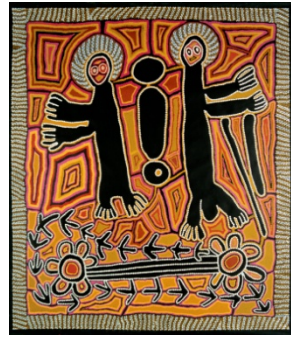




Australian Government

Department of Finance and Deregulation



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Evaluating Indigenous Programs – Creating Public Value?

Presentation to the Australasian Evaluation Society Annual
Conference, Perth, 2008

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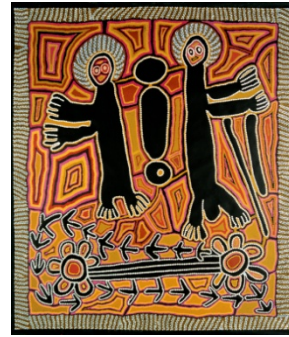
Evaluating Indigenous Programs – Creating Public Value?

- The history, role and mandate of OEA
- Challenges for OEA
- Audience
- Approach
- How OEA creates value



The history of OEA

- Originally in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)
 - Evaluations of ATSIC programs
 - internal audit and assessment role
- moved to the Department of Finance and Administration (now “...and Deregulation”) in 2004
- Established under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005*

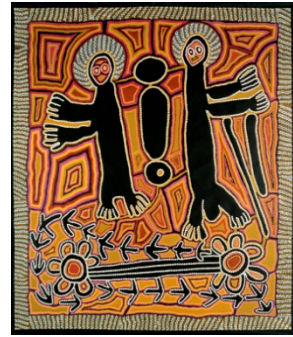


OEA mandate:

- Evaluate or audit relevant Australian Government programs
 - that is, programs that aim to further the social, economic or cultural development of Indigenous people
- Audit organisations and individuals at the request of the Minister

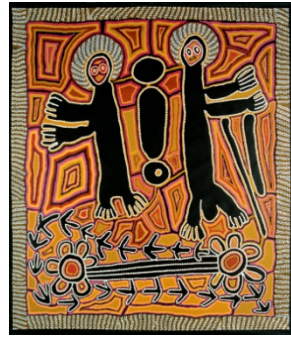
OEA goal:

- To make a meaningful contribution to the management and performance of Australian Government Indigenous programs with a modest budget and a small team



OEA's role

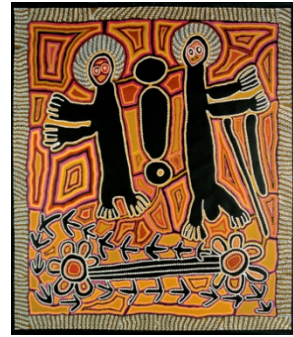
- Objective advice and recommendations about:
 - improving the management and performance of Indigenous-specific programs
 - delivering better outcomes for Indigenous people
- We report directly to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation who decides on the distribution of reports



OEA's challenge

Developing the Work Program

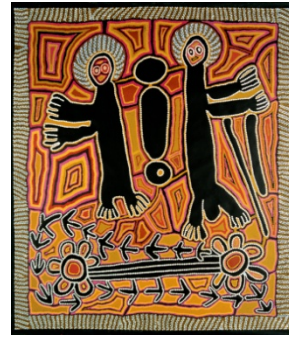
- Eight portfolios
- 170 government programs and initiatives
 - Small, medium and large programs
 - Often new initiatives
- Total annual expenditure of around \$4 billion



OEA's challenge

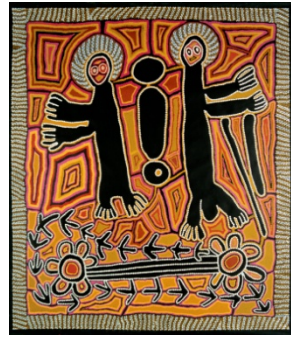
Doing the Work Program – getting quality

- All locations, including the remotest regions of Australia
- Interaction of Australian Government programs with mainstream and state/territory government programs
- Complex inter-relationship of cause and effect
- Lots of public interest



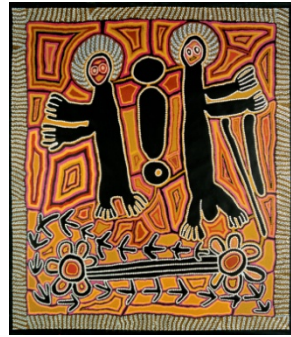
Creating value – OEA’s audience

- Legislatively, the Minister for Finance and Deregulation and, less so, the Minister with primary responsibility for Indigenous Affairs
- But, also includes:
 - Australian Government departments
 - Organisations delivering Australian Government programs
 - Indigenous people
 - the general public



Creating value – our approach

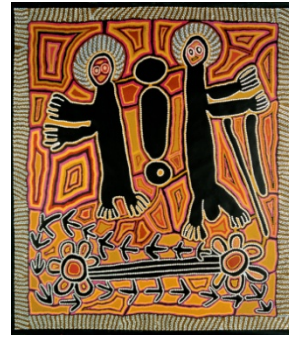
- Consulting with ministers and agencies to identify priorities
- Collaborating with departments and/or organisations
- Reporting in a timely, fair and balanced way
- Promoting better practice and lessons learnt
- Highlight matters that need attention, that will assist departments in their future management of the program



Creating value – our approach

Timeliness – a key issue

- How long should an evaluation take
- In what stage of a program's lifecycle should we be involved



11 Creating value – our approach

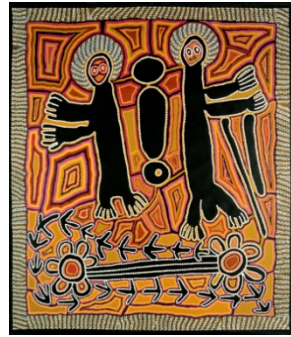
- Selecting a variety of evaluations across a range of portfolios and sectors
- Focusing on
 - program management and administration
 - systems and processes – performance frameworks, feedback loops, decision-making
 - achievement of outcomes – for the government and for the Indigenous people or communities involved
- Less focus on
 - Efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery bodies



Creating value – our approach

Recent Projects

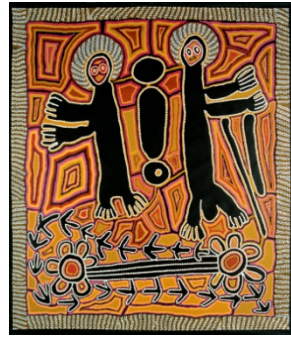
- Family Violence Programs
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Torres Strait Regional Authority
- Legal Aid and Restorative Justice programs
- Aboriginal Rental Housing Program
- Aboriginals Benefit Account
- Special Hearing program
- English as a second language program



Creating value – our approach

Present Projects

- Primary Health Care
- Service Delivery in remote communities
- CDEP
- Indigenous Community Volunteers
- Capacity Building
- Sporting Chance
- NTER projects
- Money Management



Creating value – our approach

- Evaluations or Performance audits?
- What is an auditor?
- What is an evaluator?



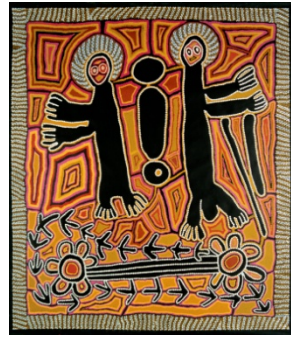
Have we created value?

- Is the Work Program relevant
- Are OEA reports
 - Of good quality
 - Objective
 - Evidence based
 - Timely
 - Can they be published?



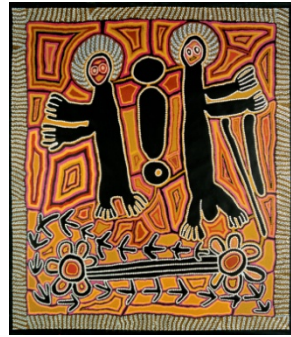
Have we created value?

- Do agencies implement our recommendations?
- Are adjustments made to programs?
 - Are programs better off for these adjustments?



Have we created value?

- Proxy measure –
 - in 2007-08, 48 of our 51 recommendations were accepted by agencies
- Started to follow-up on the implementation of recommendations
 - we write to agencies 12 months after the completion of a report, requesting an update on the implementation of recommendations
- Process of evaluation or audit does add value – it shines a light on different aspects of a program



Evaluation of the Family Violence Programs

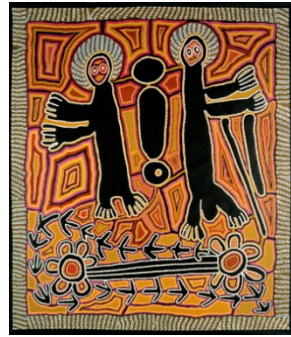
Recommendations: 4 only

- Develop methods to target and implement the two programs with other initiatives
- Improve strategic management
- Explore more appropriate funding processes
- Position the agency in more of a support and coordination role



Australian Government

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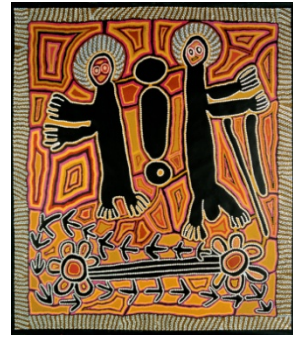


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Evaluation of the Family Violence Programs

But the Department commented in their response

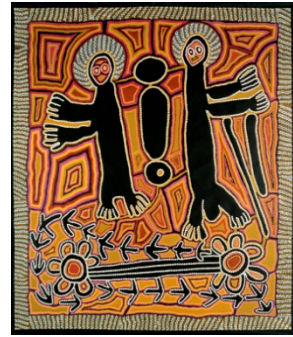
...disappointment that OEA had not acknowledged recent
program improvements



Evaluation of the Family Violence Programs

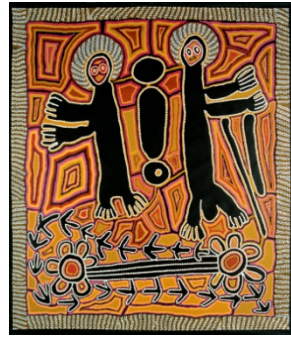
Value from:

- Focus on program which is directed towards a serious issue in Indigenous communities
- Focus on the performance framework which has provided a guide for future OEA work
- Impetus for program reform



Evaluation of the Torres Strait Regional Authority

- Findings:
 - TSRA is a small organisation with limited capacity to implement policy and program reform
 - TSRA is required to perform an increasing number of coordination activities on behalf of other government agencies
- Value from:
 - identifying TSRA as needing more assistance from government
 - providing independent support for a TSRA case to government about assistance



Evaluation of Indigenous Business Australia

- Findings regarding *IBA Homes*:
 - successful program
 - near capital constraint and has a long waiting list
- Value from:
 - identifying *IBA Homes* as good practice
 - considering IBA for additional resources when the government is assessing funding priorities



Evaluation of the Legal Aid Program

- Its not yet public but...
the department advised that OEA's
recommendations provided a basis for it to review its
reform directions and likely future management
arrangements.



Conclusion

- Independence-advantages and disadvantages
- OEA is fortunate to be in a central Australian Government agency reporting to a senior Minister
- Value is a many edged sword: to Government, Departments, and to the public including Indigenous people
- But without quality, timely reports within a relevant Work program there can be no Value