Hi TIS Teams!

This month's evidence update looks a little different. I wanted to share some best practice information about monitoring and evaluation. As you know, monitoring and evaluation is an important part of the TIS program and should be built into your activities from the start.

Monitoring your activities and evaluating outcomes help you keep track of progress, identify important changes, and make it easier to see what you've achieved. More importantly, it builds evidence of what works well in community and why the TIS program is not only effective, but sustainable.

The strength and sustainability of the TIS program comes from your commitment to continuous reflection and learning. That's what makes the TIS program work, and that's what keeps it going. This process of using monitoring and evaluation data to improve your activities as you go is called 'continual quality improvement' or CQI. Check out this resource for more information on CQI for TIS.

A recent review highlights best practice approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluation. While the review is not specifically about tobacco smoking or vaping, it offers valuable insights that you can use to strengthen your planning, monitoring, and evaluation of TIS activities. I've put together a short summary of the key principles highlighted by the review and a visual to help you apply these best practice principles:
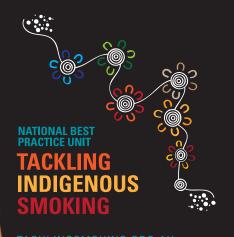
- Culturally safe, Indigenous-led evaluation isn't just good practice – it's essential. Programs are more effective, ethical and meaningful when evaluation is guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities, leadership and self-determination. It should reflect the voices, values and lived experiences of community.
- Good evaluation starts early. It should be built into the whole program cycle – from planning, to delivery, to review. Communities should help shape priorities and define what success looks like.
- Strong, respectful relationships with community are the foundation of effective evaluation. Long-term partnerships make evaluations more relevant, empowering and aligned with local values.
- Evaluation methods should reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and lived experience are valid and important sources of evidence.
- Evaluation should support growth and learning for both the program/ evaluator and communities involved.
- Communities must have ownership and control over how data is collected, stored, analysed and shared.
- Transparent communication and culturally respectful reporting are important. Evaluation findings should be shared back with community in clear, practical and culturally appropriate ways. Community reports, yarning sessions and feedback forums are useful ways to return findings and support meaningful change. Evaluation should lead to action.
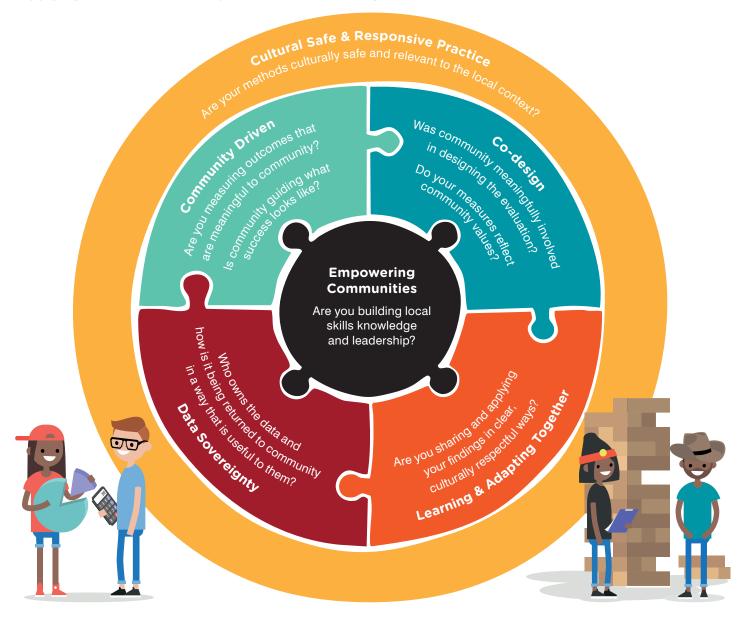
Strong, respectful relationships with community are the foundation of effective evaluation. Long-term partnerships make evaluations more relevant, empowering and aligned with local values.

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Applying Best Practice Principles to Your Monitoring and Evaluation

Adapted from: Calma, T., Agung-Igusti, R., Kiessler, T., Little, R., Reeve, R., & Derry, K. (2025). Indigenous evaluation: best practices for social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention, catalogue number IMH 32, AIHW, Australian Government. doi: 10.25816/gwf9-k613

This wheel shows six core principles for effective, culturally safe program evaluation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These principles are adapted from this paper and provide strong guidance for how to plan, monitor and evaluate your TIS activities. Each principle includes reflection questions to help guide your thinking and ensure your monitoring and evaluation approach is:

- Community-led
- Culturally responsive
- Purposeful and practical
- Useful for learning and improvement

Take home Message for TIS Teams

Evaluation works best when it's ongoing and grounded in community priorities, rather than something done only at the end of a project. Meaningful evaluation centres community voices, builds local skills, and supports self-determination. When done well, evaluation can strengthen programs, build trust, and lead to better health outcomes. Respecting data ownership and sovereignty by involving community in how data is collected, used, and shared is also important. These approaches help keep the TIS program strong, relevant, and community driven. For more information about monitoring and evaluation, check out the Monitoring and Evaluation Guidance page on the TIS website.