

Old Knowledge, New Tools: Applying an Indigenous Approach to Social Network Analysis

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Abstract: Program work with American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities necessitates Indigenous approaches and methods for evaluation. AI/AN researchers are working to reclaim evaluation as a traditional value and identify methods that fit into existing Indigenous evaluation frameworks. However, an increased understanding of how to utilize data collection tools appropriately and how they fit within these Indigenous frameworks is still needed. In this article, the author describes the process, rationale, and reflections on using a social network analysis tool while grounded in Indigenous evaluation principles. We discuss how displaying the results using a GIS story map can tell the story of a community of practice of Indigenous plants and foods educators. This article addresses the Southern Door—Be of Good Mind—as it describes a method that centres on community, honors relationships, and focuses on resiliency. By presenting the results through a GIS story map, the data can be gifted back to the communities and connect the relationships on a spatial scale to honour the inseparable connections between Indigenous plants and foods work and the land on which it takes place.

Keywords: Indigenous evaluation, Indigenous methods, methods, social network analysis, story maps, strength-based evaluation

Résumé : Pour évaluer des programmes s'adressant aux communautés autochtones des États-Unis et de l'Alaska, il faut utiliser des approches et des méthodes autochtones. Les personnes qui travaillent en recherche dans le domaine des communautés autochtones des États-Unis et de l'Alaska cherchent à se réapproprier l'évaluation comme valeur traditionnelle et à déterminer les méthodes qui correspondent aux cadres d'évaluation autochtone actuels. Cependant, une compréhension approfondie de la façon dont on peut utiliser les outils de collecte de données de façon appropriée et de la place de ces derniers dans ces cadres autochtones reste toujours à venir. Dans le présent article, l'auteure décrit le processus et les raisons d'utiliser un outil d'analyse des réseaux sociaux (et fait part de ses réflexions sur cette utilisation), dans un contexte de principes d'évaluation autochtone. Il est question de la façon dont la présentation de résultats à l'aide d'une cartographie d'histoire par SIG peut raconter l'histoire d'une communauté de pratique

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d'éducateurs/éducatrices autochtones de flore et d'alimentation. L'article fait référence à la porte du Sud — bon esprit — lorsqu'il décrit une méthode axée sur la communauté, qui rend hommage aux relations et met l'accent sur la résilience. En présentant les résultats par l'intermédiaire d'une cartographie d'histoire par SIG, les données peuvent être redonnées aux communautés et lier les relations dans le temps pour honorer les connexions inséparables entre le travail autochtone en matière de flore et d'alimentation et les terres sur lesquelles ce travail a lieu.

Mots clés : *analyse des réseaux sociaux, cartographie d'histoire, évaluation autochtone, évaluation fondée sur les points forts, méthodes, méthodes autochtones*

We need more Indigenous evaluation tools to better serve Indigenous peoples.¹ Since the colonization of the Americas, current social and political systems have purposefully oppressed American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples. Colonization decimated our population through genocide and foreign disease and as a result, we lost much of the traditional knowledge that kept our communities healthy and abundant for generations (Greenwood & Lindsay, 2019). This resulted in the glaring health and socioeconomic disparities we witness in too many Native communities today. Western systems have long attempted to deliver social services to AI/AN communities or use Western ideas of health improvement to prevent disease. However, it has become increasingly clear that many traditional Western approaches have failed to address the disparities that persist across Indian country. To make effective changes in the conditions of AI/AN communities, service providers need new approaches and new tools to evaluate programs driven by Indigenous values and voices.

INDIGENOUS EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

AI/AN researchers have worked for many years to reclaim evaluation as an Indigenous value and develop frameworks and methodologies built on a foundation of those values. LaFrance and Nichols (2008) published their Indigenous evaluation framework after extensive consultation with the American Indian Education Consortium. In it they identified a set of common values that served as a foundation for their framework outlining a tribal approach to evaluation. Throughout, they centred the values Indigenous knowledge on four primary tenets: people of a place, recognizing our gifts, the centrality of community and family, and sovereignty. As explained by LaFrance and Nichols, people of a place honours the fact that the land and environment are a living presence for Indigenous people. There is an inseparable and reciprocal relationship between the land and the original people of that place and Indigenous evaluation should honour the place-based nature of many of our programs. The tenant of recognizing our gifts guides evaluation to take a more strength-based approach. In Indigenous knowledge systems, we recognize that each person and being is making a meaningful contribution to the world through their unique gifts and Indigenous

evaluation should reflect that viewpoint. The centrality of community and family recognizes the more collectivist culture that Indigenous communities practice. Within a traditional worldview, Native people see themselves in relation to others in their community, so Indigenous evaluation needs to be situated in that community context as well. The final tenant, sovereignty, is an expression and practice of our ongoing nationhood as Indigenous people. It speaks to the fact that Indigenous evaluation has a responsibility to support nation building.

Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) built on previous work to develop a framework that is more inclusive of the urban Indian experience. This Indigenous evaluation framework includes the following four principles: community is created wherever native people are, resilience and strength-based evaluation, decolonizing data, and community-centred (Locklear et al., 2023). We recognize that Indigenous evaluation starts in the creation of Native communities regardless of whether they are on federally recognized reservations or in urban centres. AI/AN people remain tribal people with sovereign rights even when they are not located on their traditional lands. Indigenous evaluation needs to use the tools of evaluation to identify solutions and strengths by and for the community. Historically, evaluation has taken a deficit-based approach toward Indigenous people for far too long and, as a result, has missed opportunities to identify and learn from strengths. Rigorous data must be collected and used with the intent of benefitting the community. All data need to serve a purpose when collected within UIHI's Indigenous evaluation framework, and that purpose is to improve the well-being of AI/AN peoples. Decolonizing data also means that we recognize data exist and are shared in many forms, including stories, art, conversation, and the relationships we have with each other and the land. The data should be collaboratively created and then shared back with those it was collected with community members in an accessible manner. Throughout this article, I use the term *data* to encompass knowledge from both Western and Indigenous epistemologies. Finally, community involvement in evaluation is crucial to the process of reclaiming data, understanding how the work is valuable, and ensuring community perspectives are driving decision-making.

Building our toolbox

With the emergence of these Indigenous frameworks for conducting both evaluation and research, there is a need to identify more methodological tools that fit within these Indigenous frameworks. Nêhiyaw (Cree) researcher Margaret Kovach (2009), in conversation with Māori researcher Graham Hingangaroa Smith, states that the evaluation and research questions we prioritize as Indigenous communities are often not adequately answered by using existing theoretical tools and knowledge. One example of this can be seen in the relational worldview of health framework as first described by Terry Cross (Cross et al. 2011) and adapted by the Native American Youth and Family Center in Portland, Oregon, to apply to its youth programming. The framework contains certain themes that are not commonly encountered in various frameworks about healthy youth

but are critical to the well-being of Native youth, such as cultural knowledge, connection to Native ancestry, and skills in traditional cultural practices. The authors describe how an Elder shared the example of how a Native youth who succeeds in getting a high math score in school could be seen as a success by mainstream indicators. But if that youth does not know appropriate cultural protocols (e.g., properly greeting an Elder) of the Native community, then they are not successful according to the indicators valued by their community. These findings are just one example demonstrating the importance of having culturally grounded indicators to assess well-being and the right tools to measure them.

Kovach and Hingangaroa Smith call for Indigenous researchers to “add more tools to the toolbox” to support Indigenous methods (Kovach, 2009). We understand this call to action means not only bringing in “old” knowledge tools to collect data, such as talking circles, art, and conversational methods, but also adopting and adapting “new” tools to our Indigenous frameworks. Indigenous peoples have a long history of adapting new tools and technology to serve the interests of their communities. We sought to apply this ancestral practice of adapting tools to benefit our peoples for an evaluation of a community of practice of Indigenous plants and foods educators. A community of practice is a formal or informal group of individuals or organizations that share a common passion and regularly meet with each other to engage in learning and improve their knowledge and practice. We used a social network analysis tool within UIHI’s Indigenous evaluation framework to collect and share this story of Indigenous plants and foods educators. To share this social network data back with the community, we built a story map using ArcGIS to both show the relationships between tribes and organizations and share stories of impact from Indigenous plants and foods educators within the community of practice. These methods highlighted relationships and place, both of which are core components of Indigenous community well-being. By using social network analysis within an Indigenous evaluation approach, we can examine relationships and elevate their status as a critical component of overall community well-being.

SELF-LOCATION

Protocol in Indigenous communities includes locating ourselves in relation to relatives and the environment. Locating oneself is not only essential to providing the audience with an understanding of the experiences that shape viewpoints and approaches to research and evaluation, but it is also a critical part of building relationships, trust, and the validity of the evaluation or research work (Kovach, 2009; Wehipeihana, 2019).

As a program evaluator of Indigenous and European descent, I bring with me specific viewpoints, experiences, and privileges to this work. My ancestors are Plains Cree and Kahnawake Mohawk; my relations are the Michel First Nation of Treaty 6 territory in Canada; and my settler ancestors are from Lancashire, England. Although I am not Indigenous to any tribe in the Pacific Northwest, I grew

up on the traditional lands of the Semiahmoo and Lummi Nations. I am trained in Western research methods but have been fortunate to engage in evaluation work under the guidance of Indigenous mentors and with multiple organizations that strive to decolonize data to better serve Indigenous peoples. This project was reviewed and approved by the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Health, Education and Social Service Senate Committee and the Northwest Indian College Institutional Review Board. I did my best to approach this work in a good way with humility and an eagerness to learn while also sharing the gifts I can bring. It is my hope that this work will serve to celebrate the strength, knowledge, and relationships present in Native communities throughout the Pacific Northwest and support the continuation of first foods and medicines work in tribal communities. Kinanâskomitin (I thank you all).

PURPOSE

This evaluation is a part of a 5-year National Science Foundation grant for a project called “Transforming AI/AN Community Environmental Health by Building Communities of Practice Using Indigenous Knowledge in Informal Education Project 1812543.” The project is a joint effort between the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Feed 7 Generations, Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB), Oregon State University, and UIHI. The goal of the grant is to expand the use of an environmental sustainability curriculum based on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in Northwest Native communities. Multiple organizations, both tribally affiliated and non-tribal, have already done Indigenous plants and foods work based on TEK for many years, including the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, GRuB, and Feed 7 Generations. We faced a need to document the current community of practice using an approach that fits within Indigenous evaluation frameworks. We decided to implement a method called social network analysis (SNA), which asks participants to list who they partner with on a specific type of work to capture the current extent and impact of the community of practice. This method was intentionally chosen because we believed this tool could help us better align our evaluation instruments with the values outlined across multiple Indigenous evaluation frameworks.

EVALUATION APPROACH

One goal of this evaluation was to conduct an SNA to further understand its use as a methodological tool to evaluate this effort in a culturally grounded way. Conducting an evaluation within an Indigenous framework is not limited to a singular set of tools or methods. Instead, it is focused on the process and ways in which the evaluation is conducted.

In Indigenous evaluation, the way in which tools are used matters more than the specific types of tools chosen. Some methods may more naturally fit within

an Indigenous framework, such as the conversational method, but that does not exclude other “Western” tools, like surveys and interviews, from working in an Indigenous framework (Kovach, 2020). As previously mentioned, Indigenous peoples have always adopted and adapted new technology for the purpose of serving our communities and we continue this practice into the present day.

The process of conducting Indigenous evaluation is inherently relational. Wehipeihana et al. (2016) describe relationships in evaluation work as not something the evaluator simply pays attention to but rather something that is inextricably linked to engaging with Indigenous peoples and therefore Indigenous evaluation. While specific tribal cultures differ, they all share a relational worldview. This truth is reflected in the focus on community and recognizing that those kinships transcend tribal boundaries within Indigenous evaluations. Relationships naturally include responsibility and accountability and similarly; the emphasis on relational approaches in Indigenous evaluation embodies that accountability. Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson (2001) shares that “as a researcher, you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research” (p. 177). As Indigenous peoples, we know these connections extend beyond humans to include our relationship with the plants and animals in our surrounding environment. This aligns with the call for Indigenous evaluators to move toward a more holistic view during evaluation and consider the interaction between humans and natural systems (Bremner, 2019). Therefore, it was critical that relationships were at the centre of all aspects of our evaluation. Examining the connections that comprise the community of Indigenous plants and foods educators via an SNA seemed like a natural fit given the inherent focus on relationships within the methods themselves.

As Bowman (2005) states in her research,

an Indigenous self-determination evaluation model respects, recognizes, and values the inherent worth of Indian culture; is responsive to the communities’ needs as voiced by all members of the tribal community; builds evaluation designs and processes around Indian assets and resources; and literally and figuratively employs Indians in every part of the process (program, policy, implementation, evaluation) to heal, strengthen, and preserve indigenous societies for the next 7 generations.

(p. 8)

Therefore, if the tools used are to achieve the values laid out by an Indigenous evaluation framework, then they can be useful within the context of Indigenous evaluation.

Our hope in using Indigenous evaluation methods is to decolonize data and ensure the processes and results of the SNA will not be re-traumatizing but rather conducive to the strengthening of AI/AN culture, work, and sovereignty. Part of decolonizing data is shifting the focus to resiliency factors in Indigenous communities rather than deficits (Secaira, 2019). Additionally, decolonizing data means ensuring that the data are accessible to the community that it came from and that they have the final say in how those data are used. This helps

ensure that the community is in control of their own stories. This is an important part of data sovereignty and is evaluated by a tribal institutional review board—a critical step in conducting research or evaluation with AI/AN communities (Harding et al., 2012). We decolonize data to enhance programming and research to better serve AI/AN communities.

METHODS

SNA is a method used to document and quantify a distinctive social network. In this evaluation, we used an SNA to measure the extent of the community of practice involving Indigenous plants and foods work in Northwest Native communities. We collected SNA data through a survey that asked participants who they partner with on Indigenous plants and foods work and the characteristics of their relationship. See Table 1 for a full list of questions included in the survey.

The initial distribution collected baseline data for Year 1 of the Transforming AI/AN community environmental health project. It will be repeated near the completion of the 5-year grant to document changes to the community of practice. Conducting an SNA involves a distinctive set of methods that allow evaluators to map, measure, and analyze the social relationships between people, groups, and organizations (Carrington & Scott, 2011).

SNAs are commonly displayed through visualizations called sociograms as shown in Figure 1 (Blanchet & James, 2012). These sociograms illustrate an actor (e.g., a single individual or organization) through a dot called a node, and the connections between these actors are shown through the lines that connect the nodes to each other, also called ties or edges (Forsé & Degenne, 1999). Ties represent many types of relationships including acquaintances, friends, or colleagues. Sociograms are useful for investigating kinship patterns, community structure, intersecting partnerships, and questions about similar relational networks (Carrington & Scott, 2011). Researchers can utilize open-source software, such as Gephi, to analyze social network data and visualize sociograms. Researchers have previously used SNAs to analyze relationships between individuals as well as organizations.

The SNA can inform us about the existence of these relationships, but they do not tell us about their quality or impact. This knowledge can only come from asking those individuals or organizations who are part of the community of practice. So, in addition to the SNA, we conducted interviews with organizations about how Indigenous plants and foods education and partnerships have impacted their communities. We developed a semi-structured interview guide asking participants to describe their Indigenous plants and foods programs and share who they partner with for this work and why. We also asked participants to reflect and share a story of how they have seen the Indigenous plants and foods work they have done impact their community.

Our primary deliverable for this evaluation was an interactive story map that was shared with the community and the broader public. A story map is a

Table 1. Questions Included in Social Network Survey

Please include the following information for you and your program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name• Job title• Tribe/Organization• Department/Program• Location
How many years (total) have you (or the organization) worked with education around indigenous plants and foods in N.W. Coastal Native Communities throughout your career	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less than 1 year• 1–4 years• 5–9 years• 10 years or more
Please select the option (Yes/No) that best reflects your experience during your work with Indigenous plants and foods education in N.W. Coastal Native Communities.	
This work has helped me gain knowledge of N.W. indigenous foods, medicines, resources, and the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• No
This work has helped me gain awareness of resources to use and adapt for N.W. indigenous plants and foods education programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• No
This work has provided me with additional skills in planning and teaching N.W. indigenous plants and foods educational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• No
This work has helped me build relationships with other educators, organizations & tribes doing N.W. indigenous plants and foods education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• No
List the current and past partnerships you have cultivated while working on indigenous plants and foods education in N.W. Coastal Native Communities.	
How often do you work together and for what type of work?	
Please list the following information for each partner listed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name of partner• Average frequency of work• Type of work• Current or past?

digital storytelling tool developed by Esri that can incorporate maps, photos, text, videos, and other media into a platform to tell an interactive story. Esri describes a story map as

a web map that has been thoughtfully created, given context, and provided with supporting information so it becomes a stand-alone resource. . . . It is a fully functioning information product. While map stories are linear in nature, their contents can also be perused in a nonlinear fashion by interacting with the map.

(Esri Story Map Apps, para. 2)

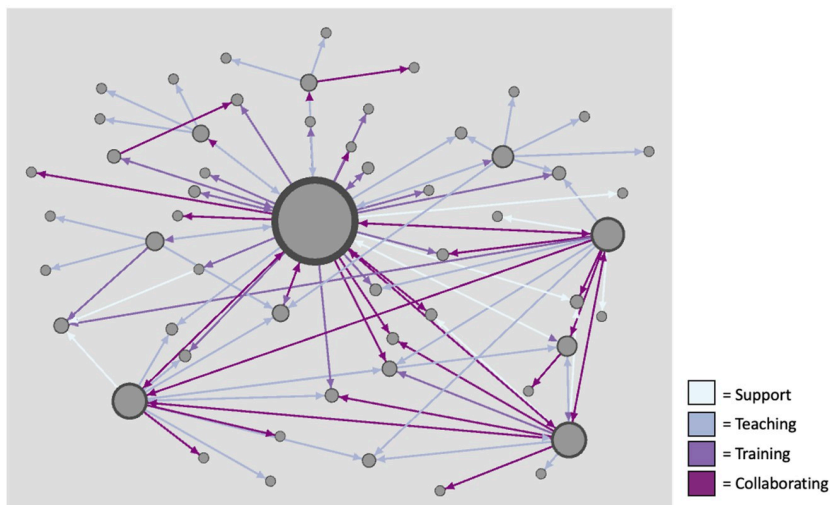


Figure 1. Sociogram of Indigenous plants and foods educator network. The size of the nodes corresponds to the number of connections to that organization or individual. The color of the lines connecting the nodes indicates the nature of the work categorized in the data analysis stage based on the description of the work the respondent provided via the survey.

Source: Blanchet and James (2012).

Although the linearity of story maps can limit the interaction with more complex and non-linear data, they still offer an engaging way to present information in a place-based manner. The story map is accessible to all who participated via a website for them to use and share as they wish. In this way, we aim to gift the data provided to us back to the communities to use.

LOCATING SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS IN INDIGENOUS EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

Our SNA and methods center on the relationships between tribes and organizations, which is a current and historic strength of many AI/AN communities including the community of practice this evaluation documents. Beyond the broad appeal of using a tool that is explicitly focused on relationships in our evaluation, there are additional characteristics of SNA as a tool that align with an Indigenous evaluation approach. To explore this, we discuss how the SNA and story map are positioned within multiple Indigenous evaluation frameworks.

Strength-based

The SNA is a type of process evaluation that documents strengths by capturing the relationships, which are a current and historic strength of our Indigenous

communities, rather than focusing on deficits. It offers an example of how evaluators can use their tools to identify solutions that build on the existing strengths or gifts in the community, which is a core principle of both the UIHI Indigenous evaluation framework and LaFrance and Nichols framework (LaFrance & Nichols, 2008; Locklear et al., 2023). The call for strength-based evaluation is also echoed across other Indigenous evaluation frameworks including the model developed by Bowman-Farrell. In their model, the Eastern Door represents building relations and sharing strengths with others (Waapalaneexweew [Nicole R. Bowman-Farrell, Mohican/Lunaape], 2018). By avoiding a deficit-focused approach to evaluation, the process can both recognize the strengths that individuals and communities have built around this work while also identifying areas where there is room for expansion or growth of these gifts.

Centring the community

The UIHI Indigenous evaluation framework recognizes the importance of centring the community in evaluation. Likewise, LaFrance also identified a common thread of communalist values across Indigenous cultures that runs contrary to the individualistic set of values that often underpin the moral values of Western societies. She characterized this principle as the centrality of community and family. It is focused on the inter and intra-connectivity of tribal communities, both to kinship ties and relations within a single tribal nation, but also the shared experience of colonialism throughout AI/AN communities (LaFrance, 2004; LaFrance et al., 2012; LaFrance & Nichols, 2008). The SNA is a tool that focuses on measuring and documenting a specific community. In our SNA, the community is the focus for each documented connection as represented by each node and the connections they share with others as previously shown in Figure 1. The fact that the SNA focuses on the individuals and connections that create community naturally aligns with the principle of centring the community. The SNA is also action-oriented as it provides information that can be acted on to strengthen the community of practice, making it an apt tool to preserve and support the community in their Indigenous plants and foods work. We decided that a story map would be an appropriate way to share the relationships and stories of collaboration and impact in the community of practice. The ability to embed various types of media into a story map offered each organization the flexibility to share its story in its own way.

Supporting sovereignty and decolonizing data

Historically, data and evaluation have been used to support colonization and other damaging practices in Indigenous communities. Therefore, a core principle of Indigenous evaluation frameworks is reclaiming data as an Indigenous value and supporting sovereignty. We can do this by collecting rigorous data and using it with the intent to benefit Native communities (Locklear et al., 2023). The reason why the primary deliverable from this SNA was a story map (see Figure 2) and not an academic paper was because we wanted to prioritize

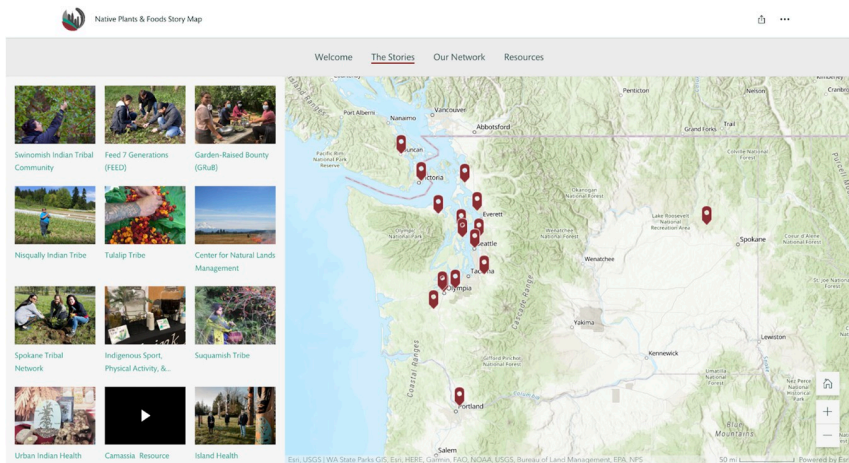


Figure 2. A screenshot of the Native Plants & Foods Story Map. The interactive StoryMap can be accessed via this link: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6aae22b2a7bf4e2b876adfee6565f3e2>.

Source: Urban Indian Health Institute, 2022.

giving the data back to the community. As [Waaupalaneexkwee \(2018\)](#) describes, reporting findings only in formats like academic journals that are only accessible to evaluators, academics, or study funders is an example of how colonialist practices continue to be present in modern-day evaluation. Academic publishing is not a community-centric or accessible way to place potentially helpful information back into the hands of the community, so we prioritized formatting the data collected in a way that was accessible to those it will benefit. Our hope is that this information can be used by organizations when applying for grants to support their Indigenous plants and foods work or to connect with other organizations to build mutually beneficial partnerships. We recognize data as sacred, and as Indigenous evaluators, we collect data to benefit the community. We collected this social network data to benefit the community with the understanding that each community will know how to best use these data in a way that benefits their people. The practice of decolonizing data calls for us to practice reciprocity and gift the data back to the community in a way that will be useful to further improve the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional health of our people.

Kinship to people and place

[Webipeihana et al. \(2016\)](#) describe relationships in evaluation work as not something the evaluator simply pays attention to but rather something that is inextricably linked to engaging with Indigenous peoples and therefore Indigenous evaluation. While specific tribal cultures differ, they all share a relational worldview. This truth is reflected in the focus on community and recognizing that those kinships transcend tribal boundaries within Indigenous evaluations.

Relationships naturally include responsibility and accountability and similarly; the emphasis on relational approaches in Indigenous evaluation embodies that accountability. When Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson (2001) stated that as researchers, we answer to all our relations when doing research, as Indigenous peoples, we know these connections extend beyond humans to include our relationship with the plants and animals in our surrounding environment. This practice informed our final deliverable visualizing the social network—an interactive map that included the organizations as nodes and the connections between them. This was an intentional choice to honour the fact that Indigenous people and this plants and foods work is inherently place-based. Although the StoryMap software did have limitations on how the data could be represented spatially in an accurate manner. The decision to present the data on a map also aligns with the call for Indigenous evaluators to move toward a more holistic view during evaluation and consider the interaction between humans and natural systems. By displaying the results on the map, we can honour the fact that Northwest Native communities consist of people who are of a place and have a responsibility to and a reciprocal relationship with the land (LaFrance & Nichols, 2008). It also adds an essential dimension to the social network by literally grounding each organization in the place where the work happens. This intentional choice to display the network on a geographical scale allows us to recognize that communities are created wherever Native people are as well as answer Bremner's (2019) call to consider the relationships between human and natural systems in evaluation.

REFLECTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Another important process within Indigenous evaluation is engaging in a reflection loop to learn from and adjust programming and evaluation. In this spirit, we reflect on some of the lessons learned through applying the SNA within Indigenous evaluation frameworks.

The survey itself was a large burden for some participants. Some respondents have been working on teaching and spreading Indigenous plants and foods knowledge for many years and have a long list of organizations they partner with for this work. Given the time it takes to list out many individual organizations, some respondents responded with broad terms such as “tribes” or “local schools” that we could not include in the social network analysis. One way to partially alleviate this burden could be to work with select respondents to develop a checklist of likely partners to include in the final version of the survey in addition to the option to include additional partners. However, this might skew responses to be over-representative of those included in the predetermined list.

We also ran into some challenges in our effort to locate each respondent in a specific geographical location on a map. Some respondents and partners did not have a singular location, but instead, their work was spread across a region. This geographical spread of a single organization or tribal program could not be

captured with the single-point approach that we took for determining location. Although we were able to conduct interviews with a select number of respondents to better understand the impact of Indigenous plants and foods programs on their communities, we could not interview all tribes and organizations listed as partners. We know that these data and the story map will represent only a small snapshot of the true impact of this community of practice of Indigenous plants and foods educators. To address this limitation, we linked to existing media that organizations had publicly available that demonstrated the impact of Indigenous plants and foods work in their communities. In future efforts, one could combine the SNA with other methods that take a more dynamic approach like Most Significant Change or Photovoice to better capture impact across time and space as defined by community members (Davies & Dart, 2005; Wang & Burris, 1997).

IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATION PRACTICE

We need to implement culturally rigorous evaluation of programs if we want to be effective in assisting AI/AN communities to achieve meaningful and sustainable improvement in overall well-being. In our experience examining interventions for Native communities, we observed that typical Western frameworks are not considerate of cultural and spiritual aspects of programs, and as a result, they fail to provide meaningful results in Native communities. Culturally grounded programs for historically oppressed communities have lacked the resources to conduct research in a way that fits neatly into the academic literature and results in a dearth of “evidence” for important interventions (Huang et al., 2003). As a result, these programs are not being accurately evaluated and therefore lose the chance to be included in the current “evidence base.”

Through this project, we discovered that SNAs are a tool that can be successfully deployed within an Indigenous evaluation framework and align with Indigenous evaluation principles. The current lack of methodological choice within Indigenous evaluation and research is due to the colonialist systems that still dominate program evaluation and research—a harmful practice that will continue to reproduce itself if left unchallenged (Kovach, 2009). The process of developing, testing, and sharing new or “Indigenized” versions of methodological tools is a critical part of decolonizing evaluation and research and reclaiming them as Indigenous values. Indigenous researchers and evaluators need to continue to adapt and develop evaluation tools that fit with the core values of Indigenous evaluation frameworks—being strength-based, centring the community, honouring place, supporting sovereignty, and decolonizing data. By developing tools aligned with these values, we can measure and document programs in a meaningful way to promote the health of AI/AN communities. The benefit of identifying additional tools that fit soundly within Indigenous evaluation frameworks extends to funders as well. They are able to identify more tools that can be deployed in a culturally grounded way to capture data and better represent

Indigenous priorities. Knowledge is a powerful tool, and choosing a methodology for research or evaluation is a political act, especially when working with Indigenous communities (Boyd, 2005). As evaluators and researchers, we must know what knowledge we are building and for what purpose this data will be used and return knowledge and power back to the hands of AI/AN communities. As Indigenous evaluators and researchers, it is our responsibility to use our position to further decolonize knowledge and data at every step in the evaluation process. We call on all evaluators working with Indigenous communities to engage in the political act of choosing methods that build collective power and sovereignty for Indigenous communities.

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NOTE

- 1 Regarding terminology, the terms *Native*, *Indian*, and *American Indian and Alaska Native* are used interchangeably throughout this article. When possible and appropriate, I used specific tribal affiliations.

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