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Australian Human Rights Commission:
Wiyi Yani U Thangani

Framework For Action And First Nations Gender Justice Institute
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Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the NFAW Board

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Framework For Action And First Nations Gender Justice Institute

This submission is being made by the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW).

NFAW is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres, and ensuring that the aims and ideals of the women's movement and its collective wisdom are handed on to new generations of women. NFAW is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations.

We respect the right of first nations women and girls to set the priorities for their future, grounded in first nation ways of working and understand of your own needs, as set out in the implementation statement.

The work that the National Foundation for Australian Women does is grounded in the principles of gender lensing, applying a gender lens across all dimensions of policy and legislation. We acknowledge the intersectional challenge of gender lensing, whereby women who are in minority groups experience multiple disadvantages as their needs lie outside mainstream experience. In particular, indigenous women, girls and communities need specific programs that acknowledge the multiple levels of disadvantage and are not constrained by western ways of thinking.

The themes and priorities set out in the original *Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report* (2020) set challenges to government, highlighting the areas where governments need to do better, while the *Implementation Framework* (2021) focuses developing ways of working that should be incorporated in the programs that are developed. Our experience in gender lensing may offer some insights that can be adapted to assist the Wiyi Yani U Thangani ways of working and principles.

The three themes for this consultation are:

- Measuring change outcomes
- Ensuring a strong accountability and evaluation approach
- Protecting and strengthening data sovereignty and governance

Measuring Change Outcomes

The first challenge, as identified in your first theme, is to identify what changes matter, and identify the appropriate set of metrics. Budgets place a financial or economic metric on the challenge, but culture and wellbeing cannot always be measured in dollars. To this extent, the principles of a Wellbeing Budget may assist in establishing an appropriate set of metrics.

The OECD has developed a [Framework for Wellbeing](#) built around three components: current well-being, inequalities in well-being outcomes, and resources for future well-being.

The *Implementation Framework* has already identified what First Nations women and girls see as important to wellbeing: the challenge is to develop the pathway to achieve those goals. The metrics used to measure outcomes should be anchored in the wellbeing outcomes, with economic benefits a secondary metric that flows when the needs of indigenous women, girls and communities are met.

Ultimately programs should become self-sustaining as cultural and economic outcomes meet the needs of indigenous communities.

Accountability and Evaluation

Accountability will flow from the co-design of programs, consistent with indigenous ways of working. By involving the community in design, and ensuring that leaders and government understand the goals of the program, resources can be allocated in the way that is most likely to achieve the desired outcomes. Community leaders are well placed to identify vulnerabilities in accountability mechanisms, including risks of exclusionary practices and succession planning. Departmental officers involved in the delivery of the program should be effectively embedded within the community to ensure that communication pathways remain clear, and non-indigenous administrators should undertake cultural acclimatisation programs to minimise risks that may arise from a lack of awareness of indigenous ways of working.

One of the fundamental challenges is that governments assess programs in budgetary or election cycles. This pattern is not consistent with indigenous ways of working, and is rarely effective in breaking down long-standing patterns of disadvantage.

To this extent, we would recommend that programs are embedded over a longer cycle than the usual electoral or budgetary cycle. This needs assurance from government that priorities established in accordance with wellbeing targets will not be arbitrarily adjusted without ongoing consultation with community. It also requires indigenous program leaders to be competent in understanding public finance, particularly in respect of the allocation and accounting of funds against budget priorities to ensure that the programs are adequately funded and the funds are being allocated in accordance with the priorities established through the co-design process.

Protecting and strengthening data sovereignty and governance

The suggestions outlined above require an understanding of the data that is needed to identify and evaluate the programs that are co-designed by governments working as a team with indigenous communities to ensure that programs are achieving their aims and objectives.

In our experience of assessing programs through a gender lens, it is not always easy to obtain access to the data that is needed to assess the effectiveness of a program. Data collected by governments to measure success may be limited, and will focus on certain aspects, limiting the usefulness of the data to explore alternatives. For this reason, it would be appropriate for the relevant metrics to be determined, as discussed above, during the co-design process.

Evaluation and data collection must be transparent, with program leaders from the community able to participate in the evaluation process, including access to the data used in the evaluation. Indigenous program leaders should be involved in the design of the evaluation including the data extracted from various sources; the form of consultation; the topics canvassed in consultation; ensuring that cultural ways of working are respected and applied as necessary; and that appropriate weighting is given to the different types of data collected as part of the evaluation.

Concluding Comments and Invitation

We think that this is an important project to ensure that indigenous women, girls and communities have a voice in the design and rollout of programs to address the entrenched disadvantage experienced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia.

We acknowledge the role of women as leaders, and girls as future leaders, in strengthening community and developing programs that are consistent with indigenous ways of working.

However we do note that the government will embed the funding for those programs in the existing systems of public finance. We invite the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* team to engage with us in our annual [Gender Lens on the Budget](#) project. We would welcome the opportunity to work with indigenous women and share the methods that we adopt in analysing the budget through a gender lens.