

**Our Homes, Our Communities, Our Future  
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**Developing Principles and Indicators  
for  
Evaluating Housing  
in  
Indigenous Contexts**

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**Curtin Indigenous Research Centre  
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## Developing Principles and Indicators for Evaluating Housing in Indigenous Contexts

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### ABSTRACT

*This presentation discusses the outcomes of research undertaken by Curtin Indigenous Research Centre under the auspices of Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). As part of this research we have written a Positioning Paper 'Investigating appropriate evaluation methods and indicators for Indigenous housing programs'. In this paper we have developed a research principles framework to facilitate culturally appropriate and transformative evaluations in Indigenous housing, as well as establish social indicators that take account of Indigenous rights, interests and agendas.*

*Our research draws on the work of several Australian and New Zealand Indigenous academics and researchers whose writings encompass issues, principles and processes regarding ethically sound research. In addition we have drawn on a range of national reports and international covenants that support the position that research in Indigenous contexts should enhance Indigenous self-determination, empowerment and social transformation.*

*We suggest that Indigenous research principles and indicators need to be framed within a context of human rights and cultural democracy. Such a position challenges housing funding bodies to establish housing evaluation policies, processes and practices aimed towards Indigenous self-determination, social transformation and cultural integrity.*

### Biographies

**Roz Walker** is Deputy Director of the Curtin Indigenous Research Centre (CIRC). She has been involved in teaching, curriculum development, policy analysis and research in Indigenous education since 1985 and was academic coordinator of the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Program at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies for several years. She is currently completing a PhD researching philosophical and pedagogical issues regarding decolonising and transformative strategies in Indigenous education which underpinned the development of that program.

**Cheryle Taylor** is a Noongar women from the South West of Western Australia. She is also a researcher at Curtin Indigenous Research Centre and is currently enrolled in a Masters in Indigenous Research and Development through the Centre for Aboriginal Studies examining service delivery models for Indigenous service provider organisations. Cheryle has been the coordinator of the Community Aid Abroad South West Indigenous Program for the past five years. She has a wealth of experience in community and cultural development both in Australia and overseas.

**John Ballard** is a researcher at Curtin Indigenous Research Centre. He is currently enrolled in a Masters in Indigenous Research and Development through the Centre for Aboriginal Studies investigating appropriate ways of working for non-Indigenous people working in Indigenous organisations. He has worked with the Noongar community since 1998 assisting in the development of a Noongar language project and other community development projects with Cheryle Taylor. He is a member of the management committee for Shelter WA, and in 1999 co-authored a submission to the United Nations on housing issues in Western Australia.

### **Curtin Indigenous Research Centre**

CIRC is one of six Indigenous research centres established 1997 with funding through DETYA. CIRC is committed to the principles of empowerment and ensuring Indigenous control and participation in all research as well as increasing the capacity to shape Indigenous futures. CIRC operates to ensure that all research and development activities are responsive to Indigenous community needs and priorities and contribute to positive social change.

### **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this country and express our appreciation for the wonderful Indigenous welcome to this place and to this conference. Secondly, we wish to thank the conference organisers and sponsors for bringing so that has brought so many people together from around Australia and the world to talk about housing in the context of our communities and our futures.

We would also like to acknowledge that this project was undertaken with funding from the Commonwealth of Australia and the Australian States and Territories. AHURI Ltd gratefully acknowledge the financial and other support received from the Commonwealth State and Territory governments, without which this research project would not have been possible.

## Introduction

This paper expands on the powerpoint presentation given at the National Housing Conference to provide an overview of our work on culturally appropriate evaluation/research principles, processes and guidelines in Indigenous housing research contexts. Our presentation is framed by the following key concepts. First and foremost, the discussion which follows is founded upon Indigenous rights. In particular Article 23, in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* asserts the right to housing as fundamental to Indigenous self-determination (HREOC, 1999). The Covenant states that:

*Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop all health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions.*

Secondly, and importantly, the position and frameworks proposed in our presentation are presented with the acknowledgement and understanding that a house and/or home has many meanings which reflect the diversity of backgrounds, cultural lifestyles, life chances and social realities within the Indigenous community.

The following quotes not only highlight and juxtapose the diversity of ideas about houses which exist among Indigenous people but also challenge and extend some of the traditional assumptions held by policymakers towards the provision of housing for Indigenous people:

*A House is a good thing. You can lock it up and go and live anywhere you want.*

Heppell, M. (1979:50) *A Black Reality: Aboriginal camps and housing in remote Australia*

While the quote above serves to turn our thinking about houses on its head — emphasising housing as providing the necessary security and freedom to move around (possibly to visit relatives, attend cultural gatherings, funerals and work) — the quote below reinforces the importance of house and place and relationship to ancestral land held by many people.

*It's my home, my country. I belong here. It's my mother's Ground.*

(Scougall, J & Osborne, R 1998:50) *Dogs, Kids & Homeswest: the story of Tkalka Boorda Aboriginal Community.*

The diversity of circumstance among Indigenous groups challenges governments to develop and implement programs to meet the corresponding diversity in housing needs, aspirations and priorities. They also require appropriate evaluation methods and frameworks to measure the effectiveness of a range of programs intended to achieve different objectives.

As with previous workshops and forums we had hoped to conduct our conference presentation as an interactive session to explore the soundness, applicability and scope of the framework and further the dialogue on Indigenous research principles and indicators in housing. Although we were limited to only a few questions at the presentation, comments by the presenters who followed us, and subsequent feedback by participants/practitioners have confirmed the high level of dissatisfaction regarding the limited parameters of existing evaluations. It is apparent that employees in several government service sector agencies share a common desire to conduct more appropriate and meaningful evaluations in Indigenous contexts. These responses confirm the need to have frameworks such as those presented here, to fill existing gaps, so that we can do more much than measure the number of broken windows, the extent of rental arrears, or the costs of repairs and maintenance in Indigenous communities. These are important elements of housing programs and interventions, however, the present emphasis on asset management and financial performance (Randolph & Judd 2001:3) often eclipses social, cultural and political concerns.

### **The AHURI Research Project**

Governments, Indigenous peak bodies and community organisations acknowledge the need to develop more integrated strategies and whole of government programs to address economic, health, social, cultural and housing issues in ways that strengthen community and build social capital within the broader society. This research responds to the need to evaluate the effectiveness of housing assistance programs and strategic interventions in achieving specific social outcomes and which enhance the capacity of Indigenous communities to access wider mainstream opportunities.

### **Project Aims**

The project aims to conduct research which addresses the following questions:

- To develop culturally appropriate evaluation/research principles for Indigenous contexts.
- To develop culturally appropriate indicators/measures for socio-economic disadvantage.

## **Project Methodology**

The methodology has involved an examination and assessment of primary and secondary data regarding the effectiveness of different evaluation approaches and methodologies currently being used to evaluate different housing program and interventions for Indigenous people in diverse contexts. The findings are based on stakeholder perspectives of the relevance and appropriateness of existing qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and methodologies currently used to evaluate housing programs intended to achieve social and economic outcomes. It also assessed the efficacy of existing indicators in measuring these outcomes for individuals, families and communities within a broader social and political context in Western Australia.

This research project can best be understood as taking place in two phases, although we have been reflecting upon, refining and further developing our ideas and frameworks and processes throughout both phases:

### ***Phase 1***

- identifying our position and developing preliminary conceptual, analytical and principles frameworks for research/evaluation/practice which were presented in a Positioning Paper.

### ***Phase 2***

- presenting and discussing the potential of the frameworks in various forums and refining the Indigenous research principles frameworks on the basis of feedback and discussion. It has also involved a further literature search regarding developing social indicators which are consistent with our principles framework.

## **Initial Project Findings**

- Current evaluation models/paradigms are insufficient for Indigenous organisations and programs.
- Evaluation/research methodologies in Indigenous contexts need to be guided by a set of principles underpinned by human rights with particular focus on self-determination.
- Evaluation/research measures need to be placed in a broader context of Indigenous histories and contemporary realities.

## **Conceptual and Analytical Frameworks**

Based on the findings of our preliminary literature search we developed a conceptual and analytical framework (Appendix 1), which with the principles framework, assists in defining the parameters, scope and design of evaluation and research in Indigenous contexts.

Beginning with housing as the primary element of research or evaluation the framework encompasses a range of widely recognised housing variables such as location, security of tenure, affordability and habitability (ABS 1996, Jones) together with other variables such as Indigenous control and cultural adequacy or appropriateness. These latter variables (with an emphasis on Indigenous self-determination) differ from those generally used in existing evaluation frameworks. The framework illustrates the interrelation between each or all of these housing variables and a range of non-housing variables (including standard ABS socio-economic indicators of social disadvantage and contextual factors).

The Positioning Paper emphasises the importance of locating all research within a broader social, historical and political context than is usually the case. It also asserts the need for Indigenous standpoints or perspectives to inform the collection, interpretation and analysis of data pertaining to this conceptual and analytical framework. The incorporation of Indigenous histories and standpoints encourage the researcher/evaluator to reframe and broaden the boundaries of their research.

This framework is intended to assist researchers/evaluators to contextualise the evaluation as well as identify links between a specific set of variables, outcomes and indicators for a particular study. This is not meant to suggest that all of variables will be involved and measured in all studies, as with other frameworks it is a conceptual tool to assist researchers to identify and negotiate the scope of an evaluation with all stakeholders involved.

While the framework holds the complex, multidimensional, inter-dependent relationships between housing and non-shelter outcomes and indicators it does not specify causal relationships between housing variables and Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage/advantage (Walker Walker, Ballard, & Taylor, 2001:14). Rather, we suggest that '[t]he interaction and resistance between community perceptions, government policies, economic/social/political/legal histories, and Indigenous responses to these, creates a fluid, reactive and responsive environment for overcoming or exacerbating Indigenous disadvantage' (Walker et al 2001:14). The dynamics operating in this environment need to be taken into account when developing a evaluation model and methodology even though ironically, it is precisely these dynamics that seem to defy description and measurement in program evaluation.

## **Working/Evaluating at the Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Interface**

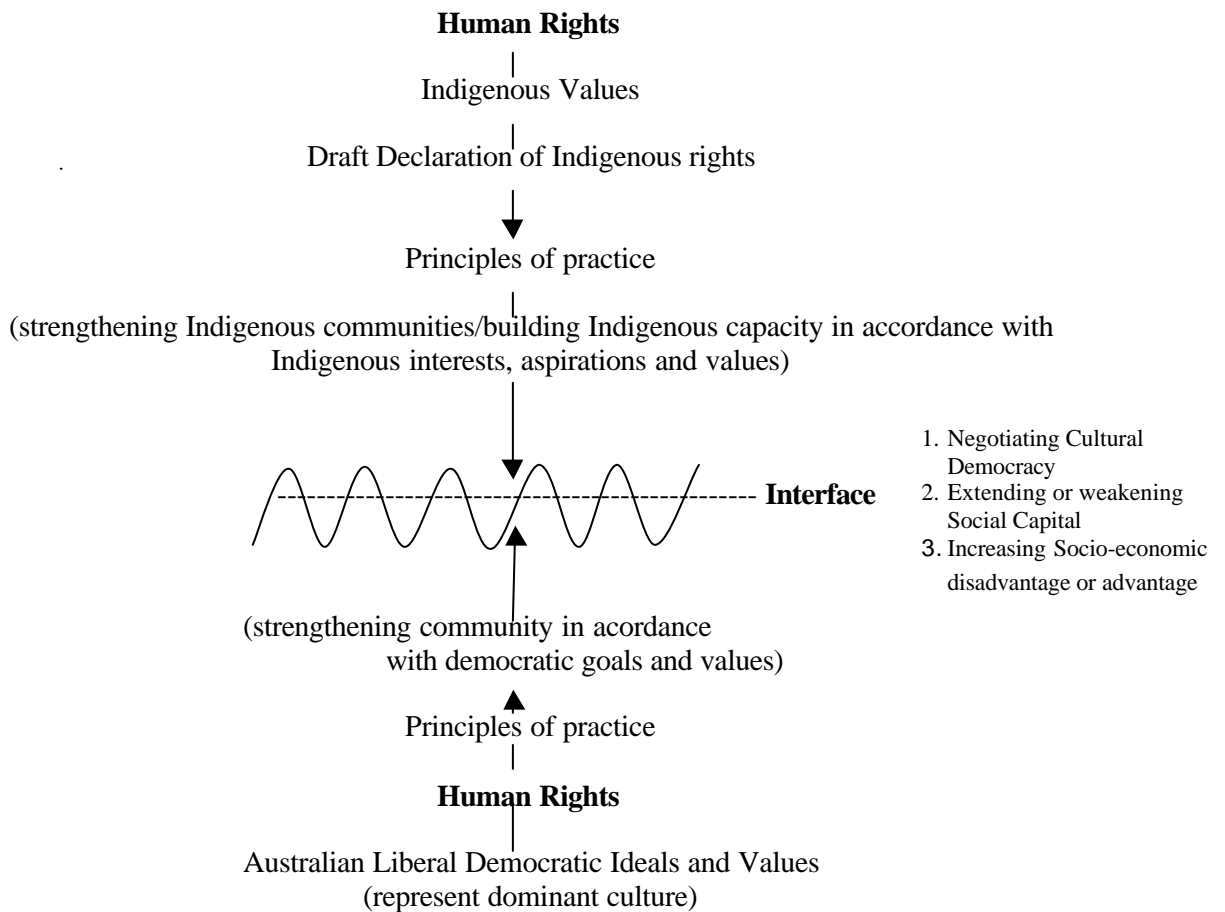
We suggest that this dynamics environment constitutes the intersection of competing claims regarding Indigenous and non-Indigenous priorities, interests, goals, values, needs and aspirations. Importantly, this point of intersection also encompasses the potential opportunities for policy makers and service providers and Indigenous people/communities/organisations to develop partnerships and negotiate their respective positions, interests and goals. This intersection of competing claims and possibilities is often described as the Interface, which:

- Is the place of debate and dialogue regarding differences and commonality of needs, rights, interests and aspirations and future directions within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.
- Holds the tensions between community knowledge and institutional appropriation/misuse and accountability.

In the diagram below (Figure 2 from Walker et al 2001:24 ) we attempt to show ‘how democratic ideals, values and human rights ought to inform principles of practice, programs, policies and processes employed by governments and relevant industry sector.’ Further, we suggest ‘that the rights asserted by Indigenous Australians are consonant with and reflected within the ideals, values and rights of social democracy which underpin notions of community building in broader community contexts.’

While this diagram ‘somewhat over simplifies what happens at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations it does suggest a site or space where cultural democracy can exist in accordance with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous values and ideals.’ (Walker, Ballard, & Taylor, 2001:24 )

**Figure 1: The interface between Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations**



As we note in our AHURI Positioning Paper (Walker, et al. 2001:24) the diagram cannot adequately capture ‘the complex negotiations, competing discourses and interactions which occur at the interface in Indigenous attempts to achieve equity and self-determination on Indigenous terms.’ However, the interface encompasses the various structures, policies, processes, practices and languages which can influence ‘the outcomes of such negotiations’ and function to ‘either weaken or strengthen Indigenous social capital and overcome or exacerbate Indigenous disadvantage.’

At the same time the diagram attempts to show the basis for working towards shared or common goals between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. For example notions regarding capacity building, stronger communities and families are closely related to the goals of cultural democracy and strengthening Indigenous communities. (They are also linked to principles of research regarding strengthening Indigenous research capacity and ensuring that the outcomes of research and evaluation benefits and strengthens the community).

In the Positioning Paper we suggest that 'the recognition of rights outlined in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the Australia Act (1986) provides the basis for cultural democracy'. Specifically Articles 31 and 32 of the Covenant delineate the right of Indigenous peoples to be self-determining 'in all matters relating to internal affairs and social welfare including housing without foregoing their rights to the same opportunities as all other citizens.' (Walker et al. 2001)

These rights have obvious implications for governments and agencies and how they negotiate their relationships and develop and deliver programs with, or for, Indigenous Australians. These rights also inform the principles and goals for actions specified in the framework to operationalise Indigenous research and evaluation which is discussed below.

### **Establishing a Research Principles Framework**

Our research confirmed that non-Indigenous research and evaluation methodologies are not always appropriate for research with Indigenous people. At the same time an audit of relevant Indigenous literature (Arbon 1992; Brady, 1993; Nakata, 1997, 2001; Rigney, 1997; Smith, 1999) revealed a range of essential principles, processes and tools being advocated by Indigenous stakeholders/researchers to ensure evaluation and research is conducted for the benefit of Indigenous communities.

Building on this literature we have developed an operational framework that links Indigenous Rights, Cultural Democracy and Indigenous research principles. The framework is established on the basis that Indigenous people have the right to take control of any research agenda that impacts upon Indigenous people. Drawing on the work of Indigenous writers and practitioners we have identified a set of research goals and principles which inform the scope, conduct and context of Indigenous evaluation and research. On the basis of feedback and ongoing discussions with Indigenous stakeholders we have continued to revise these principles throughout the research. A refined version of this framework is outlined in greater detail in the Final Report, however, the key goals and principles are as follows:

### **Goals of Indigenous Research**

- Maximise Indigenous participation.
- Strengthen community/capacity building.
- Increase effectiveness & efficiency (as defined by Indigenous people).
- Increase empowerment (individual & collective).
- Ensure dual accountability and genuine partnership.
- Achieve appropriate representation.
- Gain Indigenous control and ownership (processes/outcomes).
- Realise gender equity and equality.
- Realise Indigenous self-determination.

## **Context Principles**

- Recognise and work within an Indigenous cultural/political framework.
- Identify and overcome power differences in gender, cultural knowledge, colonial domination and other variables.
- Identify and work with diversity in culture, environment, language, experience, and background.
- Identify and work with variations in socio-economic and geographic disadvantage/advantage.

## **Action Principles**

- Prioritise Indigenous knowledge and experience.
- Contribute to Indigenous interests, priorities and future's orientation.
- Disseminate research findings in appropriate forms for relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure research processes and outcomes benefit Indigenous people.
- Include, and be guided by, Indigenous people in all phases of the evaluation/research.
- Assist Indigenous capacity building.

This matrix of goals and principles attempts to hold the multidimensional interrelationship of context and action principles and goals of Indigenous research. At the same time it is not meant to suggest a linear relationship where specific goals and principles intersect to produce one specific set of actions being prescribed for all evaluations or research projects. Rather, the framework is intended as a checklist or audit, a basis for discussion, decision and negotiation between all stakeholders about the 'what', 'how' and 'why' elements in existing programs for all research/evaluation projects. Importantly, Indigenous self-determination is both a goal and a non-negotiable right — as such it remains a fundamental principle and criteria of all research concerning Indigenous peoples.

## **Social Indicators**

There is widespread agreement that many of the assumptions underpinning existing indicator frameworks are flawed. A critique by Hayward and Burke (2001) reveals that current housing evaluations are driven by efficiency and effectiveness indicators which focus on accountability and monitoring processes and quantitative measures of outcomes, often at the expense of qualitative social indicators. However with the increasing focus on whole of government approaches and integrated strategies to build stronger communities there is clearly a need for the development of indicators which can measure broader social goals. More specifically in the context of our research indicators need to:

- take account of Indigenous community interests, needs and aspirations;
- be developed with regard to organisation vision, goals and objectives and broader social policy goals; and
- be interpreted and analysed in accordance with the analytical, conceptual, principles and rights frameworks introduced earlier.

## Policy Discourses, Principles, Goals and Indicators in Practice

Throughout this project we have focused on achieving Indigenous community outcomes as well as developing frameworks to inform policy and funding bodies. A primary emphasis in the research has been to engage with Indigenous community groups and organisations delivering programs and services to explore how evaluation and research can have real VALUE, worth and benefit for Indigenous individuals, groups and organisations. An important message from Indigenous stakeholders is the need for government service providers and funding bodies to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in the development of indicators to more accurately measure genuine program effectiveness in achieving existing policy goals in Indigenous affairs.

A second outcome of this project has, in the broadest sense, involved the ‘resuscitation’ and reframing of human rights discourse within the social policy domain and to develop a set of conceptual, analytical and operational frameworks (as discussed here). Taken together these frameworks highlight the importance of adopting and enacting a set of principles which recognise and facilitate equal partnership and Indigenous self-determination in the provision of services at the intersection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies/communities. They also confirm the need for social indicators in evaluation and research which recognise and support Indigenous rights, interests and aspirations in accordance with policy goals and organisational purpose.

The diagram below illustrates how the goals, principles and discourses underpinning existing policies can/ought to provide the complementary links and paradigmatic justification to move beyond the existing economic rationalist/managerialist paradigms in order to realise these policy goals and principles and fundamental rights in practice.

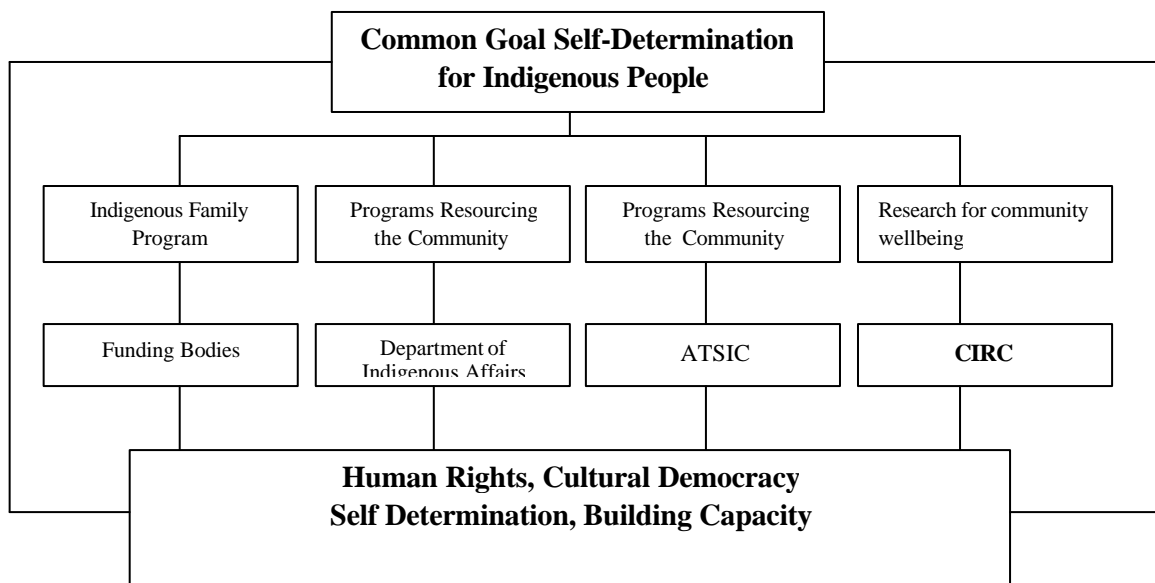


Diagram 2. Linking Policy Discourse, Principles, Goals and Indicators in Practice.

As indicated earlier notions such as capacity building are now firmly embedded in government policy frameworks. However, there is still a need for a paradigmatic shift in thinking about evaluation approaches and performance measures by governments to achieve such goals in Indigenous contexts in a way that recognises the importance of enacting principles and processes which contribute to Indigenous self-determination. Arguably a similar paradigmatic shift is both necessary and possible within mainstream social policy sector.

In summary, in the Positioning Paper we argue that evaluation approaches to assess the extent to which programs, policies and practices strengthen community and build capacity (in both Indigenous and broader societal contexts) need to establish social indicators to measure the extent to which Indigenous goals, terms of reference, equitable processes and outcomes are achieved.

### **Policy Relevance**

The key policy implications of our research reside in the potential to provide:

- a discourse as a starting point for negotiations between Indigenous community organisations and groups and government policy makers and funding bodies; as well as,
- a set of conceptual tools to assist in the development of evaluations and indicators in Indigenous contexts.

Our discussions and workshops with key policymakers and Indigenous community organisation stakeholders reveal widespread dissatisfaction, frustration and even a sense of helplessness regarding existing gaps between policy rhetoric and practice. We have received broad support, expressions of interest, and some immediate requests to further examine how the ideas and frameworks can be embraced in evaluation and research in housing and broader social policy areas.

An evaluation of such scope requires particular process-oriented research approaches, including models based around participatory action research and community education. It also requires moving the emphasis beyond purely efficiency and effectiveness measures. The framework discussed here, which is informed by Indigenous principles, values, rights and cultural democracy, attempts to encompass and operationalise this proposition.

### **Project Outcomes**

Although we have received positive feedback regarding the potential benefits of this framework for Indigenous communities and organisations it should be noted that some community groups have expressed concern that this process may become coopted and used as another tool of surveillance of Indigenous organisations rather than to embed or institutionalise corporate responsibility and accountability. For this reason the following outcomes, while largely positive, need to be understood within the broader, more

circumspect context of the Indigenous-non-Indigenous interface.

### ***Local Community Outcomes***

- The principles and indicators have been endorsed by an Indigenous community based organisation, who have expressed a desire to apply the evaluation framework to their Indigenous housing program;
- The principles and indicators have been applied to an existing evaluation of the Indigenous Family Program and as a result negotiations are underway to pilot this model; and,
- Community organisations/leaders have reported that the framework provides a tool and discourse to enter into new negotiations and contractual arrangements with state government funding bodies.

### ***National /State/Institutional Outcomes***

- The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has established a set of research ethics and guidelines which incorporate the principles outlined in the Positioning Paper and embrace the principles pertaining to funding bodies responsibilities outlined in the RIADIC. All research through AHURI Research Centres will be required to observe these guidelines which can be found at [www.ahuri.edu.au/research/agenda/ethical.pdf](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/agenda/ethical.pdf)
- In addition, Curtin University of Technology have adopted the *AHURI Ethical principles and Guidelines* into their own Research and Development ethical clearance process. The AHURI principles have also been integrated into policy document the *'Role of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin'* which requires all educational and research activities involving Australian Indigenous people 'to be conducted in consultation with the Centre for Aboriginal Studies' (Policy Doc. A006: 2001).
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) & Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) in Western Australia have indicated strong support to pilot the the evaluation frameworks in cross sectoral programs.
- Aboriginal Housing WA has expressed interest in developing and piloting an evaluation process that encompass Indigenous principles and social indicators for their Management Support Program.
- The Indigenous Research Forum held in Melbourne in September 2001, supported the implementation of the research principles at state and federal levels. In addition discussions have commenced regarding collaboration on extending and applying the research framework to human rights projects.

## Further Information

More information about this AHURI research project undertaken through the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Murdoch University & Curtin University Research Centre is available in the following papers:

- Positioning Paper
- Work in Progress Report
- AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin
- Final Report (in progress)

See [www.ahuri.edu.au/research](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research)

In addition the AHURI Ethical Principles and Guidelines can be found at:

[www.ahuri.edu.au/research/agenda/ethical.doc](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/agenda/ethical.doc)

Or contact AHURI National Office on + 61 3 9629 5033

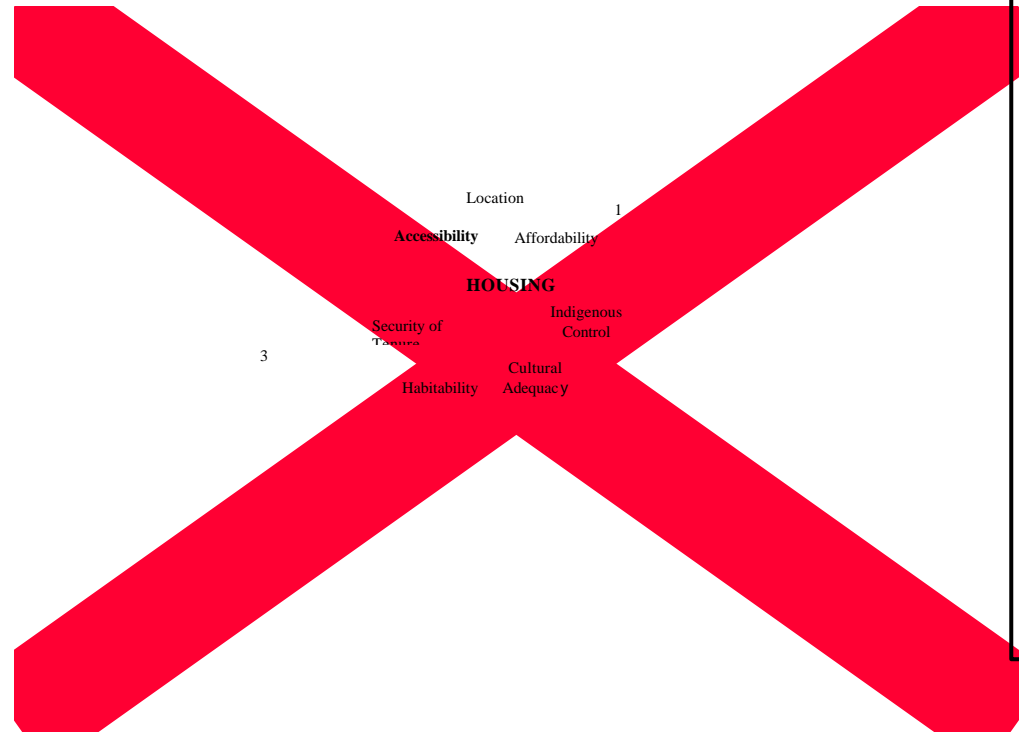
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## Appendix 1

### Indigenous Housing Program Evaluation Indexes and Context



#### Non-Housing Indexes and Context of Social Disadvantage/Advantage

1. Individual/family and community health and wellbeing
  2. Access to family and social networks
  3. Access to education and standard of education
  4. Access to employment and type of employment
  5. Access to financial resources
  6. Access to services
  7. Frequency of incarceration and legal entanglement
  8. Economic /Social / Political / Legal / historical context
- Indigenous cultural practices and responses
  - Non-Indigenous community perceptions and responses to Indigenous people
  - Government policies effecting Indigenous people

#### Note:

This diagram shows the complex relationships between housing and non-housing indexes for measurements of social disadvantage/ advantage. Furthermore, it highlights that social disadvantage/ advantage occurs within a broader economic, social, political, legal and historical context. Evaluations of any one area need to take into account all other areas in order to assess the impact of intervention programs