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The Nonprofit Nerd (January 2019)

The Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University

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The Nonprofit Institute

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

THE NONPROFIT NERD

Research you can use.

Our topic is culturally-responsive evaluation with Native and Indigenous communities.

In this issue, we explore culturally-responsive evaluation for Native American or Indigenous communities. This is the first of a series focusing on culture and equity.

According to "Leading with Tradition," The Portland Metro region has been home to many nations including the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, bands of Chinook, and more. Across Oregon, there are [nine federally-recognized tribes](#). According to the [Coalition of Communities of Color's "An Unsettling Report"](#), Portland is the ninth largest urban Native population, and this diverse Native community is served by almost 30 Native nonprofit organizations.

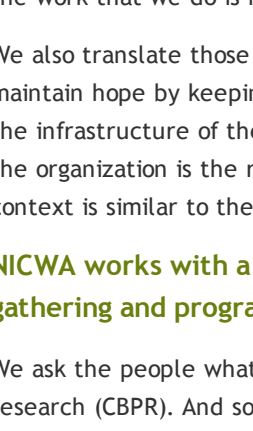
The Nonprofit Institute would like to thank the Native community leaders and researchers who contributed to this issue through interviews and publications. Sharing multiple ways of knowing provides us with an opportunity to broaden capacity for serving our diverse community.

Let the resources and insights we share in *The Nonprofit Nerd* inspire you to get your nerd on and find innovative ways to make research and data work for you and your nonprofit!



NERDS AT WORK

This month we feature an interview with [Terry Cross](#) (Seneca, MSW, Founder and Senior Adviser of the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), which is headquartered in Portland.



Please describe the services NICWA offers. In what ways is NICWA's programming unique to Native/Indigenous people?

NICWA is a nonprofit with four major areas of activity: information and training, community development, public policy, and research. Research—we do both original research as well as program evaluation research. We are pretty unique as our services are dedicated to the well-being of American Indian children and families and so everything we do is making sure that people that work with tribal children and families have the skills and resources to do that work well. We are an organization that was founded by Native people in child welfare for the purpose of coming together to make sure that we were strong in our cultural grounding and the way that we were doing our work. So, we believe that the content of our training and technical assistance, policy work, [and] research, should all be culturally-based. We also believe that our methodology should be culturally based.

How does NICWA conceptualize knowledge and ways of knowing? Is this understanding unique to the communities served by NICWA?

NICWA's basis of our work, we refer to as the relational worldview model. We make sure that we are testing all of our approaches to that model. We understand the world as a balance between mind, body, spirit and context. We represent that in the four-quadrant circle and so whenever we work with communities we try to make sure that the work that we do is responsive to those four quadrants.

We also translate those four quadrants to organizations and whole communities and in that model we are able to maintain hope by keeping a balance between those four quadrants. For organizations, the mind quadrant becomes the infrastructure of the organization and you can think of that as everything you can put on paper. The body of the organization is the resources, mostly people. The spirit quadrant is the mission, vision, values. And then the context is similar to the environment, so all of our approaches are organized around those four quadrants.

NICWA works with a variety of Native/Indigenous cultures. How do you make decisions on data gathering and program evaluation with the possibility of so many different ways of knowing?

We ask the people what is important to measure. We use an approach called community-based participatory research (CBPR). And so when we do an evaluation, the community determines what outcomes they want to measure. There's an old adage that says "if you measure what people value, then people will value what you measure." And that's certainly [what we do] and historically we've had one of the highest rates of participation in our research projects because people have a lot of ownership of measuring the outcomes. And when you use a CBPR model, even though you have a conceptual organizing framework, if you're listening to people and measuring what the people value and what's important to them, it's much easier to reflect their thinking than your thinking in everything from the design to the findings and the outcomes.

What types of data or information do you gather regularly on programs? What methods of data and information gathering are utilized? How often do you adjust your data and information gathering techniques?

There are similarities across all the projects that we do but every one of them is unique. In terms of the types of research ... we may use [the] "World Cafe" technique, which is a nominal group process. We may use individual key informant interviews. We often do record reading or document analysis. We want to know, for example, if we're reviewing a program, what are the founding documents or the documents that give the program its mandate to operate. And, are there constraints in policy so that we're not just looking at whether the stakeholders are satisfied.

We're also looking at what's the scope of the program and what are the issues that they are responding to, so we might do an environmental scan. We might be looking for the types of problems or issues that are more global that a community is trying to respond to—what's the shifting environment and is the program keeping up with the shifting environment. For example, if we're doing a review of a child welfare program we'll want to know whether or not they are facing a crisis in their community with opiate addiction and if the program is responsive to that.

One of the things that the framework of the relational worldview does for [us] is that it helps us make sure that we are paying attention to the environment wherever we work and that the inquiry is informed by stakeholders. We also know whether or not there is an alignment between policies and procedures and mission, or if legislative constraints affect services. We assess whether leadership is a support or challenge. We're looking at all those four quadrants, those factors together, and looking at what ... the measurable outcomes are. Again, every project is different because if it's research on a particular type of practice we're going to be looking at that more broadly, [and] identifying specific community-defined outcomes.

In your experience, how does historical and ongoing trauma impact program evaluation and/or research efforts?

There's a direct impact. One of the reasons that tribal communities have been reluctant to participate with research or program evaluation is the misuse of research historically and research that is done from an outside perspective. Research that takes information [and] doesn't bring back value to the community is a misuse of research. One of the things that we really encourage is for tribal communities to have their own institutional review boards (IRBs) for research projects. And that they have some kind of advisory process if it's a program evaluation when an IRB is not needed or not appropriate in that situation. What we find is that by using a CBPR model the people not only help define what the research is going to look like but also participate in what the findings mean.

We find that tribal communities are actually very interested in research and evaluation if they're involved in those decisions. It's when people are left out that they're suspicious, and rightly so. People are cautious about how data are going to be used. I'll give you an example: we never publish anything without the permission of the community we're working with, even if it's a case example for a publication or a journal article. We wouldn't publish a description of the program without the permission of that program.

NICWA is a policy advocate and subject matter expert on Native child welfare policy. How has program evaluation and/or research impacted NICWA's policy work and technical assistance?

One of the reasons that I've described the four areas that NICWA works in is that they're all tied together. At our founding, we came together on three basic premises. One is that every person that works with Indian children and families needs the very best skills and information to do that job well. Second that every tribal community has people that want to make the lives of children and families better and [it's] our job to find them and support them through our community development. And, finally, in order for people to be able to do this work they've got to have the resources and their rights have to be protected.

We have a public policy arm to inform people about policy issues and to advocate for the rights of Indian children and families and tribes to do their own services. We advocate for good and responsive services. And, as we were doing that work of advocacy, we realized that if we were going to be successful we had to have a research function. In many cases we found that as we took public policy issues to leaders they would say to us "where is your data?" And, there simply wouldn't be much.

Very early in our existence we started our research arm that informs public policy. It also informs our information and training services as well as informing leaders who are making policy decisions. The best example of that, is that one of the major issues confronting our tribal programs when we started this work was children who had mental health challenges, severe emotional disturbances, and no place to get any services or help. In the late 1980s, we conducted an exploratory study in Oregon, Washington and Idaho and identified that there weren't mental health services available to American Indian children. In the early 90s, we got an invitation from Georgetown University to replicate that study nationally and in partnership with their child development center at Georgetown. We found that the problem was throughout the nation.

In 1999, as a result of our research, the Clinton administration created the Circles of Care program, which ... still in existence today, helped tribes develop a plan and develop children's mental health services. Since that time, [from] the work of the Circles of Care program, there's been almost 50 tribes that have participated and they've gone on to create services for whom NICWA is now [providing] training and technical assistance. It's really interesting to be able to point back to research that is [rooted] in research that we did 30 years ago.

NICWA has contributed to several large scope program evaluations. What learning do you think your organization can contribute to other agencies working with Native/Indigenous populations?

Several lessons I think are important. The idea that we should measure what is important to the population and that the community should define their own outcomes to measure. Those are really foundational. Being able to listen and hear the voice of the people who were served and the people who do the work, and the leaders and the elders along the way. Having that community input is just essential to building support because any kind of program evaluation should capture the interest of the stakeholders. When people have a voice in the research they want to hear that data going forward to improve the program or expand services or to change services.

One study, one evaluation, that we were involved in [was] a project called Start Early Start Smart, a grant awarded to a tribe for children's mental health services. There were 13 grantees and only one tribal grantee. In the course of that three-year grant project—federally-funded—our tribal site research had the highest retention rate of any of the 13 sites that conducted the research. We were the only tribal site and we busted everybody's stereotype that Indian people aren't interested in research by having the highest rate of retention.

The other researchers asked us how we had done that [and] we told them about having people have ownership and we used the example of when ... we'd visit a tribal preschool and we've had parents ask us "How is our study coming along? How are we measuring up to the other sites?" Those are the kinds of questions that the parents of the preschool children were asking because they'd had a role in formulating the interview questions and deciding what outcomes to measure. So, as a community they'd ask "how's our research coming along?" You know you have a strong buy-in. I really encourage others to use a community-based model and really work with the people about what's important to their community.

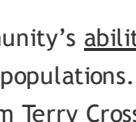
How do you define resiliency? How can program evaluation address the strengths and resiliencies of communities?

We've done some good work on this issue. We define resiliency as a balance across that four-quadrant circle. Having strengths in each of those four areas as an individual and for a community and in our design for adapting the four-quadrant circle to organizations. So ... the difference I think [between] mainstream society and the indigenous perspective ... is the perspective in the dominant world [of] research being a linear process and the development of resiliency really being a linear process. Looking for one thing that brings about resilience when in fact it's not about one thing at all. It's about the balance of many things.

Our way of looking at resilience is making sure that there are strengths in a variety of areas that help balance out the challenges. You don't have to solve every problem, or you don't have to find the huge issue... to change dramatically, and you don't have to wait until you have the resources to do it. You can focus on even very small things, but things that will be very high leverage for impacting everything else in that four-quadrant circle because nothing in that circle can change without everything being impacted.

When we try to help communities build resilience we're very strengths-based. We do asset mapping. For example, a community will ask us to come in and think about dealing with an issue of abuse or neglect, or the influence of opioids on child welfare and one of the major things we'll do is to help them map out all of the resources in their community so that they'll know what they have to draw on. The asset mapping helps the community have the agency to address an issue even before they've got to go out and find a grant to fund some new work. We help them think about what you do have and what you have to realign a changing environment and the issue you've come to address. It's been shifting the balance from feeling overwhelmed to feeling hopeful, to help communities take the action that they want to take. So, hope is the really good element of resilience, probably one of the strongest elements of resilience. Hope gives us energy to do other things that need to be done—it's a process of bringing those four quadrants into alignment, into balance, [and] hopefully it's a harmony.

Know someone you'd like to see featured in the Nonprofit Nerd? Tell us who and why!



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Evaluation is ineffective without insight. Sometimes, it is possible to gain insight from listening to the diverse perspectives of communities, but there are considerations that must be addressed prior to engaging in evaluation or research with historically marginalized communities. After performing an extensive review of resources, we have culled together resources from some of the leading experts on evaluation practice with Native or Indigenous communities.

Learning from Culturally-Specific Services

The best place to begin is to learn from culturally-specific services. Culturally-specific services are an antidote to systemic inequity. The [Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) defines culturally-specific services as "by and for" communities of color. Sometimes these services are provided within culturally-specific organizations, and sometimes a culturally-specific program exists within an organization that serves the general population. Culturally-specific services offer the promise of [diminished disparities and better outcomes](#) for communities and individuals experiencing inequities often tied to systemic racism.

Culturally-specific services contribute to a system's [ability to achieve universal goals](#) by providing specific, culturally-responsive interventions to particular populations. For an example of a local culturally-specific service evaluation, we recommend this presentation from Terry Cross on [an evaluation of NAVA's youth services](#).

Academic and Professional Best Practices

Another excellent place to start examining culturally-responsive evaluation, is to identify American Evaluation Association (AEA) topical interest groups (TIGs). The [Indigenous Peoples in Evaluation group](#) has plenty of resources, including an associated [library of blog posts related to indigenous evaluation practice](#). Two prominent experts in Indigenous Evaluation have chaired this interest group, including Dr. Joan LaFrance and [Dr. Nicole Bowman](#). Dr. LaFrance's work "[Culturally Competent Evaluation in Indian Country](#)" provides an overview of cultural and ethical considerations for evaluation with Native or Indigenous people, and she co-authored a [resource guide for indigenous evaluators](#). Dr. LaFrance's research includes the definition of the [Indigenous Evaluation Framework \(IEF\)](#). You can hear Dr. Bowman's perspective in [a recorded panel on culturally-responsive evaluation](#).

Although there are countless sources defining indigenous evaluation as a separate and distinct set of practices, there have been barriers to receiving recognition and acceptance for these approaches. [RMC Research of Portland](#) discusses the challenges of using culturally-responsive indigenous evaluation methods for grant reporting. And, in response to Oregon legislators requiring evidence-based practice in healthcare, the "[Oregon Tribal Evidence Based and Cultural Best Practices](#)" report provides an overview of the "circular worldview" of some Native peoples.

Several sectors have applied various iterations of indigenous evaluation practice, including healthcare and education. [National Perspectives on Evaluation of Native Child Health Programs](#) discuss cultural competence in healthcare and information on what has alienated Native communities in evaluation. Additionally, SAMHSA and the Native American Center for Excellence in Substance Abuse Prevention (NACE) published a [best and worst evaluation practice report](#).

For perspectives on education, "[Weaving the Web](#)" illustrates a participatory evaluation with Native American undergraduates and includes an example logic model. Also, this [National Science Foundation transcript from a conference on educational evaluation](#) with Native youth offers an array of perspectives from experts.

New to Culturally-Responsive Evaluation?

If this is your first foray into culturally-responsive evaluation, you may benefit from [reading this article](#), which includes practice considerations for working with Native communities. And, if your agency engages in research with the Native community, the "[Walk Softly and Listen Carefully](#)" white paper is required reading for building effective partnerships with tribal communities.



INSTITUTE NEWS

Interested in deepening your partnership with tribal communities? Portland State's Institute for Tribal Government offers the Certificate in Tribal Relations. [Contact the program manager](#) for more information on enrollment in Fall 2019.

Starting Fall term 2019, Portland State University is offering a major in [Indigenous Nations Studies](#).

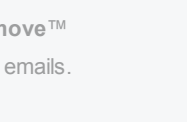
Learn more about PSU's [NEW Master's degree in Nonprofit Leadership](#).



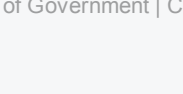
FELLOW NERDS

If you're interested in learning more about culturally-responsive program evaluation and topics in Native and Indigenous research, NPI recommends you get to know the great work of these fellow nerds:

- [AEA Indigenous Peoples in Evaluation TIG](#)
- [National Indian Child Welfare Association](#)
- [Portland State University's Center Hatfield School of Government Institute for Tribal Government](#)
 - [Certificate in Tribal Relations](#)
 - [Agency and Government Training](#)
- [Portland State University Indigenous Nations Studies program](#)
- [Dr. Nicole Bowman](#)
- [Dr. Joan LaFrance](#)
- [Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment](#)



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