

# A Snapshot: Indigenous Evaluation Annotated Bibliography

“An Indigenous Self-Determination Evaluation Model **respects, recognizes, and values the inherent worth of Indian culture**; is responsive to the communities’ needs as voiced by all members of the tribal community; builds evaluation designs and processes around Indian assets and resources; and literally and figuratively employs Indians in every part of the process (program, policy, implementation, evaluation) to heal, strengthen, and preserve Indigenous societies for the next 7 generations.” (Bowman, 2005, pg. 8)

Indigenous evaluation and research methodology has been around since time immemorial. More recently, it has started being accepted into western academic publications. This annotated bibliography may provide helpful readings on Indigenous evaluation theory and methods and culturally-grounded research. It is divided into three sections: existing Indigenous evaluation frameworks; reflections on Indigenous evaluation frameworks (which provides theoretical and real-world examples of evaluation in Indigenous communities); and research in Indigenous communities. This is not meant to be an extensive bibliography, but instead a launch pad for further exploration on this topic.

## Evaluation frameworks

**Bowman-Farrell, NR. (Waapalaneexkweew) Looking Backward but Moving Forward: Honoring the Sacred and Asserting the Sovereign in Indigenous Evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*. 2018, 39(4), 1-28.**

This article discusses issues with the use of western evaluation in tribal contexts and the Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation (CRIE) model. Without decentralized evaluation driven by the context, values, and experiences of community, Bowman-Farrell argues that evaluation will never be able to truly address root community issues or barriers that program participants face. She argues that Indigenous knowledge systems were not slowly lost through assimilation, but through very intentional violence making Indigenous peoples’ knowledge, ceremony, kinship connections, and forms of governance illegal. Today, the delegitimization of Indigenous knowledge continues. Western evaluation, for example, often only views external, non-tribal evaluators as “subject matter experts” and values written data as more legitimate and objective than oral knowledge. She then describes her development of a CRIE model based on four tenants, arranged in medicine wheel and based on Lunaape/Mohican seven directions cultural teachings. The Northern Door represents wisdom of our experiences is used for growth and new visioning. The Eastern door represents building relations and sharing strengths. The Southern door affirms the value of our lived experiences in context. Finally, the Western door represents the challenges and gaps that need to be addressed to restore balance.

**See also: Bowman, NR. (Waapalaneexkweew) Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation and Tribal Governments: Understanding the Relationship. *New Directions for Evaluation*. 2018.**



**Urban Indian Health Institute**  
A Division of the Seattle Indian Health Board

Our mission is to decolonize data,  
for indigenous people, by indigenous people.  
611 12th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98144  
206-812-3030 | info@uihi.org | www.uihi.org

**LaFrance, J & Nichols, R. Reframing Evaluation: Defining An Indigenous Evaluation Framework. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. 2010, 23(2), 13-31.**

This article discusses the American Indian Higher Education Consortium's (AIHEC) development of their Indigenous evaluation framework in 2003 to 2004. They begin by discussing the reasons why western evaluation frameworks are not applicable, and indeed often harmful, in Indigenous communities. Research studies and evaluations often depict Native peoples and communities in a negative light, framing us within a context of deficiency or loss. Further, research and evaluation often denies that distinct, evidence-based Indigenous knowledge exists or is legitimate. Common issues LaFrance and Nichols discuss include incompatibility of worldviews, conflicting ideas on what is ethical and what is "scientific," differing concepts on individual autonomy and tribal perspectives on informed consent. They argue that evaluation should be led by Indigenous researchers and evaluators, and should "respond to tribal concerns for usefulness, restoration, preservation, and sovereignty" (16). In 2003 and 2004, AIHEC held four one-day Indigenous evaluation advisory committee meetings with 54 total participants total. The committee developed four key values for evaluation: 1) People of a Place: Indigenous communities have a responsibility and reciprocal relationship with their land; 2) Recognizing Our Gifts: Evaluation should be strengths, not deficits based and must be respectful to personal agency; 3) Centrality of Community and Family: unlike Western values, Indigenous communities are not individualistic but rather value kinship and community; and 4) Sovereignty: Indigenous evaluation should reclaim Indigenous knowledge and support tribal wellbeing and nation building.

**LaFrance, J, Nichols, R & Kirkhart, KE. Culture Writes the Script: On the Centrality of Context in Indigenous Evaluation. In D. J. Rog, J. L. Fitzpatrick, & R. F. Conner (Eds.), *Context: A framework for its influence on evaluation practice. New Directions for Evaluation*. 2012, 135, 59-74.**

This article also discusses the creation of AIHEC's Indigenous Evaluation Framework (IEF). The coalition that created the IEF consisted of both authors and members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. The

emphasize that Indigenous evaluation is about storytelling and should be created within Indigenous knowledge and culture. The authors frame Indigenous knowledge within certain values: that it is land based and holistic (not linear or hierarchical); focused on interconnectivity (not causality and generalizability); and action oriented (inquiry/research is expected to give back to the community). In creating evaluation, they note that "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 functional shift in worldview" (61). The argue that evaluation work should be grounded in lived community experiences, not in western theory.

**Lawrence, T & James, R. Good Health and Wellness: Measuring Impact Through an Indigenous Lens. *Preventing Chronic Disease*. 2019, 16(E108), 1-5.**

This article discusses a collaboration between Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop a 3-tiered evaluation model for evaluating Good Health and Wellness in Indian Country (GHWIC), A CDC grant to prevent chronic disease in American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) and address health disparities. The 3-tiered evaluation model drew upon an Indigenous framework, prioritizing strength-based approaches for documenting program activities. Tier 1, the local level, is where data collection is primarily conducted. Tier 2, the regional level, is connected to Tier 1 through partnerships. Tier 3, the national level, is connected by the community of practice. Each tier is associated with evaluation questions. The 3-tiered model combines Indigenous knowledge and values with Western evaluation practices by aligning tribal strengths and bidirectional learning with federal requirements and data collection processes. It incorporates locally tailored metrics, adherence to tribal protocols, and cultural priorities. Core Indigenous values that guided the GHWIC project were defined coming from LaFrance's model, including 1) Centrality of the community and family, 2) People of a place, 3) Recognizing individual gifts, and 4) Personal and tribal sovereignty. The article describes how UIHI worked with tribal recipients, tribal health organizations, Tribal Epidemiology Centers, and the CDC to develop and implement the model on the basis of an Indigenous framework of mutual trust and respect.

**McKegg, K. White Privilege and the Decolonization Work Needed in Evaluation to Support Indigenous Sovereignty and Self-Determination. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. 2019, 34(2), 357-367.**

McKegg, a non-Indigenous evaluator from New Zealand discusses the ways in which colonial structures and white privilege play out in evaluation work leading to a reinforcement of inequities, even when well-intentioned evaluators are aiming for social justice. She argues that for non-Indigenous evaluators to be effective allies, they must unpack their own place and privilege in colonization and subsequent power structures and argues that they must undertake “ideological, cultural, emotional, and constitutional work”. She acknowledges that this is a sensitive and personal journey and can often be scary, but in challenging one’s self to do, they will be working towards dismantling power structures and validating and uplifting Indigenous people’s ways of knowing.

**Tribal Evaluation Workgroup. “A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities.” *Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. 2013, 1-57.**

This roadmap for Tribal child welfare evaluation was developed in summer 2012 by a 21 member working group, the majority of whom were American Indian/Alaska Native. Eight federal staff, primarily from the Administration for Children and Families, also helped develop the roadmap. The roadmap emphasized the importance of training Tribal evaluators, researchers, and program staff to design and implement evaluation on their own. The roadmap includes both a discussion of the key values and achievements of evaluation in tribal communities, as well as a helpful and detailed graphic discussing the eleven main stakeholders, where they fall in the evaluation plan, and the work they contribute to and benefit from during evaluation.

They then highlighted seven key values that any evaluation done in collaboration with a tribal community should include Indigenous ways of knowing, respect tribal

sovereignty, be strengths focus, be culturally and scientifically rigorous; engage the community, follow ethical practices, share knowledge with the broader community. They also assert that evaluation should: benefit community and be informed by Indigenous knowledge; improve program and policy; be guided by local questions, data, and insight; analyze and disseminate data in a way that is understandable to community; support bidirectional learning; and build capacity for tribal communities/programs to be able to do their own evaluation.

**Wehipeihana, N. Increasing Cultural Competence in Support of Indigenous-Led Evaluation: A Necessary step toward Indigenous-Led Evaluation. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. 2019, 34(2), 368-384.**

This article outlines the rationale for and presents a strategy to support Indigenous-led evaluation, and presents a model for non-Indigenous evaluators to reflect on their role in power dynamics that create barriers to Indigenous evaluation led by Indigenous peoples. Wehipeihana, an Indigenous (Māori) evaluator from Aotearoa New Zealand, defines Indigenous evaluation as evaluation that is led by Indigenous peoples with evaluation teams largely made up of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous evaluation is further defined by having clear benefits for Indigenous peoples, its responsive to tribal and community contexts, and by its guidance from Indigenous principles, practices, and knowledge. Wehipeihana argues for Indigenous led as a key criterion for Indigenous evaluation, with no assumed or automatic role for non-Indigenous peoples unless by invitation. The article outlines a range of ways to support the development of Indigenous evaluators and Indigenous evaluation, including a model for non-Indigenous evaluators to assess their practice and explore how power is shared or not shared in evaluation with Indigenous peoples, which is necessary for evaluation rooted in self-determination and increasing control by Indigenous peoples.

## Reflections on evaluation in Indigenous communities

**Anderson, C et al. It Is Only New Because It Has Been Missing for so Long: Indigenous Evaluation Capacity Building. *American Journal of Evaluation*. 2012, 33(4), 566-582.**

This article by Maori and Alaska Native evaluators describes a capacity-building project to train and develop Alaska Native evaluators at the Interior-Aleutians Campus of University of Alaska Fairbanks. The article is a summary of how the training was structured and includes personal reflections from workshop participants. It may be a helpful resource for those planning their own Indigenous evaluation capacity building workshops or trainings. The authors framed the Indigenous evaluation cycle in five phases: dream your version of Indigenous success; tell your story using outcomes maps; set culturally appropriate criteria and standards; measure outcomes and check progress; report challenges and successes and repeat the process. They also discussed barriers they faced in the training, including the presence of nonnative people who self-selected to attend the training. For example, the university was not allowed to limit attendance to only Alaska Native people, though the intended audience was evaluation by and for Indigenous peoples.

**Bowman, N, Francis, CF & Tyndall, M. Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation: A Practical Approach for Evaluating Indigenous Projects in Tribal Reservation Contexts. *Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evolution Theory and Practice*. 2015, 335-359.**

This chapter situates their Indigenous evaluation framework within Tribal Critical Theory, which asserts that colonialism is endemic to society, that Indigenous people thrive toward sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification, and that story is a legitimate data source and building block of theory.

The second half of this chapter provides a case example of a Midwestern tribal community's environmental health and diabetes prevention work with a CDC grant. They described, for example, how they worked with community members to collect meaningful data. For one project, community measurers (called "data warriors") used "pow wow pedometers" to measure calories burned by fancy

dancers versus traditional dancers to quantify healthy behavioral changes.

The article is primarily aimed at non-Indigenous people working in a reservation specific context and they provide several suggestions for non-Indigenous evaluators. For example, evaluators need to be aware of knowledge that community members may not be comfortable (or allowed) to share with outsiders (particularly traditional knowledge). They also note that depending on the community, providing a gift as a thank you for sharing knowledge is appropriate (such as tobacco or food). Finally, they remind external researchers and evaluators should realize that they are under a different jurisdiction when working within Tribal context and provide suggestions on working within this multijurisdictional system.

**Cram, F, Pipi, K & Paipa, K. Kaupapa Māori Evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Directions for Evaluation*. 2018, 159, 63-77.**

This article focused on principles of Kaupapa Maori theory (Smith, 1997), like self-determination and collective responsibility, and how Kaupapa Maori evaluation can reclaim knowledge creation mechanisms. They argue that evaluators should be asking themselves questions like: whose idea was this? Who will this evaluation benefit? Who will "own" this information? What is my connection to this person/community I am interacting with?

They also suggested seven guidelines for working with Maori communities, which are also applicable to working with AIAN communities in the United States: 1) Respect people, allow them to meet with you on their terms; 2) Meet people face to face, be seen in the community; 3) Look and listen before speaking; 4) Share and be generous (support bidirectional learning); 5) Be cautious – recognize that evaluators are not "insiders;" 6) Respect self- dignity and voices of Indigenous communities; and 7) Be humble, don't flaunt your knowledge or academic pedigree.

**Grover, JG. Challenges in Applying Indigenous Evaluation Practices in Mainstream Grant Programs to Indigenous Communities. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. 2010, 23(2), 33-50.**

This article discusses barriers that Indigenous evaluators face when working within western/mainstream grant programs, including cultural misalignment, distrust by community members of government agencies, power inequities between academic evaluators and Indigenous communities, and lack of epidemiological data on Indigenous people (due to undercounts in urban settings and/or exclusion of reservation data). To combat these issues, the authors suggest engaging and empowering the community throughout the evaluation process (including evaluation design), recognizing your status (evaluators hold a position of privilege/power, even if a fellow Native person), and using culturally valid instruments, such as community contributions and oral measures.

The article also discusses issues they faced when implementing a strategic planning framework in a small tribal community that utilized a grant from a governmental funding body. For example, one of the issues they came upon was that one of the programs they were hoping to implement (focused on generational and historic trauma and racism) was not recognized as “evidence based” by the federal government, though the program had been widely implemented in tribal and urban Native American communities across the U.S. This caused some tension between the community coalition and the state grant administering agency, though they were ultimately funded to use this program (provided they had a strong evaluation plan).

**Kawakami, AJ et al. Improving the Practice of Evaluation Through Indigenous Values and Methods: Decolonizing Evaluation Practice—Returning the Gaze From Hawaii and Aotearoa. *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being*. 2007, 4(1), 319-348.**

Kawakami et al. make several suggestions on how non-Indigenous evaluators should work within Maori communities. Importantly, they assert that Maori have a different perspective on the “value” of an intervention than a Western evaluator might. For example, a cost-benefits analysis, attainment of benchmarks, or tracking of test scores can’t necessarily communicate the spiritual or cultural esteem impacts of a program, which may be more significant for the participants. In that same lens, they

argue that the results of an evaluation should be viewed in multiple contexts, including cultural, historical, economic, and environmental significance (not just statistical or practical significance and effect size). They also argue that results must be communicated to the community in a way that the community understands and gains value from. Finally, they assert that evaluation should be used to revise a community agenda or policy, not just to be submitted to a funder.

## **Research in Indigenous communities**

**Abolson, K, & Willett, C. Aboriginal Research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*. 2004, 1(1), 5-17.**

In this article, Indigenous scholars Abolson and Willett discuss how traditional Indigenous knowledge creation and storytelling is a form of research. They argue that the traditional way of interacting with the natural world – careful observation to improve community wellbeing – is research. They note that historically, knowledge was passed down via song, storytelling, ceremony, rituals and sharing. Yet in Western academia and colonial society, these forms of knowledge are misrepresented as legends, myth or folklore, not history and knowledge, because written research was seen as the only legitimate form of knowledge.

Further, they argue Indigenous research should value community participation and community ownership and control of research processes and that Indigenous researchers should do their best to challenge Western hierarchical principles/relationships with the communities they are working. They also note that though community-based participatory research and participatory action research (both western methods) are good “launch pads,” Indigenous researchers and communities should continue to develop research methods and methodologies that are embedded in Indigenous epistemological frameworks.

**Cochran, P, et al. Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Implications for Participatory Research and Community. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2008, 98(1), 22-27.**

This article is aimed at external researchers interested in conducting research in Indigenous communities. They observe that western academia establishes what constitutes good, high quality research, and not the

communities that are being researched. For example, Indigenous communities and people are often viewed as objects (not subjects) or as problems that need to be “solved.” Culturally rigorous research methods are essential for figuring out what health disparities exist and what interventions truly work. They also note, like many other scholars, that participatory research does not guarantee that the work will center Indigenous epistemologies or knowledge systems, merely that communities will be engaged. The authors give examples of both harmful and successful research with Indigenous communities across the globe, including in Australia, Mexico, and the United States. They conclude with six ways that academic researchers collaborating with and working for/in Indigenous communities can support truly community driven, community supported research. Suggestions include having a community leader be a Principal Investigator, adjusting the research design/aims depending on the suggestions or needs of the community, and facilitating capacity building within the community.

**James, R, et al. Responsible Research with Urban American Indians and Alaska Natives. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2018, 108(12), 1613-1616.**  
**One of the only that focus on urban AI/AN population**

This article, written by UIHI’s leadership and partners at the University of Washington, offers suggestions on how to improve research with urban Indian communities. They note that tribal communities have some protections for outside researchers – including tribal regulations, oversight, and IRB processes. Though the majority of Native people live in urban communities, and face health disparities and barriers in access to healthcare, they do not have the same protections. Urban Indians are protected by Urban Indian Health Service facility IRBs, but Urban Indian Health Programs (UIHPs) vary widely in their in-house capacity. Additionally, university-based IRBs (where the researcher may be) often aren’t culturally specific to American Indian/Alaska Native protocols and values.

They offer several suggestions on how to improve research with urban Indian communities, including strengthening UI organizational capacity and infrastructure to conduct their own research studies, establishing inter-tribal IRBs or UIHP-directed ethics review boards who can provide oversight of research in UI communities, increasing community engagement in research design and processes, and/or

creating a national clearinghouse with resources on UI research (including Indigenous research models and UI service population needs and research priorities).

**Simonds, V & Christopher, S. Adapting Western Research Methods to Indigenous Ways of Knowing. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2013, 103(12), 2185-2192.**

In this article, Simonds and Christopher make suggestions to researchers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge into Western research methods based on their experience doing community-based participatory research (CBPR) on the Crow Reservation of Montana. For Simonds and Christopher, decolonizing research does not mean rejecting all Western methods/theories but using those that are appropriate and beneficial to community. They argue that decolonized research is well complemented with a CBPR approach because of its emphasis on social justice and dialogue. However, they also emphasize that CBPR is still a western research method, and community participation doesn’t guarantee Indigenous knowledge is respected and utilized.

Based on their experience conducting CBPR on the Crow Reservation, they provided several examples for researchers to learn from. One barrier they faced was that elders disagreed with the western method of breaking apart stories for themes, versus recognizing the overall goal/impact of a story. The elders also argued the storytellers should be the one analyzing and interpreting it, not the interviewer. Further, the elders found it disrespectful that those interviews were not recognized by name (in a Western framework, this is considered “protection”). These cultural protocols and values must be recognized by researchers working within Indian Country.