

**Community engagement and ownership**

Everyone in the Indigenous community power-value chain should be meaningfully engaged, and cooperation between the public and private sectors must be encouraged. Distributed energy generation combined with local ownership creates more sustainable, lower-cost renewable energy systems as well as local jobs that are particularly attractive in Indigenous communities. With a platform for energy security, the localization of other goods and services (e.g., food production) is possible, thereby reducing the need for expensive, unsustainable imports from faraway producers. Localizing power production and profit also indirectly supports the resurrection or reinforcement of Indigenous moral authorities and energy democracy. Indigenous power producers require an incubation platform and access to experienced Indigenous clean-energy leaders who can provide mentorship.

**Fair markets**

It is the business of government to regulate markets. Subsidies to fossil fuels must be phased out in order to support greater Indigenous inclusion in the energy transition. Government subsidies to fossil fuels are relatively easy to track. However,
the costs of water and overland contamination resulting from oil and gas spills, as well as the human costs of airborne noxious substances and extreme weather events to which fossil fuel use contribute, are not properly integrated in our energy balance sheets. Feed-in tariffs (i.e., a policy mechanism designed to accelerate investments in renewable energy by providing tariffs to power producers who are feeding electricity into the grid from renewable energy systems) may be appropriate in some Indigenous communities that are grid-connected, but they are not attractive in off-, micro-, and mini-grid scenarios that require fair markets for clean energy investment and deployment. In these remote and isolated scenarios, better supports for pre-feasibility, feasibility, and construction phases are needed.

**RE mini-grids**

There may be a need to consider mini-grids that are suitable to a suite of renewable energy technologies. Key actions in support of mini-grids would necessarily include

- identification of Indigenous communities suitable for mini-grid development;
- reduction of financial risks to Indigenous clean-energy leaders and developers of mini-grid projects;
- consideration of a suite of upstream and downstream incentives that buffer life-cycle costs (i.e., costs to purchase, own, maintain, and dispose of the renewable energy production system);
- use of tariffs that accommodate local socio-economic conditions and commercial viability for mini-grid developers; and
- anticipation and mitigation of the impact that the national grid might have upon the mini-grid if (or when) it arrives, and optimizing conditions for integration.

**Set-asides**

Set-asides (i.e., special allocations for Indigenous community-owned power production to feed into the grid or establish independent micro-grids) are particularly important to guarantee inclusion in the energy transition and to support equity as a tenet of Canadian nationalism. The unique trials of off-grid renewable energy projects require tailored approaches to lending and funding terms as well as serious consideration of end-user characteristics (e.g., their incomes and energy expenditures) in Indigenous communities. Set-asides could accommodate these unique circumstances.

**Capacity**

While skills are needed on a national scale (particularly in financing institutions), the focus here is upon the technical capabilities associated with operations and maintenance within Indigenous communities, particularly those who have had the least energy security historically. To that end, the expansion of training
opportunities that support operations and the maintenance of renewable energy systems are needed to meet the needs of Indigenous communities. Training institutions should be adequately equipped to meet this demand. Efforts are also required to share with Indigenous communities the vast training materials that exist within North America and internationally.

This suite of promising policy practices sets a foundation for inclusive prosperity in Canada’s energy future, where Indigenous leadership, industry, agency, and energy security and democracy flourish.

**MONITORING AND EVALUATING INDIGENOUS INCLUSION IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION**

If equity remains a tenet of Canadian nationalism, then there is merit to focusing on Indigenous communities who do not yet have quite enough energy security to meet other development goals. Diesel-dependence must remain a key performance index, as fuel prices have tripled in the past decade, an escalating trend that is likely to continue (Henderson, 2013). Consistent with the spirit and intent of several Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., energy security SDG#7, climate action SDG#13, reducing inequity SDG#10, and inclusive growth SDG#8), mapping the intensity and cost of diesel-dependence (including both the fuel consumed and the distance it must travel) would identify priority Indigenous communities and projects, but policy decision makers must acknowledge that transition efforts may be more time- and resource-intensive in situations of greatest need, where a readiness phase must be cultivated. Collaborative partnerships would be critical in these priority projects and should include provincial/territorial capital, capacity building, and economic development funding sources.

While the work of provinces, municipalities, and Indigenous leadership is laudable, accelerating energy democracy with fair markets requires a whole-of-government approach. Monitoring and evaluation efforts would be most effective if they recorded where pooled resources between public funds nationally and sub-nationally, as well as with private-sector partners, have been secured to advance Indigenous-owned power production. Capturing coordination between economic development and capital infrastructure that has maximized resources for green infrastructure development would illustrate promising practices. Understanding, profiling, and sharing what partnerships have accommodated the local socio-economic conditions and commercial viability for Indigenous power production are also needed. The characteristics of downstream incentives that buffer life-cycle costs of renewable energy installments could support and create more hospitable policy climates to accelerate the energy transition in other remote situations.

Monitoring and evaluation efforts that help us to understand the unique challenges, costs, and opportunities of Indigenous power production allow for the most strategic investments to become clear. Earnest efforts begin by determining which Indigenous communities are suitable for power production by profiling end users, developers, suppliers, and other stakeholders (e.g., where they are...
geo-politically, current GHG emissions, local economic conditions, history and extent of diesel dependence and associated costs of transport, fuel-related water-quality remediation efforts, climate-change risks and adaptation plans, burden of utility monopolies that largely exclude community contributions. etc.). Narrow targets based upon greatest need and greatest opportunity would surface in this analysis and identify where incentives must be bolstered. Once these narrowed targets have been established, more generous, fairer subsidies can be offered to fewer communities that better match the developmental costs of renewable energy systems in rural and remote Canadian situations. More generous subsidies can significantly reduce financial risks to communities seeking to develop off- and mini-grid projects and create momentum for early adopters that will affect industry and other policy climates through a contagion effect.

Monitoring and evaluation of key indices would highlight where interest or readiness is apparent. At last, Canada’s measurement of energy democracy and equity could be solidified by a clearly articulated vision with realistic, yet ambitious, GHG emissions-reduction and renewable energy targets. Equity and inclusion would be obvious if monitoring and evaluation efforts focused on measuring the degree to which those historically underserved in diesel-dependent scenarios enjoy energy security in the transition. Similarly, energy democracy could be indicated by the extent to which new opportunities were created for Indigenous community-owned power production. Suggested policy objectives and indices to advance reconciliation, energy democracy, and inclusive and sustainable prosperity are offered in Table 1.

Table 1. Reconciliatory energy-democracy performance measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy objective</th>
<th>Performance index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific GHG emissions reductions</td>
<td>GHG reductions in megatonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of communities and regions suitable for locally owned power production</td>
<td>• end user profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• developers, suppliers working with Indigenous communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• current GHG emissions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• local economic conditions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• history and extent of diesel dependence and associated costs of transport</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• fuel-related water-quality remediation efforts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• climate-change risks and adaptation plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase access to clean energy</td>
<td>Megawatts of new clean energy produced in historically energy-insecure Indigenous communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy security</td>
<td>Off-, mini-, and integrated renewable energy grid systems replacing diesel-dependent systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce diesel dependence</td>
<td>Reduced/eliminated costs of importing diesel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policy objective | Performance index
---|---
Maximize meaningful Indigenous engagement and ownership | Percentage of Indigenous ownership of renewable energy system installations
Stable, hospitable policy climates that create a fair market for remote energy systems | Codes and standards for renewable energy technologies in Indigenous communities
Remote energy systems | Models of off-, mini-, and integrated renewable energy grid systems
Acceptance, coordination, and partnership with provinces and territories in the development of off-, mini-, and integrated renewable energy grid systems, particularly in utility monopoly scenarios | Total $ set aside, ratio of subsidies to real costs, comparative analysis of government subsidies for fossil-fuel and renewable energy industries
Source and dollar amount of downstream incentives to buffer life-cycle costs | Characteristics of collaborative partnerships supporting local power production in Indigenous communities
Enhanced knowledge exchange and translation | Off-, mini-, and integrated renewable energy grid-system innovation networks established
Create/sustain off- and mini-grids with set-asides | Number of off- and mini-grid installations; proportion of Indigenous communities with off- and mini-grid installations,
Building capacity | Percentage of community ownership, engagement, and responsibility for system installation and maintenance, local green jobs created
Increase local self-reliance | Number and quality of localized goods and services available to communities after energy security (e.g., food production, cottage industries, jobs, etc.).
Improving understanding and awareness of RE | Uptake of renewable energy as measured by investments, kWh of RE produced by Indigenous clean energy leaders, and percentage of Indigenous ownership
Ease RE system integration | Influence upon regulatory environments for renewable energy system development integration by province and territory

CLOSING REMARKS
While Canada is not the only nation that falls short in climate-change mitigation, it does have one of the worst climate-change performance records in the developed world and very little energy democracy when compared with others internationally. Indigenous communities, already challenged economically by an
import model for almost all goods and services that sustain life, will see increases in basic living costs over time. If Canada accounted for the costs of importing all food, medicine, energy, and expertise to service remote and isolated Indigenous communities, investments in community-owned power would seem inexpensive by comparison.

Still, there are shining examples of Indigenous clean-energy leadership where energy security and democracy have formed the foundation for the development of other local systems that meet human needs (e.g., food production) to emerge. The wealth creation born of Indigenous-owned power production has made these communities alive with possibility and has reinforced the power of internal moral authorities, agency, and industry. The implications of restoring local access to goods and services that sustain life is that internal accountability is also reinforced. When Indigenous moral authority drives the development agenda, there is an immediate and localized evaluation system that allows for interventions that work best and feel right to flourish.

The little-published, rarely mentioned good news story in the development of energy democracy in Canada is that Indigenous clean-energy leaders are significantly moving Canada's needles on several sustainable development goals (namely, energy security SDG#7, inclusive growth SDG#8, reduced inequity SDG#10, and climate action SDG#13). If equity remains a tenet of Canadian nationalism, then Indigenous communities who have had the least energy security historically must be the first recipients of generous Canadian investments in green infrastructure. Following close behind these first recipients of investment would be every other Indigenous community that is largely dependent upon imports to sustain life.

For energy democracy to flourish, Indigenous inclusion in the energy transition must be amplified by fair markets and stable, hospitable policy environments. Without such favorable policy climates, Canada can expect rising Indigenous resistance to runaway extractivism in our quest for climate and energy equity. Ultimately, we have agency over all energy development in Canada, as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Treaties, and our Constitution, and we will use all of it in our quest for inclusive and sustainable prosperity.

NOTE

1 Personal communication with Dr. Andreas Wieg, director of the executive staff department at German Cooperative and Raiffeisen (Deutscher Genossenschafts – und Raiffeisenverband e. V.; DGRV), head of the German Office for Energy Co-operatives, November 19, 2014.

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**AUTHOR INFORMATION**

Kimberly A. Scott is a performance measurement specialist with a keen interest in the nexus between human health, energy democracy, and sustainability. She is the founder of Kishk Anaqout Health Research, an Indigenous-owned and -operated consultancy, co-chair of the Advisory Council for the Indigenous Clean Energy Social Enterprise, and a member of the Canadian Sustainability Indicators Network. She currently serves as external advisor to the Deputy Minister of Global Affairs, supports the strategic direction of the National Aboriginal Advisory Council on Species at Risk, and is involved in diversity and inclusion initiatives at McMaster University. A life-long supporter of solar energy, she has designed and built a passive solar home, systematically reduced her own carbon footprint into carbon-negative territory, and is in the process of continuing to alter her lifestyle to live on the resources of one earth while capturing the humour inevitable in the transition.
Indigenous Evaluation in the Northwest Territories: Opportunities and Challenges

Debbie DeLancey
Hotì ts'eeda: NWT SPOR SUPPORT Unit

Abstract: There is increasing interest by governments and other service providers in the potential for Indigenous evaluation methods and approaches to support the evaluation of programs and services in a way that is culturally appropriate and responsive. Indigenous governments and organizations are using Indigenous evaluation methods and approaches to inform their own program and service delivery. This article explores the current status of Indigenous evaluation in the Northwest Territories, the opportunities for expanding the use of Indigenous evaluation, and some of the challenges that must be addressed.

Keywords: Canada’s north, co-creation, culturally responsive evaluation, Indigenous evaluation, NWT Evaluation Symposium, self-government

Résumé: Les gouvernements et autres fournisseurs de services accordent de plus en plus d’intérêt aux méthodes et approches autochtones en matière d’évaluation, afin de mieux appuyer l’évaluation de programmes et de services de manière respectueuse et adaptée à la culture autochtone. Les gouvernements et les organisations autochtones utilisent des approches et des méthodes autochtones en matière d’évaluation pour éclairer leurs décisions concernant les programmes et services pour lesquels ils sont responsables. L’article explore l’état actuel de l’évaluation autochtone dans les Territoires du Nord-Ouest, les possibilités d’élargissement de l’usage de l’évaluation autochtone et certains des défis qui doivent toujours être relevés.

Mots clé: Nord du Canada, cocréation, évaluation adaptée à la culture, évaluation autochtone, symposium d’évaluation des TNO, autonomie gouvernementale

There appears to be a revitalized interest in evaluation across northern Canada, with a focus on Indigenous evaluation. Participation in the 2018 NWT Evaluation Symposium, the recent re-establishment of a Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Evaluation Society, and the recent Request for Proposals issued by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami for the development of a five-year Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan, all point to this renewed focus (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2019). In the Northwest Territories (NWT), this interest is manifesting itself in the context of a seismic shift in the shape of governance in the NWT and an emerging interest in the role that Indigenous evaluation may play in this new landscape. Specifically, the

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introduction of Indigenous evaluation approaches has great potential to advance the field of evaluation and contribute to the utilization of evaluation findings in policymaking in the NWT and across northern Canada.

In this paper I present the historical context of evaluation in the NWT and explore the potential for Indigenous evaluation to make a major contribution to the current and emerging governance of public and Indigenous programs in the territory. I consider the challenges to full utilization and implementation of Indigenous evaluation and propose opportunities to address those challenges in the context of current policy and program initiatives.

I am not an expert on Indigenous evaluation, nor can I ever become one. I am a settler who has made the NWT my home since the 1970s, generously welcomed as a resident during this time on the traditional territory of Chief Drygeese, the home of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, in Yellowknife; in the community of Radeli Ko’e (Fort Good Hope), home of the Kasho Got’ine; and in Baker Lake and Iqaluit in what is now Nunavut. The perspective I offer in this article is that of a non-Indigenous evaluator who is a long-term resident of the NWT with a career that spans more than 40 years of working with Indigenous organizations and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). During that time, I have had the privilege of working for and with a number of Indigenous organizations and communities, and collaborating with Indigenous colleagues and Elders on research related to socio-economic assessment of resource development projects, community-based research, documentation of traditional knowledge, community development, and issues related to health and well-being. Any insights that I have developed about the co-creation of research approaches and the potential for Indigenous evaluation to inform public discourse in the North I owe to the wisdom and patience of those Indigenous colleagues who taught me more about other ways of knowing, other research methods, and other modes of knowledge translation than what I brought with me from my training as a social scientist.

Some of the information and many of the insights contained in this article, particularly those dealing with the history of evaluation in the NWT, have been gleaned from my role as a practitioner in the NWT and from discussions with people in public and Indigenous governments and non-government organizations, as there is relatively little published information available.

THE EMERGING GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Occupying a land mass of 1.346 million square kilometres, the NWT has a population of just under 45,000 residents, of whom approximately 50% are Indigenous (First Nations, Inuvialuit, or Métis) (Statistics Canada, 2017). This dispersion of a small population over a large territory with limited transportation infrastructure creates governance challenges in and of itself, but governance in the NWT is made more complex because it is continually evolving as Indigenous
governing organizations (IGOs) negotiate and finalize agreements dealing with lands, resources, and self-government. At the time of writing, twelve IGOs had completed, or were currently engaged in, negotiation of land claims agreements (three completed), land claims and self-government agreements (one completed), self-government agreements (one completed, six in negotiations), and/or land, resources, and self-government agreements (three in negotiations). An additional three communities are seeking governing powers at a community level, unique to the interests of their membership (GNWT, n.d. b). Each of these agreements provides the IGO with some degree of jurisdiction and authority over a broad range of governance areas, typically including management of land, water, renewable resources and harvesting, heritage, education, and a range of social programs.

The GNWT is a public government with province-like powers. But as Indigenous governments complete self-government agreements, jurisdiction over many of the powers and duties of a provincial-style government is available to be drawn down by Indigenous governments. There is no common template for how this will happen, or for what mechanisms may be put in place to provide for shared jurisdiction in areas of common interest. Further, since NWT land claims and self-government agreements have been completed over a period of many years (beginning with the signing of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement in 1984), the scope of topics and level of detail included in those agreements have evolved as the focus has broadened from dealing only with land rights, to the broader range of self-governing authorities outlined above.

At the community level, GNWT legislation provides for the creation of charter communities, which allow Chiefs and Councils to assume the role of a municipal corporation, thereby expanding their authority to include all aspects of municipal-type government responsibility, ranging for example from operation of water treatment facilities to provision of sport and recreation programs.

The result is a continually changing, and potentially confusing, governance environment where many government programs and services will be delivered differently in different regions of the NWT. Some possible scenarios for how this might evolve include the following:

- some programs remain under GNWT jurisdiction and will be delivered by GNWT, for example, health (with the exception of traditional healing), but with the potential for regionally differing delivery mechanisms to be negotiated;
- Indigenous governments will draw down jurisdiction for some programs as provided for in self-government agreements and become fully responsible for designing and delivering those programs, for example, early childhood education, resulting in different approaches among regions;
- Indigenous governments may choose not to draw down jurisdiction in the near future, in which cases GNWT may continue to deliver programs through a contractual arrangement, such as the Tłı̨chǫ Intergovernmental Services Agreement (Tłı̨chǫ Government, 2003);
Indigenous Evaluation in Northwest Territories

- Indigenous governments may draw down jurisdiction in areas where their authority within self-government agreements has been limited, for example, in the Délînê Final Self-Government Agreement, jurisdiction with respect to kindergarten to Grade 12 education of students must be exercised within a curriculum framework and graduation requirements established by the GNWT (Délînê Got’îne Government, 2013).

Given the nature of rights negotiations between Indigenous nations and Canada, it is evident that governance in NWT will be in a state of evolution for years to come. Further, if the GNWT acts on the newly stated priority of the 19th Legislative Assembly to implement UNDRIP, this may result in changes to current GNWT negotiating mandates and broaden the scope of future self-government agreements (Legislative Assembly of NWT, 2019). This presents a number of challenges for the systematic use of evaluation to provide insights into the delivery of government programs and services. With respect to the role of the GNWT, each of the scenarios outlined above will require a different evaluation approach depending on the extent of GNWT authority and involvement and the development of appropriate methods, thus potentially requiring a larger investment in evaluative activity to support the disparate needs. For Indigenous governments, there will be a need to build evaluation capacity. All parties will be challenged to find common ground in establishing theories of change and shared outcomes for territorial programs that are delivered differently among regions, and they will need to find ways to collaborate to determine what policies and guidelines will be applied, to reach common agreement on what methods and approaches are appropriate and effective in each governance context outlined above, and to identify the parties best suited to commission and implement evaluation in each setting.

THE NWT EVALUATION CONTEXT

The evaluation function in the GNWT was formally established in 1995, when a program design and evaluation unit was established within the Financial Management Board Secretariat (now the Department of Finance). Over time, this function has been combined with the budgeting function in Finance, or housed within the Department of Executive, but the fundamental mandate to promote evaluation within GNWT has remained unchanged. The unit has produced a series of manuals, guides, and workbooks to support program design and evaluation activities within the GNWT (GNWT, 2014). They also provide training, ranging from short workshops to offering support for GNWT employees to engage in graduate-level coursework. Although the evaluation resources are publicly available, outreach beyond GNWT employees has not been a major focus of the unit’s mandate.

There was a stand-alone NWT Chapter of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) for many years, but in the early 2000s the local capacity to maintain a separate chapter was deemed insufficient, and NWT joined the Alberta Chapter
of CES. Although some efforts were made to reach out to the non-government sector and Indigenous organizations, membership was composed primarily of federal and GNWT employees, and a few private-sector consultants, mostly resident in Yellowknife.

**Historic challenges to Indigenous evaluation in NWT**

Until recently, the promotion and utilization of evaluation have generally not been a priority of Indigenous governing organizations in the NWT. As has been noted by many authors in Canada and elsewhere, Indigenous communities and organizations have developed a deep distrust of research, including evaluation, as a result of a history of extractive research (Gaudry, 2015; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013). Larry Bremner noted in a keynote reflection at the NWT Evaluation Symposium in May 2018 that evaluators “have stolen their knowledge, we’ve taken their stories and we haven’t returned anything of benefit.”

This distrust and skepticism about the usefulness of research and evaluation have been made worse by the language of evaluation. Terms like “logic model” and “indicator” are not generally meaningful for people who are untrained in evaluation and research methods, and they may seem even more alienating to people whose first language is not English (DeLancey, Radu, Enosse, & Ritchie, 2018; Waapalaneexkweew, 2018).

When evaluation has been initiated by Indigenous organizations, it has frequently been in response to a requirement from a funding agency—most often a territorial or federal government agency—rather than as an internally driven initiative to drive program or service improvement. This is consistent with the experience of other Indigenous groups in North America (Martinez, Running Wolf, BigFoot, Randall, & Villegas, 2018).

Compounding this historic distrust and skepticism about the value of evaluation is a lack of time and resources. Indigenous governing organizations in NWT have, for the most part, been focused on one overriding priority, which is the negotiation and implementation of land claims, resources, and self-government agreements, an activity that is all-consuming and takes many years to complete. Smaller organizations, such as band councils and Indigenous non-profit groups, face capacity and capability challenges including limited funding, lack of sustained funding for most programs, and difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff—all of which mean that resources and attention tend to be focused on the immediate pressures of program delivery rather than other components of the program cycle (i.e., planning, monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement based on evidence).

**Contemporary challenges**

The concept of Indigenous evaluation provides an opportunity to change the narrative of evaluation as a tool of colonization, as something that is imposed on Indigenous governments and organizations by external agencies and not relevant to their own needs and priorities (Bowman, Francis, & Tyndall, 2015). But this is
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a relatively new field, and there are barriers to utilization—including a shortage of trained Indigenous evaluators in Canada and the absence of formal learning opportunities for Indigenous evaluation in a Canadian context.

Another challenge is that Indigenous evaluation approaches and methods may not be understood by public governments and funding agencies to be as rigorous, credible, or valid as those with which they are more familiar. The beliefs and values that inform Indigenous evaluation approaches, which are grounded in Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and defined by Indigenous communities, may not resonate with funders (Gregory, Easterling, Kaechele, & Trousdale, 2016). The greater emphasis on qualitative methods and reliance on stories and Elders’ wisdom which is characteristic of Indigenous approaches may be seen as less rigorous. Kawakami, Aton, Cram, Lai, and Porima (2007) note that Indigenous nations and communities are not homogeneous and that effective methodologies must be rooted in local knowledge and traditions. Kovach (2009) also stresses that Indigenous knowledge cannot be standardized but must be contextualized. Although this need for differing approaches and methods appropriate to local circumstance is not substantially different from the accepted use of a variety of approaches and methods in the established western evaluation profession and tradition, the fact that Indigenous evaluations differ in format and approach may pose an impediment to acceptance and understanding on the part of funding governments and agencies with respect to the contribution that these evaluation products make to fit with their needs.

To date, the use of evaluation as a program improvement tool has not systematically been embraced or adopted by Indigenous governments and organizations in the NWT. The outcomes and measures promoted by evaluation professionals often do not reflect the values and priorities of Indigenous governments and organizations (Kawakami et al., 2007). Indigenous communities and governments are frustrated by what they perceive as an unnecessary need to demonstrate outcomes of community-driven projects and programs to the dominant society, particularly those that are rooted in values that are deeply grounded and universally shared. As former Chief Roy Fabien of the Katlod’eechee First Nation described it, “We’re trying to justify ourselves as Dene people, here. We don’t need to . . . . To me, this is a colonization process we’re in right now . . . . The whole process—is it about money? If we toe the line and do everything that they tell us to, then we get money?” (CBC North, 2017).

A GROWING INTEREST IN EVALUATION

The GNWT and, to a lesser extent, municipal and community governments and some NWT non-government organizations have regularly utilized evaluation studies to inform the design, development, and improvement of programs and projects in the NWT, but as noted above, until recently there appears to have been less interest on the part of Indigenous governments and organizations. Recent events described below indicate that this is changing, and they point to an
emerging interest in evaluation as a means for Indigenous governing organizations to ensure that the programs and services they are providing to beneficiaries and residents are effective, and as a means of accountability to beneficiaries and not just to external funders.

Evaluation as a means of demonstrating outcomes: On-the-land programs

Indigenous governing organizations and communities have long been subjected to requirements for reporting on activities and outcomes imposed by funding agencies, and the requirement has been experienced as an imposition with little relevance to local needs and priorities (GNWT, 2001). However, there is also recognition that undertaking sound evaluation practices can be an essential step in accessing continued funding from external agencies, both governmental and non-governmental. One area where this recognition has recently gained traction is that of land-based programming. On-the-land programs play an important role in Indigenous communities, providing a range of benefits that include connection to language and culture, transmission of traditional knowledge and values, healing opportunities, and many more (Burgess, Mileran, & Bailies, 2008; Burgess et al., 2009; Redvers, 2016; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014). Land-based programming is expensive, including costs of transportation, infrastructure, staffing, and insurance, among others (Wildcat et al., 2014). The programming costs mean that Indigenous communities are continually seeking funding to support what is seen as a critical need in their communities.

To help communities address this need, the NWT On The Land Collaborative (OTLC) was established in 2015 by TIDES Canada and the GNWT to provide NWT organizations and communities with one-window access to funding, and to lever additional funding. The OTLC is composed of government (territorial and Indigenous), charitable, corporate, and not-for-profit partners, and in 2018 it distributed $1 million in funding to 48 land-based projects in NWT.

Funders of land-based programming often see the investment as an opportunity to achieve broad social outcomes—land-based programs often have stated goals that include healing, addictions treatment, reduction in youth crime, language enhancement, to name a few. Funders and program sponsors want to see evidence that the intended outcomes are being achieved, or at least that there is a direct link between program activities and the intended results. But often, land-based programs are focusing on issues whose origins are rooted in a multi-generational shared community experience of colonization, residential school, dispossession of lands, and institutional racism, and the impacts of programs will not be realized in the short term (Bowman et al., 2015, Williams, 2018). Generally, these programs are short-term due to financial and other constraints, lasting from just a few days to a few weeks, which only increases the difficulty of achieving substantial impacts in response to generational issues.

Further, there is skepticism in Indigenous communities about the need to evaluate an activity that is universally understood to have inherent value. As one
leader noted, “You can’t evaluate land-based programs. That’s ridiculous. We all know what it feels like when you get out of town and you get on the land. How do you measure that?” (DeLancey et al., 2018). At a 2017 Pan-Territorial On The Land Symposium held in Yellowknife, a panel discussion on evaluation approaches for land-based programs prompted a heated exchange that illustrated how deeply rooted is the distrust of evaluation activity in this area. Iona Radu summarized this divide by distinguishing between how evaluation of land-based programs has been perceived as “judging the merit, worth and significance of a program” to see if it measures up to standards set by external funders; and the use of evaluation as a tool for “coming to know,” that is, making new knowledge to guide programming in a good way (DeLancey et al., 2018).

OTLC partners and funding recipients have worked together to bridge this gap. In 2019, the OTLC convened a gathering of land-based program funders, practitioners, and evaluators with interest and experience in working with these programs, to begin the process of developing a shared understanding of approaches to evaluating on-the-land programs. Organizers hoped that this work could lead to a body of literature that would propose a generally accepted program theory for Indigenous land-based programming, and shared best practices that would be grounded in Indigenous epistemology, while also being accepted as credible by funders and program sponsors. Participants concluded that there is value in developing a shared theory of change to help program funders understand the link between short-term outcomes and longer-term outcomes. They proposed further work to engage the broader community of organizations working in this field to collaborate on developing best practices in evaluation approaches and methods for land-based programming, on the assumption that this collaboration on a large scale would support general acceptance of these methods and approaches by funders (Tides Canada, Sahtu Renewable Resources Board, NWT Recreation & Parks Association, & GNWT, 2018).

Evaluation for self-government: The NWT Evaluation Symposium

In the context of the evolving governance landscape in the NWT described above, Indigenous governments are increasingly engaged in delivering programs and services to beneficiaries and other residents in their areas of jurisdiction, and in generally establishing themselves as governments exercising the full range of powers and duties that fall within their purview.

In 2018, the Alberta and NWT Chapter of the CES partnered with Dedats’ęetsaa: the Tłı̨chǫ Research & Training Institute of the Tłı̨chǫ Government, to host the NWT Evaluation Symposium in Yellowknife. The Symposium was organized as an ancillary event following the CES Annual Conference, which was also hosted by the Alberta and NWT Chapter, and was held in Calgary, Alberta. CES conference organizers worked with Dedats’ęetsaa to develop an agenda for the Symposium that built on the broader conference theme of co-creation but with a specific focus on Indigenous evaluation, and they designed an agenda “to highlight work that is being done by Indigenous governments and communities,
or by non-Indigenous evaluators in partnership with Indigenous governments and communities, in the Northwest Territories and elsewhere; and to provide an opportunity for evaluators and program staff in all levels of government to network, share approaches and methodologies, and promote best practices” (CES, n.d. b).

A key organizing principle for the conference was that the CES organizers and Dedats’eetsaa would work in full partnership and collaboration—that the event would be truly co-created. Therefore, instead of just offering time slots for Indigenous presenters, the conference was split into two separate days. The first day of the two-day Symposium was held in a hotel meeting room, with an agenda similar to most academic conferences, including keynote presentations and a panel discussion with an explicit focus on evaluation. For the second day of the conference, the agenda was developed by Dedats’eetsaa. They decided to set aside traditional Western academic notions of knowledge transmission and instead to privilege Indigenous methods. The focal point for the day’s agenda was to highlight Boots on the Ground, a caribou monitoring program that involves participatory action research using traditional Indigenous monitoring methods. The agenda was turned over to the Tłı̨chǫ experts, including Elders, and the sessions were held at a land-based venue outside of Yellowknife, with break-out sessions held in tipis or around campfires. Elders and program staff spoke in their own words about the program, about their research methods, and their findings, often speaking in their own language with the use of simultaneous interpretation. The rhythm and pacing of presentations were markedly different from the first day.

Some 115 people attended the Symposium, with about one third of the participants identifying as evaluators. An indication of the emerging interest in evaluation in the NWT is that half of the participants were from the NWT, and seven NWT Indigenous governing organizations were represented. Strong financial support was provided by the GNWT and several corporate sponsors, and substantial in-kind support was provided by the Tłı̨chǫ Government and non-government partners.

Dr. John B. Zoe, Chair of Dedats’eetsaa and the Symposium co-chair, opened the Symposium by noting that evaluation sponsored by public government tends to be deficit-based:

"The only evaluation we hear today is when GNWT reports on Indigenous people, for example, “rates of Indigenous language use slightly improved but overall education levels are decreasing.” . . . Everything is negative. It doesn’t capture our strengths, or use these strengths as the foundation for using evaluation."

Zoe went on to explain that the second day of the Symposium would focus on the Tłı̨chǫ Government’s Boots on the Ground program, a caribou monitoring program based on the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Elders and harvesters, and that the approach to evaluation would differ from Western evaluation approaches: “Our report is a story, it’s different from what you’re used to.” He closed by stressing the importance of evaluation for Indigenous self-governments, stating, “We know we need to evaluate what we do and see how we can make it stronger.”
also noted the value of having several NWT Indigenous governments present at the Symposium, providing an opportunity for them to share best practices and learn from one another—a critical first step in developing a community of interest for Indigenous evaluation in the NWT.

Other Indigenous speakers also highlighted the role of evaluation in promoting and strengthening Indigenous sovereignty. Dr. Nicole Bowman stressed the importance of grounding evaluation in the shared history of colonization and dispossession of lands. Nan Wehipeihana from New Zealand noted that “[e]valuation is part of the cultural DNA of Indigenous people” and outlined several examples of Maori culturally grounded frameworks that have been applied in New Zealand (Wehipeihana, 2018b). Hillory Tenute closed her presentation with a blunt statement about the need for Indigenous approaches and methods to be privileged: “Co-creation and collaboration are fine, but just for one minute, can we just own the space?” Her statement highlighted the need to distinguish between evaluation approaches that, while making sincere efforts to engage Indigenous collaborators in a respectful way, still remain grounded in Western ways of knowing and methods, and evaluation that is initiated by Indigenous people, grounded in Indigenous values and methods, and undertaken by Indigenous evaluators.

Building Indigenous evaluation capacity

As the interest in Indigenous evaluation increases, so too does the need to build capacity for evaluation among Indigenous scholars and researchers. Hotıì ts’eeda is a research network in the NWT, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research as one of a national network of SPOR SUPPORT Units under the Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research, with a mandate to support health research and training that is rooted in Dene Naowo, Inuvialuit, and Métis knowledge and to respond to the needs of patients and communities (Hotìì ts’eeda, n.d.). It commenced operations in 2016. In an effort to respond to priorities brought forward by Indigenous organizations in the NWT, Hotìì ts’eeda has identified the need to promote the development of Indigenous evaluation capacity and methods related to health and well-being in the NWT and has implemented an Indigenous evaluation capacity strategy that will provide opportunities for training, professional development, and mentorship to staff of Indigenous organizations working in health and wellness-related programs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS EVALUATION IN NORTHERN CANADA

The intention of the NWT Evaluation Symposium was to showcase new approaches to evaluation that provide an opportunity to change the narrative of evaluation as a tool of colonization, as something that is imposed on Indigenous governments and organizations by external agencies and not relevant to their needs and priorities. Terms such as culturally responsive evaluation, Indigenous evaluation, and Indigenous evaluation frameworks have been used by different
authors to encompass several dimensions of evaluative activity, generally falling into three broad categories:

- **culturally responsive evaluation**: evaluation conducted by non-Indigenous evaluators that is “intentional and inclusive when selecting and implementing evaluation design and methods based on the culture and contextual needs of the project, context, participants, and stakeholders” (Bowman et al., 2015);
- **co-created evaluation**: where both Indigenous and Western knowledge are equally respected and utilized as appropriate in designing evaluation approaches (Superu, 2018); and
- **Indigenous evaluation**: evaluation by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people, as Indigenous people (Wehipeihana, 2018b).

These distinctions provide a useful framework for discussion of the opportunities for the utilization of Indigenous evaluation approaches in Northern Canada. As described above, the NWT governance landscape includes a range of programs and services variously delivered by public governments, non-government organizations, and Indigenous organizations and governments, as well as initiatives that operate under collaborative or co-management agreements. This diversity of governance and funding arrangements will be a permanent feature of governance in the NWT, thus requiring an equally diverse evaluation toolkit. These distinct evaluation approaches and their potential for utilization in the NWT are explored below.

**Culturally responsive evaluation**

Several authors have addressed the need for non-Indigenous evaluators working in Indigenous contexts to practise evaluation that is grounded in the cultural context of the community in which the evaluation is taking place, respects Indigenous beliefs and protocols, applies culturally relevant measures that flow from community-defined values, and meaningfully engages Indigenous people in the design and conduct of all stages of the evaluation (Bowman et al., 2015; Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; LaFrance & Nichols, 2008). Given the extensive literature, it is reasonable to state that the precepts of culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) have become widely acknowledged and generally accepted by the evaluation profession in North America.

Both Bowman et al. (2015) and Wehipeihana (2018b) have stressed the importance of the role that non-Indigenous evaluation allies play in the contemporary context where there are few Indigenous evaluation practitioners trained to participate in evaluation-related activities, in effect considering CRE not only as a valid evaluation approach in its own right but also as a much-needed bridging mechanism to a future where capacity issues will no longer hamper Indigenous evaluation approaches.

Bowman et al. (2015) have also noted the utility of CRE in contexts where there may be a lack of clarity with respect to who has jurisdiction for delivery of
services in situations where, for example, tribal peoples reside in non-tribal areas. This is particularly relevant in the NWT where there is considerable mobility among regions and where employment opportunities tend to be found in regional centres and in Yellowknife, the capital city, resulting in a large proportion of the residents of self-governing entities living outside the area where their Indigenous government has jurisdiction.

There will be an ongoing need for CRE in NWT as public governments will continue to provide the greatest proportion of programs and services for the foreseeable future, and in order for evaluation in this context to be effective it requires cultural competence and an ability to work effectively in Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. The GNWT, in its ongoing role as a public government, will continue to be a major funder and delivery agent for programs and services in the NWT. Given that half of the territory’s population is Indigenous, demonstrated competence in CRE methods and approaches should be a requirement embedded in policies, protocols, and practices for any evaluation undertaking that involves programs and services delivered to, on behalf of, or in partnership with Indigenous residents and governments. Compared to many public government institutions, the GNWT has been progressive in its efforts to acknowledge and incorporate Indigenous culture, values, and ways of knowing in its work—see, for example, the *Traditional Knowledge Policy* (GNWT, 2005), the *Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework* (GNWT, 2015), and the *Respect/Recognition/Responsibility* policy (GNWT, n.d. a). GNWT’s evaluation policies and protocols, however, are outdated and contain no explicit mention of CRE or Indigenous evaluation, other than an indication that evaluators must “respect the culture that you will be working in” (GNWT, 2014). While any evaluation undertaking dealing with a GNWT program should be informed by the overarching policy documents noted above, explicit direction and support for evaluators working with Indigenous populations in the NWT should be developed. The Australian government has shown leadership in this area by initiating the development of a whole-of-government evaluation strategy for policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians (Government of Australia, 2019).

Culturally responsive evaluation approaches are likely to be most effective when applied to situations where jurisdiction remains with the Government of Canada or GNWT but where program beneficiaries include Indigenous residents and communities.

**Co-created evaluation**

Co-created evaluation builds on the precepts of CRE but is premised on the assumption of true partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants at every level. Co-created evaluation requires more than recognition and respect for Indigenous epistemology and methods. As the theme for the CES 2018 Conference, co-creation was described as follows: “Co-creation challenges traditional power relationships. It requires an evaluator to be a methodological expert, facilitator, critic, ally and strategic thinker who can move evaluation to enable
change while sharing jurisdiction. It speaks to developing true partnerships, to building evaluations from the ground up and to acknowledging that other methods and perspectives have equal weight to our own” (CES, n.d. a).

Kate McKegg has explored the power relationships inherent in research and evaluation. She asserts the need for this issue to be addressed explicitly in order to truly co-create an evaluation approach and has written about the need to shift the balance of power, stating that “(white) evaluators and others with power to resource need to invest in and support the development of evaluators from other cultures to lead and to determine whose values hold sway” (Wehipeihana, Davidson, McKegg, & Shanker, 2010, p. 189). For co-created evaluation to be genuine, Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies must be equally privileged; as Wehipeihana notes, “there is no substitute for cultural capital that comes from being within the culture; some things can’t be learnt or explored simply with a ‘culturally responsive’ lens” (Wehipeihana et al., 2010, p. 188).

As challenging as this is, Canadian evaluators are going to have to come to grips with the growing need for co-created evaluation in situations where jurisdiction or program delivery responsibility is shared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments, or even among Indigenous government organizations. Bowman et al. (2015, p. 341) note that the evaluation community will benefit from a multijurisdictional framework in situations where governments are linked into “an interconnected system that helps agencies form policy task forces and working groups; develop information and resource sharing practices; form political alliances; create memos of understanding and legal ordinances or structures; and carry out research and evaluation studies to properly document evidence-based programs and practices carried out in municipal, state, federal and Tribal contexts.”

The NWT is well positioned to become a leader in the development of protocols and methods for, and utilization of, co-created evaluation approaches. As more Indigenous governments contemplate administrative service arrangements with the GNWT and co-management arrangements become more established, there will be an increasing need for robust evaluation approaches that reflect the spirit of shared jurisdiction, that equally privilege Indigenous and Western knowledges and methods, and that produce results and recommendations that are perceived as credible and relevant by all knowledge users.

Canadian evaluators and social scientists frequently cite the concept of “two-eyed seeing” to describe an approach where Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges are integrated through a process of learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledge, and weaving these together (National Collaborating Centre on Aboriginal Health, 2013). The Tłı̨chǫ Government promotes the philosophy of “strong like two people,” which recognizes the value of both Western and Indigenous knowledge systems and the need to be able to operate effectively in both contexts (Tłı̨chǫ Government, n.d.). What these philosophies
have in common is that they do not privilege one form of knowledge over another but acknowledge merit in multiple perspectives (Waapalaneexkwew, 2018). This is an admirable goal but can be difficult to achieve in reality, especially in a context where power and privilege have generally accrued to Western epistemologies and methods. Co-creation is not about Indigenizing Western evaluation but can be effective only when evaluation frameworks and methods are designed in true partnership, drawing on knowledge, values, and research methods from Indigenous and Western spheres as needed to arrive at the most appropriate and effective evaluation approach for the specific context of the evaluation. Further, as Gaudry (2015, p. 260) notes, “Non-Indigenous researchers hoping to carry out research with Indigenous people or in Indigenous communities must be prepared to navigate settler-Indigenous and colonizer-colonized relationship.”

Various authors have proposed models for designing co-created evaluation approaches; for example, Martinez et al. (2018, p. 35) describe a model for co-creating collaborative evaluation for tribal child welfare programs in the United States, citing its potential to “build a new narrative for program planning and evaluation.”

The experience of the NWT Evaluation Symposium highlights some of the challenges the profession will face in crafting approaches to co-creation. In responding to the evaluation survey, the majority of the participants who responded (33% response rate) were positive about having the opportunity to learn in an Indigenous context from Indigenous experts and to hear the unique perspectives of Indigenous researchers. However, there were also comments that revealed dissatisfaction or discomfort with the Day 2 sessions. Some respondents indicated that they were not comfortable with the unstructured approach of the on-the-land sessions, that they found the day to be poorly organized, and that listening through interpreters was challenging. Some respondents expressed a desire for more focused and systematic presentations. It may be that, pushed out of their comfort zones, some evaluators experienced for the first time how many Indigenous people have reacted to the experience of participating in academic conferences, highlighting what McKegg has described as the need for non-Indigenous evaluators to “understand ourselves as ‘cultural beings’ and to acknowledge that our cultural worldview is not ‘best’ or ‘better’, it is different” (Wehipeihana et al., 2010, p. 189).

Co-created evaluation approaches will have particular relevance in situations where public and Indigenous government share responsibility for program delivery and where Indigenous governments and other organizations rely on external funding sources to support critical programs, as is currently the case with some land-based programs.

**Indigenous evaluation**

The ultimate goal for Indigenous governments is to utilize evaluation that is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and responds to the priorities and values of Indigenous communities, and to use evaluation not only for internal
accountability but also for ongoing program improvement. This goes far beyond training Indigenous people in Western evaluation methods:

Indigenous evaluation is not just a matter of accommodating or adapting majority perspectives to American Indian contexts. Rather, it requires a total reconceptualization and rethinking. It involves a fundamental shift in worldview. Indigenous methodology challenges us to rethink both epistemology and method. Although methods of indigenous evaluation share common ground with qualitative methods, the two are not synonymous. (LaFrance, Nichols, & Kirkhart, 2012, p. 61)

As Indigenous governments in the NWT advance the process of negotiation and implementation of self-government agreements, there will be an increased role for Indigenous evaluation in supporting program and service delivery by Indigenous governments, for Indigenous residents. Non-government Indigenous organizations are also increasingly seeking to rely on Indigenous evaluation approaches and methods to support their program delivery and improvement, as evidenced by attendance at the NWT Evaluation Symposium.

Indigenous evaluators are breaking down the historical barriers of distrust by grounding evaluation approaches in Indigenous values and cosmologies, using methods that are familiar and appropriate in local Indigenous contexts and changing the language of evaluation to be more responsive to Indigenous ways of knowing.

Is there a role for non-Indigenous evaluators to participate in, or contribute to, Indigenous evaluation? Informal and undocumented feedback received by the organizers after the NWT Evaluation Symposium indicated that some non-Indigenous evaluators were made uncomfortable by the emphasis on Indigenous evaluation as an enterprise that must be Indigenous-led, questioning what the role of non-Indigenous evaluators and Western approaches might be in a future NWT context. In her keynote address to the CES 2018 Conference, Nan Wehipeihana noted that while the goal of Indigenous evaluation is to have evaluation that is done by Indigenous peoples, for Indigenous peoples, as Indigenous peoples, the current reality is that there is a shortage of Indigenous practitioners trained to play this role, so there is a role for non-Indigenous evaluators to participate in both co-created and Indigenous evaluation. However, she stressed, this is “by invitation with no automatic or presumed right of leadership” (Wehipeihana, 2018a). As Indigenous governments expand their role in taking ownership of evaluation, non-Indigenous evaluators have to be willing to step aside and recognize that while being an ally sometimes means collaborating and supporting, sometimes it just means getting out of the way.

The preceding sections focus on how the development of Indigenous evaluation in the NWT may contribute to the broader public discourse on this topic. But there is another, critically important, aspect to the role that a better understanding of Indigenous evaluation approaches can play in today’s world. Michael Quinn Patton and others are promoting the concept of Blue Marble Evaluation—evaluation that is “aimed at transforming systems towards a more sustainable
world,” breaking down silos and creating linkages to make global systems more sustainable (Patton, n.d.). Andy Rowe (2019, p. 29) has echoed this theme in his promotion of the need for sustainability-ready evolution, that is, “evaluation that recognises that human and natural systems are coupled, and that current evaluation portfolios are now and will increasingly be affected by natural system forces including climate.” Rowe and others have criticized current evaluation approaches as falling short of the scope needed to be sustainability-ready because evaluation generally treats human and natural systems as unconnected. In a keynote panel presentation on “Evaluation for the Anthropocene” at the CES 2018 Conference, panel members noted how Indigenous worldviews, which are rooted in place and perceive mankind as part of a broader ecosystem, provide the means to bridge this gap in evaluation approaches. Sean Curry argued that environmental science doesn’t say “no” until hard science proves a negative impact, but that when an issue is viewed through an Indigenous lens, there will be a different, more nuanced, outcome. Jane Davidson proposed that a core value of sustainability-ready evaluation should be that evaluation must be responsive to the needs of the community but without compromising the ability of future generations to enjoy the use of the land and resources—a value that is congruent with Indigenous understanding of responsibility for stewardship of lands and resources (CES, 2018).

These perspectives are mirrored in the work of Indigenous evaluators. Wehipeihana (2018b) states, “Our conservation and guardianship practices are a form of evaluation for the protection and sustainability of mother earth and ourselves.” Zoe, a recognized expert in Tłı̨chǫ cosmology, continually returns to this theme in his work. In explaining the importance of the evaluation approach reflected in the Boots on the Ground project to participants at the NWT Evaluation Symposium, he noted that the program is founded on the principle of having on-the-land experiences informing research: “All the information, all the knowledge that we need is still on the land.” Boots on the Ground is, in fact, a sophisticated, mixed-methods evaluation of the interplay of human and natural systems and their impact on one another; the project’s purpose, as described by Zoe, is to determine “what impact is [the decline of the caribou herd] having on us, and how do we make it public to our people.” Stressing the essential linking between human and natural systems, Zoe asserted the need to make policymakers understand that “the goal is not to get people off the land, the goal is to get people on the land with the caribou. We have co-existed since time immemorial. We’re partners—if one of us is missing, the other is going to wander away.”

Rowe (2019, p. 43) asserts that in order for evaluation to be relevant in a twenty-first-century context, it must “incorporate different worldviews that regard human and natural systems as coupled and each important” and concludes that “Indigenous evaluation approaches that incorporate Indigenous worldviews could prove to be the polar star for sustainability-ready evaluation.” The development of Indigenous evaluation approaches in the NWT and elsewhere has a role to play in addressing issues of critical importance to twenty-first-century society, beyond its immediate application to the needs and priorities of Indigenous governments.
CONCLUSION

As Bowman et al. (2015) have noted, building Indigenous evaluation capacity and capability will require a substantial investment. They describe the scope of the work to be done with respect to training, developing common policies and methods, and data sharing protocols as “staggering.” But their conclusion about why this investment is worthwhile rings true for Canada as well as the United States: “without evaluation capacity building within, across and outside of Indian Country, the pattern of long-term educational, economic, health, and other disparities that Indian people have endured will likely continue” (Bowman et al., 2015, p. 352).

The multi-dimensional governance landscape in the NWT provides opportunities for advancing the understanding and utilization of culturally responsive evaluation, co-created evaluation, and Indigenous evaluation approaches. All three have relevance, but consideration will be needed to determine which approach is the most appropriate in any given situation.

There is an opportunity for the GNWT to update and enhance its evaluation policies and guidelines to formalize the use of CRE as an appropriate evaluation approach for work in NWT communities, and to ensure that Indigenous ways of knowing and research methods are given equal or greater weight than non-Indigenous approaches and methods. The requirement for a CRE approach when appropriate can be built into the contracting process for government-sponsored evaluation projects.

In the NWT, Indigenous governments are leading the way in developing research and evaluation approaches rooted in Indigenous knowledge and values. NWT stakeholders with an interest in evaluation have fertile ground to develop and test protocols for co-created evaluation, and to build on learnings and share best practices with one another and the rest of Canada—both through existing forums such as CES meetings and publications, and through new communities of interest that may be formed to promote Indigenous evaluation in the north and across Canada.

There is a need not only in the NWT, but throughout Canada, for learning and research institutions to make an intentional investment in the nascent field of Indigenous evaluation, supporting research, publications, and training wherever possible. Targeted opportunities must be made available for Indigenous researchers and practitioners who want to advance their own skills in this area.

CES can play a role by continuing to advance the public discourse, using its privileged position as the curator of evaluator credentialing in Canada to advocate for the credibility and legitimacy of Indigenous evaluation approaches.

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Reflections on Evaluating in Indigenous Contexts: Looking to the Future

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INTRODUCTION: RECALLING OUR PURPOSE

This special edition on evaluation in Indigenous contexts had two purposes: to understand the differences between Indigenous and Western ontologies and epistemologies as these relate to research and evaluation; and to highlight the experiences and insights of researchers and evaluators who work routinely in or with Indigenous communities on research initiatives that incorporate evaluation. Creating a volume of this nature builds on the ideas of several in the field who propose that context matters where effective and relevant Indigenous research and evaluation are concerned (Cram, Chilisa, & Mertens, 2016; Cram & Mertens, 2015). Equally important, however, is our view that there is a dearth of research and reflection on the actual practice of evaluation in these contexts. Although there is an acknowledgment that attitudes, behaviours, and methods must be different, there is little writing on the substance and implications of these differences on evaluation practices. In this regard, explorations about how evaluators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are working in and with Indigenous communities was the main insight we were looking for from the papers.

The special edition was divided into two main parts: the first part, including the introduction, contains papers that explore the legal and aspirational obligations for evaluating in Indigenous contexts; the second part relates evaluator and researcher experiences working in Indigenous contexts on actual projects. The latter set of papers provides some initial reflections on experiences with an emphasis on the challenges encountered when attempting to bridge Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. They highlight methodological challenges and the practical realities of designing and implementing projects that are meaningful to Indigenous communities. We observe three common themes emerging from the seven papers that comprise this edition.

COMMON THEMES: OBSERVABLE IDEAS

Relationships are more than aspirational: There are legal obligations

All of the papers in the volume identify the fact that the Crown’s obligations to work and behave differently in relationships with Indigenous communities are...
rooted in legal as well as aspirational demands to change. The lead paper by Pam McCurry is likely unfamiliar territory for many readers of CJPE, but it is a critically important narrative that sets the tone for the papers that follow. She provides the legal context and obligations on the Crown with respect to Indigenous relations since 1982. Her paper provides a legal narrative that shows the transition from Section 91(24) under the British North America Act that exerts Crown control over Indigenous affairs to Section 35 rights that set the legal conditions for shared power and the basis for nation-to-nation relationships under self-government. Successive Supreme Court cases and challenges since 1982 have consistently attempted to define Section 35 rights, including increased local control over their affairs and all matters that affect them, which includes research and evaluation. She makes the argument that evaluation has continued to work under a Section 91(24) frame of reference that obligates Indigenous communities to participate under Crown preferences and ways of knowing. Among other things, this is contrary to the federal government’s policy that builds on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Calls to Action put forward by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She concludes that evaluators must understand Indigenous rights and get to know local contexts and conditions with the aim that evaluators must contribute to Indigenous sovereignty over knowledge creation.

McCurry’s conclusions align well with Michelle Firestone’s paper that documents the meetings of the “Three Ribbon” panel of Indigenous health and social service evaluators brought together in 2015/16 to support a partnership among four Indigenous health service organizations. The purpose of the panel was “to support the development of wise practice guidelines for high quality Indigenous health service and program evaluation through transformative, shared learning by way of discussion circles.” Like McCurry, Firestone summarizes the panel’s concerns with dominant (i.e., Western) evaluation systems that are externally imposed through funding agencies and agreements. She cites the various challenges to systematically gathering data that caused under-resourcing of administrative systems. She also relays that Indigenous leaders have long called on funding agencies to adopt decolonizing principles aimed at balancing control over evaluation designs and implementation (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007) in ways that respect local governance, clarify roles and responsibilities of the evaluator and community, and ground inquiry in Indigenous knowledge systems (“Indigegogy”). As noted in other papers, she also highlights the importance of holistic concepts of good living, recognition of local community leadership, responsiveness of evaluators to local needs, and the importance of protocols in working with communities. She concludes that recognizing the granularity of local context is critical for evaluation to move forward positively and argues that evaluators would be well advised to create effective relationships prior to commencing their work.

Nicky Bowman and Larry Bremner’s paper traces the roots of EvalIndigenous through the EvalPartners initiative, which begins with the premise that “all Indigenous populations have unique human rights as outlined in Article 43
of the International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” and that these rights translate into obligations for “nation-to-nation” evaluations that use a co-production framework. Bowman and Bremner call for greater sovereignty over research and evaluations for Indigenous communities and organizations, which is consistent with other literature (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cram & Mertens, 2015). In addition, they make the argument that culturally appropriate approaches must become common practice in ways that are consistent with the spirit of UNDRIP. They cite the importance of approaches such as Critical Systems Theory, which maintains that activities such as evaluation are holistic efforts that incorporate power relations, governance, attitude, reciprocity, and sustainability. They argue that such theories form the basis of work with Indigenous communities and that awareness and training are needed to guide legal and aspirational imperatives into what may be called common practice.

**Context is critical for effective relationships: It’s about building trust**

A central theme in all papers is that context is critically important when designing any research and/or evaluation effort that creates a relationship with Indigenous communities and organizations. As noted in the Introduction, acknowledging that context is critical means taking the time to understand the difference between Indigenous ontology and epistemology. Bridging these comes with several methodological challenges, as noted in the Shepherd/Graham, Delancey, McKinley, and Scott papers. However, equally important challenges emanate from Western attitudes of cultural and epistemological superiority. These attitudes assume that knowledge is understood and valued from the standpoint of individuals and that this liberal paradigm is dominant over collective notions of knowing (Bortolin, 2011). In contrast, Indigenous epistemologies assume that knowledge is relational, which means that multiple relationships to objects, people, and programs/projects are valued from the perspective of both individuals and collectivities (Wilson, 2001, p. 176). In practice, this means that evaluation schools of thought that support more constructivist and transformative approaches are preferred. These approaches take time: getting to know communities and individuals; understanding that relationships, not power or leadership relations, are important in designing appropriate “research” efforts; and getting to know local priorities and preferences regarding research and evaluation relevance. It is equally important for the researcher/evaluator to take the time and have the local conversations that enable others to feel comfortable with her/him as an individual and have a sense of agency regarding the work ahead.

Robert Shepherd and Katherine Graham’s paper situates the importance of context in terms of the Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership project that aims to understand the conditions needed to create resilient communities that support youth engagement. They emphasize the importance that pre-engagement activities played in setting up the project to establish trust with interested communities, and in creating the relationships with local leaders and youth that carry the work to desired ends. They conclude that relationships are often regarded as more
important to nurture than Western methodological considerations for rigorous data collection.

Debbie Delancey’s paper highlights the evaluation approaches used historically in the governmental context that have contributed to mistrust in the Northwest Territories. Governmental preferences have frequently taken precedence in evaluation designs, which have often been constrained by time and resources, further contributing to mistrust. She emphasizes the importance of language when communicating evaluation ideas to Indigenous communities. Given the increased participation of Indigenous governments in the delivery of programs and services, she highlights the importance of relationship building through symposia and other fora where communities have been afforded greater opportunity to steer consultation processes and lead evaluation initiatives.

Gerald McKinley’s paper focuses on his experience in child and adolescent mental health programs with Anishnaabek communities. He works from an ethnographic perspective, with some training in evaluation approaches. He argues that it is important to make transparent the normative assumptions attached to concepts such as health, and that relationships to such concepts must be understood from the perspective of those living within local contexts. Through transformative approaches to evaluation, understanding programmatic conditions takes significant investments of time in order to create trust that local concerns are acknowledged in the research and evaluation endeavour.

Kimberly Scott’s paper explores Indigenous inclusion in the transition to sustainable energy initiatives according to the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Like other contributors to the volume, she maintains that understanding local priorities, needs, and approaches is essential if there is to be meaningful discussion of local energy production within an era of reconciliation. She advocates for advancing Indigenous leadership in the energy transition that is guided by some basic protocols that are jointly developed or co-produced by governments and Indigenous communities. Essential among these protocols are attention to reciprocal arrangements and measures to ensure there is fairness in both the negotiation processes and the achievement of outcomes. The contribution of evaluation to these discussions is enlightening the local context that contributes to understanding each other’s needs, aspirations, and expectations.

Co-production is essential: But on whose terms?

A key theme in all papers is that affirmation of treaty rights is an obligation of settler countries such as Canada. A key part of affirming treaty rights is the development of a nation-to-nation relationship, as highlighted by McCurry, Bremner and Bowman, and Firestone. All papers, either implicitly or explicitly, identify co-production and co-creation as a necessary condition of effective relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations. Co-production is a basic characteristic of a nation-to-nation relationship.

Ideas of co-production vary from paper to paper. For example, Scott identifies co-production from a policy perspective whereby governments and communities advance energy democracy through shared ownership, meaning that
Indigenous peoples must see themselves in local energy policy as having their own space that is under their control. Communities have the authority to decide how best to design and use that policy space to ensure that all community members have a role to play in power production with producers. McKinley highlights the importance of transformative evaluation (Cram & Mertens, 2015), where a key feature is collaboration in the design and delivery of evaluation products. Key aspects of this collaboration are recognition of Indigenous space and the ability of the community to define the space and who can participate in it. Underlying this is the need for the researcher/evaluator to take the time to understand and recognize the local dynamics in creating the space for co-production and the conditions for working within it. As always, co-production is dependent on respect for community preferences. In the context of health evaluation, and the identification of health outcomes in particular, co-production of both policy outcomes and evaluation approaches is central to advocacy as a fundamental pillar of transformative evaluation.

The Delancey and Shepherd/Graham papers understand co-production from a community perspective as well, but with emphasis on creating or enhancing local decision-making processes. Both papers focus on mutual respect and reciprocity as central features of co-production but recognize that culture change is needed to balance power, both in defining co-production processes and in how individuals and organizations will define what is shared and produced in the process. Although they see the need for culture change on the part of donor governments and agencies, and Indigenous communities, the need is most acute for donor governments and other non-Indigenous participants. The rebalancing of power means giving up significant control over the definition of what is shared and how to work with a more balanced co-production process that sees greater equality for Indigenous participants. Both the GNWT government, the focus of Delancey’s paper, and federal donor departments in the case of the Shepherd and Graham paper are struggling to give up control over evaluation design and the manner in which evaluations are carried out. Even terms such as “leadership” or “evaluation” are being contested at the community level, as these show a predisposition for non-Indigenous priorities and preferences.

In overall terms, there are several other themes that emerge from the papers, but the three highlighted here speak to the core ideas of the special edition. The state of evaluation in Indigenous contexts is not yet at a point where basic principles such as mutual respect, reciprocity, mutual recognition, fairness, and co-production are being practised in any noticeable ways. Control over evaluation design and delivery remains firmly with donor governments and agencies. In this regard, the following are some areas where improvement is required.

**CHARTING A PATH FORWARD: IT’S ALWAYS ABOUT BALANCE**

We propose that several important steps can be taken that extend from the common themes gathered from the research papers.
The focus of evaluation in Indigenous contexts needs to be rethought

As indicated in the themes section, control over the design and delivery of governmental and other donor-funded programs and services often does not reside in any substantive way with affected communities and organizations. Homogenous and pragmatic approaches to evaluation design and conduct are imposed, which serve mainly to support evaluation objectives related to expenditure management: cost efficiency. Governments in particular mainly want to know that funds are being used appropriately, rather than whether communities are benefitting from the programs and services in ways that serve or support their needs (Shepherd, 2018). Evaluations in these terms, for reasons of budget and time, do not account well for local contexts. In addition, legal relationships are often ignored in the design and conduct of evaluations that meet the tests of a nation-to-nation relationship, as described by McCurry. Equally important, the delivery of programs and services is often not well understood in communities, and when they are explored, irrelevant indicators and measures are conceived and applied in isolation from community input. In addition to federal government preferences for applying evaluation criteria of relevance and performance that are usually related to federal policy concerns, few attempts are made to apply other criteria that might be of interest to communities, such as program cohesion with other initiatives, local program capacity, or administrative effectiveness.

In addition to such design flaws, evaluators are often selected without community consultation. Such considerations almost ensure that local contexts and conditions for evaluating programs and services will be ignored, as evaluators are more than likely beholden to donor departments and agencies. Questions will be applied that matter to donors, and there may not be incentives for evaluators to seek out, let alone acknowledge, local evaluation priorities. Such factors set up evaluations to fail in Indigenous contexts. In short, if evaluation is to improve, legitimacy has to be afforded to local questions, epistemologies, and methods. Evaluation has to be decoupled in some respects from expenditure management considerations to a learning orientation that benefits communities over governments.

To transform evaluation means legitimizing Indigenous ways of knowing

As shown in all of the papers, not only does sovereignty over evaluation have to be restored to Indigenous governments and organizations (Bowman, 2017; Chilisa, 2012), but Indigenous ways of knowing also have to be acknowledged. This needs to occur in a manner that recognizes and respects the differences among Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous cultures within Canada. This is a prerequisite to adapting to the foundations and variations in circumstance among Indigenous communities and organizations. This is not easy to do from a governmental perspective, because there is a predisposition on the part of state actors to want to observe patterns and validate these so that programs and services may continue
to be funded. Such practices open the possibility that the life or existence of the program is more important than the outcomes being felt. This is a generalization, of course, but the larger point is that governmental evaluation design tends to pay greater attention to universalistic design and conduct than to understanding Indigenous ways of knowing that focus on discrete circumstances over general observable patterns (Smith, 1999). This disjuncture means that, in effect, evaluation in Indigenous contexts is evaluation of an unknown, resulting in significantly more risk than informed practice.

In practice, governmental evaluators in particular may benefit from mapping Indigenous contexts and ways of knowing. Wilson (2001) and others acknowledge that there are likely constellations of epistemologies that could be mapped that outline cultural, political, and methodological preferences for evaluation design and conduct, but such mapping exercises will take time. Such mapping is better than current attempts at capturing the “Indigenous voice” through sampling techniques that often privilege best practices, rather than representing local needs and priorities. The challenge with current sampling strategies is that there is no way to come to reliable evaluation findings that come close to anything representative of common practice. Such mapping that includes Indigenous voice may be one tangible way to shed light on what constitutes, at the very least, appropriate evaluation practice in local contexts.

**There is a role for practitioner associations to enlighten understanding**

There is a role for practitioner bodies such as the Canadian Evaluation Society and other similar bodies, such as the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), universities, think tanks, and Indigenous research centres to work together and create awareness about Indigenous contexts and epistemologies. Although some of this work is currently being done at various national and even regional conferences, perhaps greater collaboration could develop that lands on agreed messages and could work on epistemological mapping and local evaluation contexts. As scholars that work in multiple research and practice associations, we observe that there tends not to be much cross-association communication. Often there are few incentives to encourage such collaboration, despite the push to create partnerships.

We suggest that such collaborations initially emphasize a regional focus to build understanding of particular cultures and circumstances and develop appropriate relations. Delancey’s paper makes the benefits of working closely with Indigenous communities apparent. The results could include greater trust and better evaluation products that take into account each other’s needs. More importantly, evaluation products may improve significantly as communities work to develop greater capacity in evaluation and use the results to improve their local circumstances.

One point is clear from the papers: there is will to do better, but no roadmap on how to do that. Hopefully this special edition provides a few ways forward.
REFERENCES


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