

# OFFICE OF INDIGENOUS POLICY COORDINATION EVALUATION PLAN FOR WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES IN INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS 2006-09

## 1. Purpose

This paper provides an overview of the planned evaluation activities to be coordinated over the next three years by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC). The plan has been prepared in conjunction with other Commonwealth agencies in respect of the Australian Government's whole-of-government approach in Indigenous affairs. It focuses on the activities for the 2006-07 financial year.

## 2. Background

The changes made from 1 July 2004 to the Australian Government's administration of Indigenous affairs represented a significant shift from previous arrangements. It was clear that the previous arrangements were not working well. New governance and advisory structures were created, together with an increased emphasis on working in a whole-of-government manner and on improving accountability. Greater importance was also placed on governments and Indigenous people working in partnership and sharing responsibility to achieve better outcomes. Sustained progress requires change in the behaviour and mindsets within both government agencies and Indigenous communities. Such changes take considerable time to come to fruition and have their full impact.

The Government is setting the over-arching direction, while progressively reviewing and revising implementation of the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs in the light of experience. Identifying what is working well and any mistakes made provides key lessons important throughout the change process. This evaluation plan is a key element of the process of continuous learning and improvement. The evaluation activities of all government agencies play a vital part in informing policy review and development and in assessing whether changes have led to improved outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Under this plan, mainstream government departments and agencies remain responsible for the evaluation of the programs they administer. This plan aims to avoid any duplication of effort and for the lessons from these agency evaluations to be shared across agencies. OIPC will compile and maintain a running directory of all evaluations of Indigenous specific programs over the past five years. Rather, the plan focuses on those evaluation activities of a whole-of-government nature for which OIPC has particular responsibility.

This plan is therefore only one element of the assessment of the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs. The new arrangements are being assessed through several layers of evaluation and performance management. This whole-of-government evaluation activity complements and will be informed by:

- Evaluations and audits by independent authorities, including the Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs) in the Department of Finance and

Administration, the Australian National Audit Office, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner;

- Departmental sponsored audits and evaluations of the mainstream and Indigenous-specific programs, including lapsing programs and services each is responsible for;
- Public-sector, academic and independent research activities, including those funded by government departments and those conducted independently by academic institutions;
- Performance monitoring and reporting mechanisms, such as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report* and the annual *Reports on Government Services*; and
- The *Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs Annual Report*.

### **3. Foundations of the Evaluation Plan<sup>1</sup>**

When the Government launched its new arrangements in Indigenous affairs, accountability was one of the five foundation principles. Evaluation is a critical component of this commitment. It is also consistent with two of the six principles established in 2004 under COAG's *National Framework of Principles for Improving Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians*. Those principles are:

#### *Establishing Transparency and Accountability*

- Strengthening the accountability of governments for the effectiveness of their programs and services through regular performance review, evaluation and reporting;
- Ensuring the accountability of organisations for the government funds that they administer on behalf of Indigenous people; and
- Tasking the Productivity Commission to continue to measure the effect of the COAG commitment through the jointly-agreed set of indicators.

#### *Developing a Learning Framework*

- Sharing information and experience about what is working and what is not; and
- Striving for best practice in the delivery of services to Indigenous people, families and communities.

The key focus of this evaluation framework is to encourage continuous learning and to refine the operation of the Government's new approach to Indigenous affairs. It will

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<sup>1</sup> The evaluation plan was not developed to manage the evaluation of OIPC's specific programs, and thus does not include programs administered by the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations, and OIPC's Land Services, Reconciliation and Women's Leadership areas. The evaluation of these programs is managed separately within OIPC.

build a strong evidence base for future policy directions and service delivery arrangements.

To give effect to the evaluation framework, OIPC, in consultation with other Commonwealth agencies, has developed a three year rolling plan of evaluations. This plan therefore identifies a set of evaluation activities that span key pillars of the Government's new arrangements in Indigenous affairs – looking at the Australian Government's engagement in Indigenous affairs and considering the whole-of-government issues that cross or go beyond the organisational boundaries of OIPC and other agencies. By evaluating individual elements of the new arrangements, a picture of the Australian Government's whole-of-government performance will emerge over time.

The evaluation plan is organised under three broad, overlapping themes:

- *Policy outcomes* – whole-of-government outcomes, coordination and gaps – the way in which policies and programs at the national level join to achieve outcomes for Indigenous people;
- *Place* – local arrangements and partnerships – the way in which governments and their programs work within local communities and how they can be made more responsive to the needs of those communities; and
- *Process* – implementation of the new arrangements – continuously improving the way agencies are implementing the Government's policies and programs.

The rolling plan will be reviewed annually by OIPC in consultation with Australian Government agencies working in Indigenous affairs to ensure that planned evaluation activities are targeting the areas of most need. This annual review process will be informed by the evaluation activities in the preceding year. While the planned evaluation activities for the immediate financial year (2006-07 in this case) are confirmed, the proposed activities in the subsequent years may be changed as the plan is reviewed each year. The plan is not a constraining document, and other evaluative activities may be commissioned during 2006-07 and beyond if the need arises.

#### **4. Evaluative Activity in 2005-06**

The plan builds on the whole-of-government evaluative work over the past 12 months, including:

##### **4.1. Red Tape Evaluation**

The red tape evaluation will provide a better understanding of the nature and extent of any undue administrative burden on organisations that provide services to Indigenous communities and suggest strategies to minimise that burden while maintaining accountability and risk management objectives. The evaluation involved 22 Indigenous organisations in 16 communities across 6 states and territories. This study will inform the approaches agencies develop to reduce the undue administrative burden on funded community organisations.

#### **4.2. Formative Evaluation of the eight COAG Trial Sites**

The formative evaluation of the eight COAG Trials focused on learning lessons from the trials, and in particular how the Australian Government can improve its engagement with state and territory governments and Indigenous people and communities. The evaluation reports on each trial site cover the history of the trial, the coordination processes used in the trial, interim outcomes and options for further consideration. A 'meta evaluation' drawing together common findings from all the site evaluations will take place in the second half of 2006. More information on the evaluation of the COAG trials is provided in **Attachment A**.

#### **4.3. Review of Individual SRAs**

These reviews will commence some 12 months after SRAs are signed or at an appropriate review point. They will be conducted by a panel of 5-10 consultants over a 3 year period. It is anticipated that all but the very low cost SRAs will be reviewed. It is estimated that around 300 SRAs will be reviewed over the next four years. The first group of reviews should be completed by 30 June 2006. More information on the performance management of SRAs is provided in **Attachment B**.

## 5. OIPC Evaluation Plan for the financial years 2006-07 through to 2008-09

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
<b>Policy</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and meta-analysis of 'no school no pool' projects</li> <li>• Follow-up on the Commonwealth Grants Commission's 2001 review of Indigenous funding</li> <li>• Review of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Minerals Council of Australia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of new petrol sniffing sites and analysis of whole-of-government petrol sniffing interventions</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation review of Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs)</li> <li>• Implementation review of Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of OIPC's community engagement mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness review of SRA approach</li> </ul>
<b>Place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meta-analysis of the COAG trial evaluations</li> <li>• Reviews of individual SRAs</li> <li>• Review of a sample of Communities in Crisis projects initiated between 2003 and 2005</li> <li>• Establishment of baselines in new priority communities and a sample of petrol sniffing sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing reviews of individual SRAs</li> <li>• Continued establishment of baselines in any new priority communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing reviews of individual SRAs</li> <li>• Continued establishment of baselines in any new priority communities</li> <li>• Review of a sample of Regional Partnership Agreements</li> <li>• 2nd year follow-up review of initial priority communities</li> </ul>

## **6. Outline of Proposed Evaluations in 2006-07**

The list below briefly outlines the proposed evaluations for 2006-07. The details of proposed evaluations in later years will be determined as they are finalised.

### **6.1. Reviews of Individual SRAs**

These reviews are a continuation of the reviews described in paragraph 4.3 and **Attachment B**.

### **6.2. Implementation Review of Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs)**

The implementation review of ICCs will instigate a cycle of formative evaluation and change management, identifying where blockages may have developed in the implementation of the ICC model, devising remedial strategies and overseeing the implementation of agreed improvements.

### **6.3. Implementation Review of the SRA Approach**

The implementation review would examine the approach taken with SRAs in the first years of the new arrangements, including the use of the flexible funding pool for SRAs. It would recognise that the SRA approach has been maturing and increasingly better understood since the establishment of OIPC in July 2004. It would draw together the lessons learnt from the individual SRA reviews (see paragraph 4.3 above), and make recommendations to improve the SRA process overall.

### **6.4. Meta-analysis of the COAG Trial Evaluations**

The meta-analysis of the COAG trial evaluations will draw together common findings from all the individual site evaluations described in paragraph 4.2.

### **6.5. Review of the early Communities in Crisis Projects**

The review of communities in crisis projects will assess a sample of the projects initiated between 2003 and 2005, looking at whether they had met their objectives and other benefits that may have resulted from the projects. The review will inform the development and implementation of policy and programs and underpin the direction taken with new projects.

### **6.6. Establish a Baseline in Priority Communities and Petrol Sniffing Sites**

OIPC will also be working in partnership with state and territory governments and local communities to establish a number of quantitative and qualitative baseline data points in communities identified as priority communities in 2006 and a sample of communities to be assisted under the Petrol Sniffing 8 Point Plan. The establishment of such baseline data will provide a starting point for the subsequent monitoring and evaluation of the interventions provided to these communities. The establishment of a baseline in priority communities is one element of the Performance Management Framework for Intensive Whole-of-Government Interventions (see **Attachment C** for more information).

## **7. Contact details**

For more information about this evaluation plan, you can contact:

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## **Evaluation Approach for the Eight COAG Trial Sites**

In late 2003 the Australian and State and Territory Governments agreed on a monitoring and evaluation framework for the eight COAG Indigenous coordination trials. The eight sites are the ACT, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands (SA), Cape York (Qld), Northeast Tasmania, Shepparton (Vic), Murdi Paaki (NSW), East Kimberley (WA) and Wadeye (NT). OIPC is coordinating evaluations of the eight COAG trial sites on behalf of the Australian Government, in consultation with the relevant Commonwealth and State/Territory lead agencies in each site.

Formative evaluations of each site commenced in 2005-06. The evaluations are looking at what's working well and what can be improved. They are being undertaken by independent evaluators using a common evaluation framework. They are focusing on how governments can improve their engagement with each other and with Indigenous people and communities. The evaluation reports will cover the history of the trial, the coordination processes used in the trial, interim outcomes and options for further consideration by the trial partners. The evaluations should be largely completed by July 2006.

An overarching report (or meta-evaluation) in the second half of 2006 will draw together the common themes and lessons from the individual COAG Trial site evaluations.

The need for and nature of further evaluation of the COAG Trials will be considered after the meta-evaluation and will be flagged in future evaluation plans as appropriate.

## Performance Management Approach for Shared Responsibility Agreements

OIPC has developed a broad framework for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of SRAs. The framework consists of two elements.

The first element relates to the performance of individual SRAs.

- The performance of individual SRAs is being monitored through regular reporting against a small set of relevant quantitative performance indicators in each SRA.
- A panel of 5-10 independent consultants is being constituted to conduct a concise review of individual SRAs at their conclusion or an appropriate review point (typically 12 months after signing). These reviews are expected to commence in May 2006. The table below sets out the estimated number of SRAs to be reviewed in each year.

Year	Estimated number of SRAs to be reviewed
2005 – 2006	20
2006 – 2007	100
2007 – 2008	100
2008 – 2009	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>295</b>

The reviews are intended to be short, and impose minimal burden upon communities and other key stakeholders. The consultant will identify lessons learnt by parties to SRAs, and capture their perceptions of the SRA process, how it worked for them and how it could be improved. The consultant will also investigate the extent to which outcomes were achieved, taking into full account the circumstances in which SRAs were developed.

Indigenous signatories and other relevant partners will be provided with the reviews on an in-confidence basis as they may contain information about individual participants and affect the ongoing implementation of the SRA. Release of a summary of the overall learnings will be considered at an appropriate time.

The second element involves the systemic evaluation of the SRA approach.

- It will begin with an implementation review of SRAs in the second half of 2006. The implementation review will synthesise lessons learnt – for instance, whether commitments made were being implemented, whether the agreement-making process had enabled effective community engagement, and whether there is community ownership and a basis for further development of partnerships with the community. The implementation review would recognise that OIPC's approach to SRAs has been maturing and is increasingly better understood since July 2004, and it would cover the use of the flexible funding pool for SRAs.
- OIPC is also planning an effectiveness review of its approach to SRAs in 2008-09.

## Performance Management Framework for Intensive Whole-of-Government Interventions

OIPC is developing an approach for evaluating intensive whole-of-government initiatives in Indigenous communities and regions. This evaluation approach would be used for priority region interventions. Elements of this approach would be applied as appropriate to comprehensive SRAs, other SRAs with a substantial investment, and a sample of communities being assisted under the Petrol Sniffing 8 Point Plan.

The proposed approach would see evaluation and monitoring occurring against the following timetable:

### Year 0

- Establish a community profile to report on the current status of the community using both quantitative and qualitative measures. Intangible elements such as governance and family violence would be included through the use of qualitative data. This profile would establish the current state of play, and capture the community's view on the perceived trajectory – are things getting better or worse.
- Conduct a diagnostic assessment to identify community strengths and opportunities, determine priority areas for action and inform a community action plan.
- Negotiate a plan of action (for example, through an SRA or RPA) with the community on the basis of the profile and diagnostic assessment. This would include a small set of performance indicators relevant to the planned interventions that would be monitored on a regular basis.
- Begin implementing the agreed action plan with regular reporting against the small set of performance indicators relevant to the agreed interventions.

### Year 2-3

- Rerun the community profile to assess progress against the baseline.
- Undertake a formative evaluation to inform fine tuning of the action plan, with a focus on what's not working, what's working well and what could be improved.

### Year 6-8

- Rerun the community profile, to further build a picture of progress against the baseline.
- Undertake a summative evaluation to measure and assess the effectiveness of the strategy.

A key element of the evaluation strategy proposed is using the data to help frame and reframe the necessary interventions. As the community is consulted in the compilation of this data, they are directly involved both in agenda setting and the evaluation process. This approach also allows the interventions to evolve over time in response to community needs.

Ensuring a well designed quantitative and qualitative profile that will remain relevant over the life of the planned intervention will be essential to the success of this approach.