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Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation and Tribal Governments: Understanding the Relationship

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Abstract

Over the last decade, culturally responsive (CR) indigenous evaluation resources have become more readily available to academia and evaluation practitioners within the mainstream literature. This is a direct result of the growing number of Indigenous evaluators in the field; the increased access and opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners collaborating on evaluation projects and academic initiatives; and changes in policy, programming, and funding that better support CR and/or culturally responsive indigenous evaluation (CRIE) initiatives. This chapter examines four overarching content summary areas for CRIE: historical and legal foundations; design approaches; application; and practical CRIE strategies for strengthening professional practice and building evaluation industry capacities for CRIE. © 2018 Wiley Periodicals, Inc., and the American Evaluation Association.

Introduction: Situating Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation

The aim of this Indigenous¹ evaluation story, from our voices, is to situate Indigenous evaluation within a broader historical and evaluation context and present an emergent, self-determined pathway forward—culturally responsive Indigenous evaluation (CRIE)—that honors both the cultural and political constructs that should be at the heart of any Indigenous model. To do so, we call upon the Lunaape (Munsee)/Mohican medicine wheel framework to structure the content of this article (Grumet, 2002). We focus on the U.S. context, but suggest consideration for Indigenous evaluation practice globally.

Ktanaxkihlaak (Kah-taw-nah-x-kee-lock)—Eastern Door. This door is about our origin story and beginnings. We situate Indigenous evaluation within a broader historical and legal context as a starting place for collective awareness of our histories.

Shaawaneewang (Shaw-one-neh-wung)—Southern Door. This door is about balanced development and Indigenous contributions. We summarize critical theories and methods that contribute to the field of Indigenous evaluation and then present the CRIE evaluation model.

Wsihkaang (wh-see-kong)—Western Door. This door is about perseverance and unknown potentiality. We share a CRIE case study that is culturally responsive, scientifically rigorous, and includes the legal/political aspects of Tribes.

Loowaneewang (Low-one-neh-wung)—Northern Door. This door is about elder wisdom to guide new beginnings. We offer guidance for our professional evaluation practice and broadly to the field of evaluation.

Ktanaxkihlaak (Kah-taw-nah-x-kee-lock)—Eastern Door: Origin Story and Beginnings

The federal government of the United States recognizes 573 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes and villages (Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA], 2016). Prior to European contact, Indigenous populations lived all over

¹ When possible, we chose to use the word **Indigenous** for describing ourselves, others, or a community of the First Inhabitants of this land but recognize the cultural, linguistic, and governance diversity of Tribal people and Nations. As Linda Smith (2012) notes, the term “Indigenous” has historic resonance, “Indigenous peoples is a 1970s term from the American Indian Movement to internationalize experiences of Indigenous peoples around Mother Earth . . . it represents our collective voices to finish the unfinished business of decolonization” (p. 7). Also, when possible and appropriate, we choose to use our Lunaape (Delaware) or Moh-he-con-nuk (Mohican) language (Waapalaneexkweew [Nicole Bowman]), Oneida or Menominee (Carolee Dodge-Francis), other Tribal languages, or Indigenous terms within this article.

in balance with other Indigenous communities, Mother Earth, and all the water, land, and sky inhabitants. Living as caretakers of Turtle Island (not “owners” of it) provided ancient guidance that allowed for all forms of life to live in natural equilibrium with each other. We begin with a high-level overview of Indigenous people’s historical experiences and Tribal nations’ legal treaty and contemporary constitutional rights as the original peoples of North America. This legal and political foundation, coupled with the cultural content and community contexts of Indigenous communities and Tribal nations, is critical for the global field of evaluation and practicing evaluators designing and implementing evaluation studies with Indigenous populations (urban, rural, Reservation, or international). Each Tribal community is different, and each will have a unique historical narrative, cultural traditions, language, community practices, and political, legal, and governance structures.

Briefly, the impacts of Colonial or non-Tribal people on Indigenous people in the United States can be summarized in three eras: The Pre-Contact Era (before 1492 and European or Colonial contact to Turtle Island, now known as North America); the Early Colonial Contact Era (1492–1786 known as the Treaty); and the United States Constitutional Era (1787 to present). For brevity, the focus here is on the last era. This provides an overview of the historical context that we are currently in (Constitutional Era), which has contemporary implications for the field of evaluation, evaluation policy, and governance evaluation and policy between Tribal Nations and other sovereign countries, including the United States. (For detailed information about all three eras, see Waapalaneexkweew [Bowman, forthcoming]).

Beginning in 1787, the government of the United States conducted relations and made treaty agreements with Tribal nations through treaties that had to be approved by the U.S. Congress (National Archives, 2016). Treaties were “contracts among nations” (BIA, 2016) in which Tribes gave up millions of acres of their homelands and vast natural resources to the United States in exchange for protections and maintenance of the health and livelihood of Indigenous peoples and communities. Treaties were considered the supreme law of the land and were predicated on the inherent right of the Tribes to govern their own people as sovereign nations (Pevar, 2012). Treaties became the foundation of federal Indian law and the federal Indian trust relationship with the United States (BIA, 2016). In total, none of the 384 treaties (Kappler, 1904) were kept despite being the contemporary basis for Indian law between sovereign governments (that is, the U.S. government and 573 individual Tribal governments in the United States).

Tribal nations have a unique government-to-government status with the United States and possess a nationhood status that retains their inherent powers of self-government (Ball, 2000). A Tribe’s inherent rights of sovereignty and treaty rights are protected by the U.S. Constitution under the Supremacy Clause, and further embedded within the trust

relationship and subsequent legislation (Reinhardt, 2008). Federal Indian trust responsibility is legally enforceable as a fiduciary obligation and duty that the United States must uphold to protect Tribal rights related to land, education, resources, economies, health, and other quality of life aspects.

Sovereignty applies across many Indigenous communities, contexts, sectors, and disciplines (Barker, 2005; Cram, 2005)—including evaluation. In fact, sovereignty is considered so foundational that most legal scholars consider sovereignty the “single most important legal right that Indians have and if Indians lost this right it would be difficult, if not impossible, to protect any of their other rights” (Pevar, 2008, p. 1; Jorgensen, 2007; Pevar, 2002). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) also calls for addressing the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world (United Nations, 2008), as does the recently developed American Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights (Organization of American States, 2016).

Respect for the legal ramifications of Tribal sovereignty is a critical aspect of any professional or academic pursuit undertaken in Indian country. Unfortunately, for many Tribal communities and governments, evaluation has not been an equal, collaborative, or value-added process (Anderson et al., 2012). Few evaluation publications address the core issues that have the highest impact for Tribal communities, such as sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization within the context of an evaluation study. Bowman (2006, forthcoming), demonstrated the lack of capacity of non-Indian funding agencies to meet the legal, cultural, and contextual requirements of Tribal governments when conducting “multijurisdictional” research and evaluation studies. Even the synthesis of the literature by governance evaluation “experts” (Schoenfeld & Jordan, 2017) omits sovereign Indigenous governments despite their recognition by over 144 countries that signed the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2008). Combining culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) and sovereignty issues will begin to address the lack of attention to this area.

Shaawaneewang (Shaw-one-neh-wung)—Southern Door: Balanced Development and Indigenous Contributions

Indigenous peoples have different experiences and origin stories related to evaluation. Though we have spoken with many elders, none has yet shared with us an Indigenous word that translates to the English term “evaluate.” When we seek wisdom about Indigenous evaluation from our elders, what is most often heard are concepts, teachings, and stories about life or death. If our ancestors did not assess or evaluate a situation, length of a season, food supply, and so on, it could literally mean life or death. In terms of evaluation, our elders tell us that it is a way of understanding the world, “something that happens is not good or bad, it just is and we have an opportunity to learn from it” (Chohkalihke [G. Jacobs], personal

communication, July 2015). This section shares a brief history and situates CRIE within the field of CRE. Through professional and community experience from our “elders,” the authors share the development and methods of a self-determined, emergent model for evaluation, namely the CRIE model.

CRE arose in the early 1970s and is influenced by responsive evaluation (Stake, 1972) and culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum efforts prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s (Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment [CREA], 2016; Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2005). CRE explores a decentralized, contextualized, transformative, and responsive evaluation model where social justice and evaluation meet. CRE uses evaluation theories and collaborative methods, study designs, and sharing of study findings to locally situate and study issues of importance to community members and stakeholders who are most impacted by the evaluation (Stake, 1972) or those who have the most at stake in the evaluation results, including underrepresented and vulnerable populations (Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2005, 2015; Hood, Hopson, & Kirkhart, 2015). Traditionally we would honor and call CRE our family or *laan = gómeew* (related to, our relative) because of the welcoming place they have created for us as Indigenous evaluators, and the way they value Indigenous evaluation in all our rich diversity as vital contributors to the field of evaluation.

Second, Tribally Driven Participatory Research (TDPR) expanded the field by exploring research where culture, context, and political/legal sovereignty is central to the research being conducted in Indian country (Collaborative Research Center for American Indian Health [CRCAIH], 2015; National Congress of the American Indians [NCAI], 2012; Mariella, Brown, Carter, & Verri, 2009; Jernigan, Jacob, & Styne, 2015). In this case, the end results were congruent to the process. TDPR moves community-based research or evaluation from a passive to active stance in that research is “Tribally driven” versus “Tribally based” (Letendre & Caine, 2004).

Third, the trilateral model (TLM) (Reinhardt & Maday, 2006) is a decolonized and indigenous-centered way used to situate Tribal sovereignty to frame, test, and modify the design, inclusion, and implementation of legal/political aspects and cultural/community context of Indigenous communities and Tribal governments. When multiple governments (Tribal, federal, state, and so on) work together to develop and implement American Indian evaluation, research, and policy studies, the use of a trilateral framework provides a structure for these governments and their associated agencies or departments to work collaboratively to carry out studies with Indigenous people.

Last, the other “relatives” contributing to our growth and practice in Indigenous communities include critical race theory (CRT) (Darder, Torres, & Baltodano, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001); Tribal critical theory, which builds on the CRT framework by applying it to the distinct legal, political, historical, and cultural components that are uniquely tied to Indigenous people and Tribal governments (Brayboy, 2005; Pulitano, 2003);

and decolonization and Indigenous theory and methods (Smith, 2012; Wilson & Yellowbird, 2005; Kovach, 2010).

Succinctly, CRIE and culturally responsive (CR) research, evaluation, and policy studies work well together to include Indigenous populations that span across sectors and disciplines, and which often require a systems roadmap for academic studies and initiatives. (Bowman, 2007; Bowman & Reinhardt, 2014, 2015, 2016; Bowman, Dodge-Francis, & Tyndall, 2015; Garasky et al., 2016; O'Connor et al., 2015).

An Emerging Model: Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation

CRIE is situated within and as a partner to CRE. CRIE's contemporary evaluation origins are found in publications as early as the 1960s, with roots in public health and public policy administration (Hutchinson, 1960; Suchman, 1967). CRIE began as a practical method and strategies used to include culture, language, community context, and sovereign Tribal governance when conducting research, policy, and evaluation studies (Bowman, 2006). After nearly a decade of cultural and linguistic growth, development and application of CRIE strategies, the CRIE model was developed and tested as an emerging evaluation framework (Bowman & Cram, 2014; Bowman, Dodge-Francis, & Tyndall, 2015; Bowman, 2017a). CRIE uses traditional knowledge and contemporary Indigenous theory and methods to design and implement an evaluation study, so it is led by and for the benefit of Indigenous people and Tribal nations. The CRIE model² was created as a flexible, four-part framework. This model allows for adaptations for community context/building community, cultural responsiveness/traditional teachings for solving issues, documenting strengths as well as needs or challenges, and flexibility to meet local and funder requirements for evidence-based evaluations (see Table 1.1 below).

Wsihkaang (wh-see-kong)—Western Door: Perseverance and Unknown Potentiality

From the western direction, we apply the CRIE model to a case study. In 2014, Bowman Performance Consulting (BPC) participated in a federally driven team charged with evaluating the capacity of Tribal governments and Indigenous communities in the United States to administer their own food and nutrition assistance programs. Stakeholders included Tribal government representatives, federal nutrition representatives, and the

² The initial development and evolution of the CRIE model are by Waapalaneexkweew (Nicole Bowman) as given per traditional teachings and responsibilities through the Stockbridge Munsee/Mohican elders and traditional culture/language teachers (2003–2017).

Table 1.1. Evolution of the CRIE Model

<i>Western Paradigm</i>	<i>Indigenous Paradigm</i>	<i>Blended CRIE Model Framework</i>
Strengths, skills, and capacities	Relation and community building	Building community through sharing knowledge and strengths, using a strength-based approach
Challenges and barriers	Using your teachings	Seeing challenges as opportunities for applying teachings and community problem solving activities
Gaps and needs	Humility and balance	Addressing needs and gaps by humbly asking for help, co-developing solutions, and restoring balance
Solutions and strategies	Visioning and path-finding	Using community and experiential knowledge to document evidence-based practices that guide decision-making and a future sustainable vision

Prime,³ a for-profit international evaluation firm. The study had four objectives:

1. Identify services, functions, and activities associated with administering nutrition assistance programs.
2. Consult with Indian Tribal organizations (ITOs) to determine the extent of their interest in administering these programs.
3. Understand the readiness of ITOs to administer these programs based on the services, functions, and activities associated with administering all or part of these programs.
4. Identify statutory or regulatory changes, waivers, or special provisions that would be needed for ITOs to administer each nutrition program.

The project team employed a multimethod and culturally responsive design that included document reviews, consultations with official Tribal government representatives, additional outreach to Tribal leaders and program staff, a survey of Tribes, and site visits. The methodology was based on an exploratory case study design as defined by Yin (2003); investigating a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context while using both quantitative and qualitative measurements. CRIE strategies were used to select theory/methods, prepare the evaluation team, design and implement the study, and present findings.

³ A Prime refers to the “Prime contractor” who is directly responsible and signs a contract for work with the Federal government. Subcontractors hold contracts directly with the Prime, not the Federal government.

Indigenous Theory and Methods as the Foundation of the Study

BPC and the Prime conceptualized and purposefully developed the procurement narrative (bid), created the study design, co-constructed internal trainings to prepare twenty-six Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, and had continuous monitoring, member checking, feedback, and quality assurance loops from start to finish using a TDPR and CDPR approach throughout the study. The project team involved Tribal stakeholders in guiding study activity whenever possible, for example, in planning with the internal team and externally through early stakeholder discussions. Their expertise assisted and informed the study process and implementation throughout the 15 months of the study.

Collaborative planning began with the review of key documents, project roll out discussions with the federal program officers and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and initial conversations and consultations with Tribal governments and the federal Office of Tribal Research (OTR). It should be noted that early teleconference calls with Tribal government participants held a note of angst, as some of them wanted more formal Tribal consultation guarantees, as sovereign Tribal governments are afforded under current law. However, this concern subsided once it was known that an American Indian company would play an integral role within the process, that there would be many opportunities for feedback online and through face-to-face outreach efforts, and that OTR and other Indigenous stakeholders (that is, NCAI) would be advisory partners throughout the study.

BPC Indigenous Centered Training

A critical element was acquainting non-Indigenous project team members with the often-troubled history of evaluation and research with Indigenous populations, explaining the concepts of Tribal sovereignty, and providing contextualized perspectives that were culturally unique to each community we surveyed or visited. The twenty-seven member research team received training in this approach from subject matter experts, themselves Tribal members, who were partners in the study along with ongoing embedded conversations throughout the entire study from design through reporting. After many weeks of development, BPC and the Prime created an internal training curriculum for the project team. This was sufficiently resourced and left to the lead evaluation team members (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to design. Pre-reading materials were given to the training participants a week in advance and a full day online and interactive webinar training was provided to cover CBPR, TDPR, Tribal governance and sovereignty, an overview of the historical and cultural aspects of Indigenous populations, governance and operational differences of Tribes and Tribal nonprofits, and human, cultural, and intellectual property protections via Tribal IRBs.

Following the training, two group webinar meetings were held to discuss impacts of training, to answer any lingering questions, and to further prepare non-Indigenous team members for conducting site visits. Pre- and post-site visit meetings were conducted with evaluation team members to prepare for working with each Indigenous community where data was collected. Feedback indicated that the entire study team felt the training was critical to the evaluation.

Co-development of Study Protocols and Documents

Whenever possible, the team asked Tribal stakeholders for help in guiding the activities, for example, in the development of study tools. The project team built in multiple ways to receive varied and diverse stakeholder feedback throughout the study design, testing, and full data collection process, which included meeting documents; and formal administrative responses of the project team to key Federal and Tribal stakeholders including production and dissemination of the final report (Garasky et al., 2016). Ensuring that the Indigenous research team members and study participants had ample opportunities to provide feedback on cleaned or summarized data, draft findings, and final sections of the published USDA FNS study report was essential.

The instruments, protocols, and ongoing internal and external discussion and feedback loops were used for project monitoring and modification. They also functioned as learning tools for the study team and funders to learn about evaluation and study process needed to produce a valid, reliable, and accurate account of the Indigenous perspectives regarding the interest, capacities, and benefits/barriers to Tribal administration of federal nutrition assistance programs. The final report included syntheses, editing, technical writing, and inclusion of Indigenous scholars from the BPC team who were documented as contributing authors of this congressionally mandated study.

Site Visit Structure and Study Closing Processes

Site visits were simultaneously conducted with Tribal leaders of sixteen Tribal communities or organizations concurrently with documentation development and survey deployment and data collection. Thirteen site visits were completed, during which the team members spoke with more than eighty participants from sixteen federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native villages. It was mandatory that each site visit had at least one Tribal representative, either from the BPC team or from the Tribal representative participant pool. An essential component of the site visits was the team debrief immediately after the site visit discussions. During debriefs, Tribal roles, terminology, or cultural components were discussed and explained to non-Native team members.

The report was completed in February 2016 and shared at a federal closeout meeting in spring 2016. At this meeting and thereafter, the internal report was shared with federal and Tribal stakeholders for feedback before its publication in June 2016. Since study was finished, there have been several activities informally that continue the work of the FNS project. Members of the initial project study team (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) have debriefed outside of the project, shared their experiences and what they learned, and have provided some initial feedback and perspective to the academic community through evaluation activities (Bowman & Chamberlain, 2015).

In summary the study was successful in academic, community context, and cultural ways because of the pre-existing relationships, networks, context expertise, and a working understanding (i.e. practical implementation using the theories, methods, and knowledge beyond just reading about it) of how to behave and conduct studies in diverse Indigenous contexts (rural, Reservation or Tribal Nation, urban, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native). The value-added team that BPC brought to the Prime contractor allowed the scientific and technical process of conducting this academic study to be strengthened; used the entire project and all the aspects (contracting, training internally, theory and method selection, development of design and instruments, data collection and reporting, and so on) as continuous and applied learning opportunities to build the capacities of non-Native and/or non-experienced academics and public agencies to grow; and resulted in Tribal nations and Indigenous communities from diverse geographic locations having a culturally responsive, community relevant, and scientifically rigorous evaluation experience with a multiethnic study team. Without Indigenous academics leading or co-leading this project, the study design, findings, and experiences would have been completely different. This is why true collaboration, with purposeful selection and adequate resourcing of Indigenous academics who equally participate as co-PI's, is critical to changing the way we work as evaluators. In short, if we change the front-end way we do academic studies (inputs, resources, supports, and so on) to be more culturally responsive, then the rest of the study activities are most likely to produce different and more valid results (outputs, outcomes, and impacts) that have the highest potential for transforming practice, policies, and programming. CRIE is one model to help us consider how we can do things differently, regardless of our sector or discipline.

Loowaneewang (Low-one-neh-wung)—Northern Door: Elder Wisdom to Guide New Beginnings

Indigenous evaluation was not seen in the literature until the 1960s, mainly regarding public health evaluations (Hogan, 2007). The current evaluation practitioners or the “founding fathers” or “pioneers” in evaluation (Dobkin Hall, 2004; Hogan, 2007; Williams, 2016, p. 7), have provided models

(Stufflebeam, 2001) that synthesize evaluation; these are further categorized in an evaluation theory tree of development demonstrating how the field has matured or evolved over the years (Alkin, 2004, 2012; Cardin & Alkin, 2012), but few include Indigenous authors let alone Tribal government considerations for evaluation (Schoenfeld & Jordan, 2017). The last few years has begun to illustrate a wider representation of Indigenous voices within the broader field of academia including data sovereignty and Tribal protections and governance in Tribal and non-Tribal research and evaluation initiatives (Bowman, 2015, 2016, 2017; NCAI, 2016; NCAI and MSU, 2012; University of Arizona, 2017).

To broaden and strengthen these new tenets within evaluation, the first step involves continued dialogue and understanding that “we don’t know all” and “need to listen more, talk less” (that is, be the catalyst to dialogue not the inquisition). The academic and evaluation community can move forward through understanding that there exist multiple ways of thinking, processing, and applying evaluation methods. In other words, we must begin to recognize that the ills of history are not discrete entities but consist of culminating experiences that impact Tribal people and communities. These factors must be integrated into our academic, policy, and programming activities to jointly address devastating outcomes and policy/programming gaps (Seaquist, Cullen, & Acton, 2011; Hill, 2008; Jones, 2006). We view this as vital to changing outcomes for Indigenous populations that have remained virtually unchanged or worsened in the last century or more despite the policies and legal frameworks that have been available to improve conditions and impacts of Indigenous people and communities (Bowman, 2017; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Walker, 1999).

The ability to include culture, language, community, and context within Indigenous populations and nations in evaluation goes far beyond simple inclusions or framing. Indigenous people belong to sovereign nations with inherent legal and political rights afforded to no other racial or ethnic group. Sovereignty must be respected (that is, utilizing Tribal IRBs and Tribal Council for study approval), and Tribal governments involved in our evaluation, policy, and political discourse. This requires scientific, cultural, legal, and governance competencies and skills by evaluators. To do less than this is marginalizing Indigenous people and Tribal nations, causing further trauma and harm, and demonstrates the technical deficiencies of the evaluation profession.

Conclusion

Evaluation should be a tool of transformation, improvement, and empowerment to solve chronic issues in society. Inclusion of Indigenous theories and methods, Tribal governments, and Indigenous people (as academics, community members, leaders, policy makers, and elders or traditional people) needs to be at the front end of this process, not an afterthought. We must

work together in an orchestrated effort to create a new evaluation paradigm, to expand the continuation of Indigenous populations at all strategic points within “evidence-based evaluation” and to put funding agencies, policy makers, and academics on notice that this step is not a suggestion but a fundamental necessity in creating the new North.

The good news is that the Indigenous resources and strategies outlined earlier are building blocks that pair well with many western foundations of evaluation (for example, community-based participatory research, critical theories, and transformative, utilization-focused, developmental, authentic, democratic, and empowerment evaluations) when done correctly, responsively, responsibly, and collaboratively. Drawing parallels between the Indigenous and western worlds is imperative to engaging non-Indigenous evaluators in a deeper and more transformative way. By using Western and Indigenous evaluation methods together as a truly blended practice and not a separate or after thought to the evaluative process, the expansion of evaluation partnerships, methods, and outcomes will be accomplished.

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