

1

Evaluating Indigenous Programs – Creating Public Value?

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

Colin Plowman
Director of Evaluation and Audit
Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs)
Department of Finance and Deregulation



2

Evaluating Indigenous Programs – Creating Public Value?

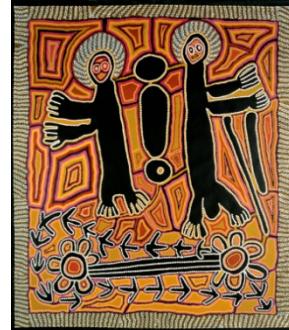
- The history, role and mandate of OEA
- Challenges for OEA
- Audience
- Approach
- How OEA creates value



3

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*



4

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:

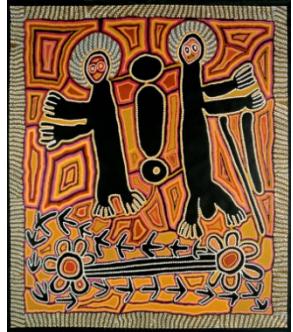
- To make a meaningful contribution to the management and performance of Australian Government Indigenous programs with a modest budget and a small team



5

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



7

OEA's challenge

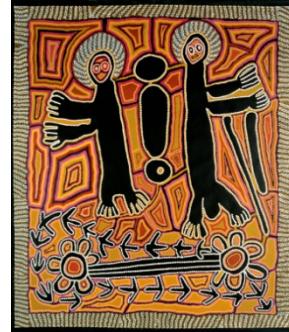
Doing the Work Program – getting quality

- 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



9

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



10

Creating value – our approach

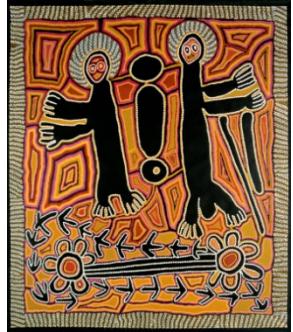
Timeliness – a key issue

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



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



12

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



13

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



14

Creating value – our approach

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



15

Have we created value?

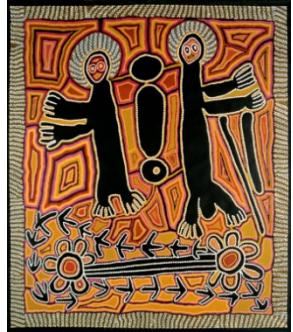
- Is the Work Program relevant
- Are OEA reports
 - Of good quality
 - Objective
 - Evidence based
 - Timely
 - Can they be published?



16

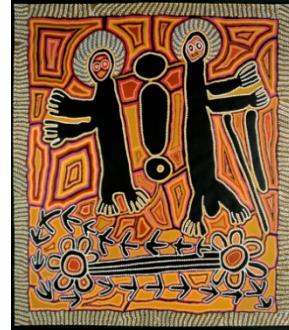
Have we created value?

- 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



19

Evaluation of the Family Violence Programs

But the Department commented in their response

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



20

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



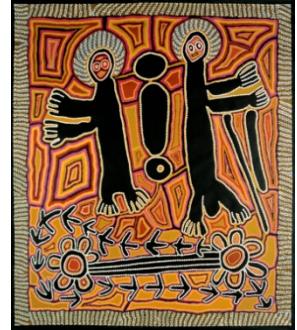
Evaluation of the Torres Strait Regional Authority

- 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

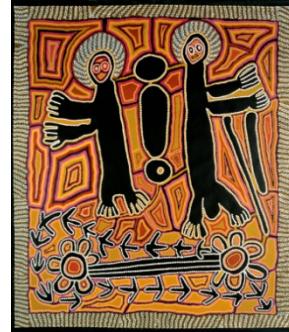
- Findings regarding *IBA Homes*:
 - successful program
 - near capital constraint and has a long waiting list
- Value from:
 - identifying *IBA Homes* as good practice
 - considering IBA for additional resources when the government is assessing funding priorities



23

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