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**Indigenous Insights: An Evaluation Podcast  
Season 1 Episode 7: Nicky Bowman**

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**January 9, 2023**

Gladys ([00:05](#)):

Tansi, greetings, welcome to Indigenous Insights. I'm your host, Gladys Rowe, and I'm so grateful you are here. Each episode I sit in conversation with Indigenous evaluation practitioners, leaders, researchers, and scholars who are working in, thinking about, and supporting Indigenous evaluation to share the learning they've experienced along the way. My hope is that these episodes allow you to reflect on how to design, implement, learn from, and support evaluation by, with, and for Indigenous families, communities, organizations, and nations. Join me and my guests as we open up our evaluation bundles to share what we've gathered in our journeys, and bring them together into this space. I hope in these stories you will come to understand how we can collectively contribute to decolonial futures and strengthen Indigenous resurgence.

Gladys ([00:59](#)):

Tansi. Today I'm here with Dr. Nicole Bowman, who is president of Bowman Performance Consulting and an Associate Scientist with the University of Wisconsin Madison. She's an Associate Editor and co-founder of Roots and Relations, a permanent section in the Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation. In 2018, Dr. Bowman received the American Evaluation Association's Robert Engel Service Award and was notably the youngest and first Indigenous awardee. She served decades as chair or co-chair of American Evaluation Association's Indigenous People's Evaluation, TIG Topical Interest Group, in addition to participating in numerous global evaluation initiatives. Welcome Nicole. Thank you so much for spending time with me today and I'd love if you would share any other introduction of yourself that feels important to add before we get started.

Nicky ([01:56](#)):

Koolamalsi. Good afternoon. My name is Nicky Bowman. I introduce myself in my Lenape language, I am Mohican and Lenape living in northeastern Wisconsin United States, and I am the things that you mentioned, but I'm also auntie and wife and sister and daughter and niece and trying to do good



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medicine out in the world. So good morning, Crack-ah-low, what's happening, and I'm looking forward to the visit today.

Gladys ([02:35](#)):

Wonderful. Thank you for bringing your whole self here and into this space today. So I'm really excited to spend some time talking with you. Your work in Indigenous evaluation has really been foundational, I think, as this field has been building over the last couple of decades, explicitly as Indigenous evaluation work. So I'd like to ask to start, how long have you been doing this work in the field of Indigenous evaluation and where did that start for you?

Nicky ([03:03](#)):

If you ask my family, they would say that I have had an opinion and was a truth teller since birth or close, as soon as I could talk formally as a practitioner scholar using Western words, I've been in service to evaluation on behalf of Indigenous communities and First Nations and those needing more voice and visibility for nearly 25 years. I was an elementary Ed teacher for Oneida Turtle School, was my first job, which I love. That's where I really learned a lot about how culture and language fit into your daily life. They are your roots and it doesn't matter if you're a teacher or a plumber or an academic or work in trades and manufacturing. Those roots are your values and ethics and you show up wherever you are in your personal or professional life. So I had to do elements of assessment and evaluation during my earlier parts of my career.

Nicky ([04:05](#)):

And then it wasn't until I tried to use numbers, I did use numbers successfully publishing about achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in public schools - Journal of American Indian Education. I had to take a statistics class and I, I'm more of a qualitative researcher than quantitative, but I had to get through two statistics classes, and the way that I did that through University of Wisconsin Madison is where I received from my PhD. I was an academic fellow there, so you had to go full time and there were lots of rigorous things to do, but they prepared me to argue and defend whatever I need to very well, to a national or global audience. And so I'm thankful they prepared me. But one of my classes there, we had to publish a paper, and that's what I published and it was about the achievement gap in Indian country with regards to our students in the further along they go in the K-12 system and long and the short of it I thought, oh wow, I'm using numbers and statistics, I'm using my passion and love for the people, our people, to demonstrate that there are achievement gaps, not these fancy media releases, or which I now know are riddled with political statements, and showed the widening achievement gap using raw data from standardized test scores, our 11 tribal nations in Wisconsin.

Nicky ([05:30](#)):

And it was well received by some and not so much by others. And so that's where sort of the rubber hit the road. That's why praxis is very important, not just theory in my life with life experience, you learn how to use evaluation for advocacy means, and when you're starting out as an early career professional, you have to sort of behave and act in ways differently, at least back then, than you do as somebody who's in her fifties and has a little bit more visibility and voice. So I can be more powerful in my



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advocacy and service and less afraid with the colonial and settler type activities or neoliberal whatever, fill in the blank things that aren't productive or healing or helpful to our communities. And so I've been in a while, formally and informally and I think my next 50 years, if creator lets me live to be a hundred, choosing projects that still meaningful, but that are, I would say legacy projects. What can I do to contribute so that the work that I have lasts beyond my lifetime so that Native American first nations, Alaskan native, native Hawaiian, Aboriginal, Maori, fill in the blank, our Indigenous people don't have to be having the same policy, political or other types of conversations that I'm having to have as a woman in her fifties in 2022, almost 23.

Gladys ([06:54](#)):

Thank you Nicky, I really appreciate how you share the roots of where you started and then how that is leading towards where you wanna go in terms of the next part of your career. Thinking about, you had mentioned a couple of things there that kind of sparked for me. One was making sure that you can advocate for the changes that need to happen. And I know in my experience in research and evaluation over the last couple of decades, there's really this kind of gap that happens where studies are completed or evaluations are completed and then they either sit on the shelf, or they're not relevant, or there's this gap in translation where the knowledge isn't used to actually do something. And so I'm wondering if you have any thoughts around that in terms of your work in Indigenous evaluation

Nicky ([07:42](#)):

In terms of knowledge translation or gaps? I just wanna make sure that I'm following your question.

Gladys ([07:47](#)):

Yeah, knowledge translation. So how can we make sure that what we're producing within Indigenous evaluation is put to use in a way that is meaningful, that is responsive, that is able to be used not 10 years from now, but right now.

Nicky ([08:04](#)):

I think you need a good foundation first in who you are, who your relatives are, who your ancestors are, what those origin stories and songs and language are, those are your roots. And as a person who is striving to be traditional every day, practice, culture and language every day before I get to work, during work and after work, I'm always learning. I know but a thimble full of what my elders and ancestors know. So some of the tracks I'm laying down are based on origin stories and teachings that I have been is part of my Waapalaneexkweew (wah-pah-lah-nay-wook) my spirit name as part of my responsibility as I'm told by my elders and the linguists and the leaders, the things that you see me put out there that I'm saying today that I put out there published or otherwise all are things that my elders and leaders and other linguists help sort of vet and shape me.

Nicky ([09:05](#)):

We have online class weekly, we have ceremonies, and these types of things. And being able to be one person in this academic lodge, if you will, to contribute is a good way to be. And so sort of part of the preparedness and that knowledge transmission, mine comes from resting, being in ceremony, writing



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things down, that small voice inside of me is talking to me about. I am not a medicine person in terms of seeing things or whatever, but I do get inclinations and instincts, intuition of which my elders have told me to nurture. And then I write stuff down and it usually gets a bunch of revisions and sometimes it takes years and years and years before it ever sees primetime cuz there's need to be time to process and reflect. But first and foremost I would say, who are you and why are you doing this?

Nicky ([10:05](#)):

And part of the who are you and why are you doing this is understanding both traditional origin stories and oral knowledge, as well as the history from pre-contact to post-contact of your communities and the communities you serve. You don't have to be an expert in that, but you have to have integrity and cultural and academic humility while you're doing that. And I believe with those roots, that gives you a solid foundation then to sort of move into the field of evaluation. And you could say of education or engineering or medicine, whatever, but I really believe that it doesn't matter what winds are blowing in terms of what's the latest, greatest fad or thing people are using and whatever field or discipline you're in. But knowing who you are and why you are doing it, and it should be obviously beyond your own agenda, that's where the humility part comes in.

Nicky ([11:02](#)):

That teaching helps give you the foundation you need to move forward. And then once you are in the field, you do a lot of hopefully reflecting, listening, hopefully you're taken in by those who have years more experience than you do. I've been lucky to have a many good mentors who have become elders, teachers, friends, comrades, however you wanna say it, of all colours of the medicine wheel, both straight, young, old, LGBTQ and all races and ethnicities. So I feel very fortunate to be embraced by global north and south in this work that we're collectively doing together. And so the preparedness comes in constant work in community contexts, work within yourself, having humility to sort sort of test things out and tinker with them. You may get some of my best teachings or when I've gotten things wrong, but I figure elders or others wouldn't tell me if I need to fix stuff if they didn't feel I was open to it.

Nicky ([12:05](#)):

So that I look as a good metric, if you wanna use process evaluation, it's a good metric, if people are giving you feedback and if it's sort of uncomfortable feedback. But everything elders tell us, everything you experience in life isn't good or bad, it just is and it should be your teacher. And so that's sort of been my pathway to knowledge, transmission access to knowledge. Let's talk about access to knowledge. If you act right, more access to things, because the folks you are in service to have trusted you with some things. So you may get more teachings inside or outside of ceremony, you may be asked to do things in formal way or a formal way that's more visible and public. And as you go along this path, you're patient and you take stuff in. I'm in my fifties, I'm not an elder yet, I'm an elder in training.

Nicky ([12:57](#)):

And I tried to figure that out but that sort of to me isn't like a linear, it's a circular process. And so you just keep going with knowledge access, knowledge development, knowledge sharing, knowledge transmission. And I try to take a lot of our traditional teachings and apply them to contemporary



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practice. And one of them is if we situate ourselves as the caretakers of knowledge instead of the owners of it, you act very differently. People who are worried about faculty tenure pathways or money being more important than people sometimes get caught up and forget about that teaching around humility. And I'm not saying I'm perfect by any means, but I try to remember - be a caretaker of knowledge, not an owner of it. Now don't get me wrong, I write a lot about nation to nation work and tribal researchers or tribal evaluators and tribal nations or tribal nonprofits or tribal foundations. When they're entering into agreements, whether it's receiving money, whether it's a partnership, that they retain their sovereign rights as owners and governors of information, I very much advocate for that. So they're in charge of their human subjects data, their cultural and intellectual property, and so on. But as a traditional person, the way that I use that caretaker of knowledge rather than owner of it is when western folks aren't involved. So it sort of has a double meaning. I hope I'm communicating clearly and people understand what I'm saying.

Gladys ([14:31](#)):

Yeah, thank you. That makes a lot of sense to me and I appreciate that you made that delineation between caretakers and then also sovereignty over tribal or nation data and the difference between the two. And so you shared a lot there about what I'm hearing are values or principles or ways of being that really form a foundation so that you can do your work in a good way. And like you said, whatever that work is to have a solid foundation is important. And so when you think about Indigenous evaluation, what really stuck out for me around humility and around something that I think about as taking care of the spirit of the work means that I carry myself in a good way, that I attend to the responsibilities that I have. And so much of what you've just shared, Nikki really resonates for me. So thank you for that.

Nicky ([15:31](#)):

Sure.

Gladys ([15:32](#)):

You said a couple of things that I wanted to ask a few more questions about. So you talk about an academic lodge and I've read your work and your bio definitely talks about having an academic lodge, but I'm wondering if you could share what you mean when you say that, academic lodge

Nicky ([15:48](#)):

Sort of the way I look at it is when you have a lodge or a ceremony, that's something that's very traditional, it's not recorded, it doesn't have an agenda, it technically usually doesn't have any type of time constraints other than if you go in before sunset or go in before sunrise, there's everyone's got different ceremonies. And so I try to think about the spirit of what our lodge is and modify that, call it an academic lodge. And there are other authors that write about using the circle as a way to share information, as a way to gather information. And so the reason I say academic lodge is to give a teaching about what our lodges are about, but also what an academic lodge is not. It's not traditional. An academic lodge, if everyone gives permission, can be recorded and used so that it benefits everybody who participated.

Nicky ([16:47](#)):



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If people don't want it to be recorded, if one person doesn't want it to be recorded, we don't record it. Or if someone gets emotional, we shut off the recording. But we've used it both as a method for data collection and as a framework or a process to gather people around and in a different way other than let's have a zoom meeting. And so when it's an academic lodge, we may come together for a fireside chat, is another name the western folks use. You come together and everyone gets to contribute. We ask that if people are comfortable, they contribute because we believe just in a lodge, everybody has something to give to the circle. And together in that circle things come up inside of people, and we have more deep and meaningful discussions if it's facilitated properly, and hopefully by sharing and sometimes being vulnerable, that's what happens in these academic lodges, then we can get into deeper more meaningful discussions that actually may affect transformation and change.

Nicky ([18:01](#)):

And so we sometimes use academic lodges for our non-native allies and for our white brothers and sisters who are more comfortable in sharing their journey to decolonize and their understanding of being the beneficiaries of colonizers. These are important conversations to have, and you have to have sort of a sensitive tender space to let people feel comfortable to share, especially when things are unknown or confusing or uncomfortable. We have this colonized settler state going on and yet Indigenous people are most often called on to help non-Indigenous sort of, I don't know, feel okay is the right word about it, but understand. So it's hard for us cuz you get tired and it's like we're victimized by these systems and colonization, but here we sit. And so that goes back to that teaching about humility. How can I be here to be good medicine and to contribute in a good way to this conversation no matter who shows up. And as long as people are showing up and being authentic, we may talk about journal articles or we may just talk about what's going on in their life or in the world at the moment. And that's sort of how I conceptualize an academic lodge. I have, I don't know in the show notes, you need a link or something, but I have just a handout on what an academic lodge is and is not, which may be a helpful supplementary piece of information.

Gladys ([19:26](#)):

Yeah, thank you. I'll definitely grab that from you and include that in the show notes for sure. And thank you for taking the time to go deeper into what an academic lodge looks like and how, you know, the purpose of it. I really appreciate that. I wanted to ask about this idea or this field of Indigenous evaluation. It's this term I think that's out there and increasingly becoming more popular in the past, I would say maybe five or seven years in Canada anyway, I don't know if you've noticed that kind of popularity rising of this idea of Indigenous evaluation, but it's something like within western frameworks, within western funders and programs, et cetera. I know that Indigenous evaluation is actually something that's been around in our communities for a very long time, ways of understanding and assessing and making sense of the world around us. And so in thinking about Indigenous evaluation, and the question that I have for you is when you think about that term, what does it mean to you and what does it include and what does it not include? So from your perspective, what is Indigenous evaluation?

Nicky ([20:37](#)):

Indigenous evaluation is whatever the local Indigenous people says it is. And that's not meant to be evasive, that's meant to be in the most open mind, heart, spirit and of greatest service. And that's sort



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of how I start out conversations or if I have to do trainings or technical assistance session, of course I've published about it, so there's a much more what do I wanna say, cited and well-defined definition and application and examples out there through some of my earlier publications in the mid 2015, 2016, 2018, somewhere in there. But first and foremost it's how do the local Indigenous people or First Nations governments define evaluation? What does it mean to them? How has evaluation been used in a good way? In a traumatic way? Has evaluation been confusing? There's a lot of questions that I ask. So we call it co-constructing, so I have an idea about what it is and I know what the literature says it is.

Nicky ([21:41](#)):

But really what's most useful and interesting is to ask those who will be affected most by the evaluation, what it is. And from there, let's say I was coming into to your community, your Cree community, you're Cree, right?

Gladys:

Yes, I'm Cree,

Nicky:

Yes, so I would ask from your elders to just traditionalists to elected officials, to let's say it was through your Ed program, the families, if they have a Tribal Education Board or whatever, what it was to them. And then hopefully by going in and listening first and visiting, you sort of get a working definition of what it means for the Cree context for this specific program or department or grant. And that's, when I think of Indigenous evaluation, it's Nan Wehipeihana from New Zealand, she's one of our Maori elders, she writes a lot about by us and for us, and that the best definition is whatever the community says and understanding what the roots are.

Nicky ([22:44](#)):

Going back to my origin story - what are the roots, what are the really important values and ethics and things that have to be in evaluation? And then how it might look for an education program, economic development program, workforce evaluation, may change a little bit here or there due to whatever the programming might be or the questions you're trying to ask when you do an evaluation. But it's always nice to have those roots, cuz I don't know about Cree, I don't know your origin stories, your values, protocols and things, and it's nice to listen. So that's how I would say what Indigenous evaluation, that's what it would include. What Indigenous evaluation does not include is an outside person coming in and acting as an expert, including Nikki Bowman who is Lenape and Mohican. Lenape is our word for the western word, Delaware. But our origins come from the northeastern side of Turtle Island, New York, New Jersey, Ontario, that area.

Nicky ([23:44](#)):

And we just have multiple communities throughout North America due to colonization and just trying to survive. Anywhoo, it wouldn't include me as an Indigenous person coming in and telling your community what evaluation is. So it does not include somebody from the outside acting like the boss apple sauce. It's that humility again, and it's listening and being in a circle and co-creating what evaluation means.



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Indigenous evaluation also means what's working. One of my pet peeves is whether it's researchers, evaluators, policymakers, fill in the blank, talking to you out about a bunch of statistics, whether it's a presentation, a meeting, PowerPoint, whatever, about all the things that are wrong. I wanna know what's right and what's strong here. That's how you have strengths-based evaluations. So Indigenous evaluation must be strengths-based. It must understand the context and the history. It must use culture, it must use language, it must involve from youth to elders, if at all possible.

Nicky ([24:47](#)):

And not just a few key decision makers cuz, we don't want to, we want to have good representation, full and comprehensive representation. Indigenous evaluation also means Indigenous people, and tribal or First Nations, that the right to decide how the data is used, what kind of data is generated, what data is kept inside to the community and what data may be shared and disseminated outward. They get to decide where it's shared and disseminated, who gets to share and disseminated it, and how that message is crafted. And then of course the piles of raw data that you get belong to the community. And so hopefully that sort of gives you at least a broad framing in of what Indigenous evaluation means. I think when we get stuck in, here's the definition of it, that's very western. I think things should be able to have good roots, but they can move and change and grow over time as things change, as you have changes in leadership or programming, it should be flexible.

Gladys ([25:52](#)):

Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. And really one of the things that I'm hearing there is that, like you said, who is defining the work? Who is driving the work? Who's priorities are central? That's really the starting point, and it's the community. And so going in to facilitate the community to be able to co-create what will work for them based on their knowledges, their language, their context, their protocols is key, is what I'm hearing.

Nicky ([26:23](#)):

And I think one of the things that I did miss is, and I started doing this just more recently, and we'll see how it goes, I'll keep you posted, but one of the things is it needs to have equitable resources, right? Equity. So if I'm starting to say if you want a run-of-the-mill western evaluation, there'll be 10 or 12 percent of the overall project budget, plus travel if they have me travel. And if you want a culturally responsive evaluation or if you want an Indigenous evaluation or if you want an equitable evaluation, something specialized, then that's going to be 15 or more percent of the budget plus travel. It's very specialized and I think that some people are well-intentioned and then others who are just hiding behind the latest diversity, equity, and inclusion movement within evaluation or the world, you can tell real fast by the resources, do we have enough time or are we rushed?

Nicky ([27:25](#)):

Do we get to co-create instruments or are they given to us and say, this is what you're using. Do we have shared data agreements where we own the data? Do we have Indigenous people leading or co-leading efforts for data collection, study design, writing, the report, whatever? Do we have enough funding? So if we're asking Indigenous people for information or whether it's a survey or interviews or focus groups talking circles, however, are you making a donation to the community or are you giving honorariums?





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There's gotta be a reciprocity in that we cannot continue mining Indigenous hearts, minds and spirits, like they mines the earth. It's a colonized way to do things and I call it out. I try to be polite and professional about it, but I am very direct when it comes to that. And that's part of the advocacy work. I understand that PhD behind my name has power and I will use that power for good medicine.

Nicky ([28:24](#)):

I make no bones about it. I state my positionality. I don't think a lot of, if there's privilege in whiteness, white fragility and white supremacy, privilege being straight person is privilege. Being over 50 is a privilege versus younger voices in evaluation or LGBTQ two, spirit voices and evaluation, these are all components of privilege. And so I think that we need more white and male and privileged type or privileged type to declare their positionality because when they do that, then you are able to get down to the brass tax and say, okay, well what are we going to do to sort of address that? What are we going to do to make sure that we're building in enough time human commitment and financial resources to do this work the right way? Because most often, 99% of the time, of hundreds and hundreds of projects I've worked on, we often have to build in time to teach the non-Indigenous people how to act right or what Indigenous evaluation 101 is, or the fact that there are even tribal nations, sovereignty, First Nations or Indigenous people still on the earth. It's amazing the ways that equity comes in. But I'm not here for somebody's kumbaya. It's gotta be that plus equitable resources, and I stand firm on that. And if that's not available then I'm not available, cuz I will not be a tool for colonization and harm.

Gladys ([29:58](#)):

Yeah, definitely. And that connects to what you shared earlier about what you wanna leave behind and the kinds of projects that you're wanting to work on. And I think also connects to what I shared around, there's this popularization of Indigenous evaluation and so, see so many RFPs for - and also how will your approach include Indigenous evaluation kind of end, at the end of RFPs? And so there's a danger in that to just continue to replicate itself, like you said, with people who are just moving forward with the status quo. And so I appreciate the point that you make around advocating for equitable resources to actually transform how the expectations of how evaluation will be done, and for people who are non-Indigenous ultimately to step aside and speak to how capacity for Indigenous evaluation can be embedded and supported within Indigenous communities. And that kind of leads to my next question, which I mean you shared a lot of the pieces of this, but I'm going to ask you to explicitly share the answer. So why is Indigenous evaluation important?

Nicky ([31:12](#)):

My personal take is that Indigenous evaluation is the next civil rights movement in terms of asserting sovereignty and having our voices count. There's a big evidence-based practice movement, practice-based evidence is the way they flip it, I just roll into evidence-based practice. You can call whatever you want. If it hasn't been tested and vetted and co-created with the communities I served, then it's not evidence. It's just us trying out some new program to see if it'll fit our community. And we know how that has worked. One only needs to look at hundreds of years of policy and programming, whether it's residential boarding schools, whether it's the separation of families and children through child welfare, forced removal. I mean you could continue this list both in the Canadian context and the United States, or other Indigenous contexts globally, and it hasn't worked. So I call myself a blue collar scholar, and the



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most simplest argument I make to people is I know what the data says, our educational outcomes, our health outcomes, our economic outcomes haven't changed much in hundreds of years.

Nicky ([32:30](#)):

So why don't you make room for having Indigenous scholarship in there? And that Indigenous scholarship could come from our elders or generations, intergenerational families who are protect the earth or the water or who understand economic development, always got a good hustle going and making sure there's resources in the community so people can make a good living. Or it might be people who know how to grow things and are part of the now called decolonization, the food sovereignty movement. Make room for the people who know how to do the things they do over many generations, whether they have a PhD or not. And so I'm just interested in how we make more of that. I don't know if I completely answered your question, so please feel free to redirect me, but that's sort of where my mind went on that when you asked me.

Gladys ([33:27](#)):

Yeah, one of the things I'm thinking about lately is knowledge generation and knowledge production and who gets to say what knowledge is, which links to who gets to say what evidence is. And so pushing back against that idea of evidence-based practice even, it's a big thing. My background's social work and it's a big thing in social work, this evidence-based practice. And Indigenous knowledge keepers that I work with have said it's not about evidence-based it's about promising practices because the context of where we work is important and the community of where we work is important. And so it's going to change, but we can share promising practices in our communities. And that looks different than what's framed within western academia about evidence-based practice. And so I agree that Indigenous evaluation definitely holds an important role in pushing back against the imposition of evidence within our communities. And I was really, that's the first time I've ever heard someone say that Indigenous evaluation could be likened to the civil rights movement, but it makes sense to me.

Nicky ([34:32](#)):

Well, it's where the rubber hits the road is what is produced as evidence because researchers and evaluators, it's, there's a difference. And some of us do research and evaluation. I do mostly evaluation, but I understand the difference because I have to teach what the difference is between research and evaluation is. We may share similar theories and methods, but the types of questions we ask and the way we use data and the type of data generated is different than what researchers do. And so evaluation gives an opinion about if something's working or not. It doesn't have to be that black and white, so to speak. You can have a developmental scale to say, that's sort of working, we need more time to, it's amazing, let's replicate it and try it in different community, and all along that, everything in between along that continuum. But to me it's an ethical and moral responsibility.

Nicky ([35:28](#)):

That's how strongly I believe in Indigenous evaluation, to go beyond doing no harm to being a good relative or being good medicine. Like this minimum standard of do no harm, do no harm, whether it's in social science, medical sciences or wherever, is bullshit. You've done harm. Let's come on now. And I know it's an uncomfortable truth, but it's one that I will literally utilize to help educate and hopefully



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reach and transform and change people, meaning the non-Indigenous, until I have my last breath. I'm learning as an older woman, a middle-aged woman, how to try to speak into the listening. My elder African-American elder Hazel, Dr. Hazel Symonette, who's been at the forefront of the civil rights movement using evaluation, she's at the University of Wisconsin Madison and is one of my beloved mentors, sisters, reminds us that we have to speak into the listening.

Nicky ([36:29](#)):

So you can't always run around with a baseball bat, even though at my heart and hardcore, I love being on the front lines, I like protesting and I like getting in people's face about - this is wrong. Because on the backside, when we're in community, when you're really engaged in community, not as Dr. Nikki Bowman, but just as Nikki Bowman in ceremonies or in helping families in time of need or crisis or seeing some of the things that our communities see on a very regular and disproportionately high basis, you understand how important it's for you to be out there as then Dr. Nikki Bowman to advocate for different policies for different ways. People are trained and educated to speak back to literature that is not accurate or appropriate. So it becomes a moral and an ethical obligation. I mean, it's part of my spirit name, that's what I need to be doing.

Nicky ([37:27](#)):

And so that's what I try to do. And I'm trying to find different ways to sort of communicate that, so we can bring more folks in, more allies in. Cuz there'll never be enough Indigenous evaluators. There simply aren't enough of us. And so where I can find allies, non-native allies, I am ride or die. But then they have to keep earning their trust and they have to be respectful and have humility and help to make room and resources so that more of this work can be done. That's sort of the reciprocity and that relationship, my expectation. And I'm very upfront about that too.

Gladys ([38:03](#)):

Thank you for sharing that. And I guess that leads to the question I have for you. You said it's important to be a good relative in this work. So what does a good relative in Indigenous evaluation look like? What does that feel like?

Nicky ([38:17](#)):

One of the practical ways I practice Wuliit eelaangoomatiit which is means good relatives, good relations, is if many of our First Nations or our tribal foundations or our tribal non-profits may not have a tribal IRB intergovernmental review board, which is, or tribal research or tribal evaluation oversight and advisory board. People call it different things depending on where you are. But most of our communities, our organizations or governments do not have that. So part of being a good relative is when I'm making a contract with folks, I'm like, what does this mean? And I actually use the medicine wheel, the Lenape medicine wheel, and I talk about the eastern door, the southern door, the western door in the northern door. And we make up agreements. It means I come to work rested, rested and not rushed. It means I use culture and language whenever I can.

Nicky ([39:14](#)):



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It means that the community owns the data, not me. And everything will be returned or destroyed by X number of date. It means I do in the future, northern door, I do not publish unless there's a co-author with me from your community, and we've agreed that this is something that would be good to share for education or other purposes. And so a good relations agreement is part of what I literally attached to my contracting document or inside the contracting language. I make sure that anybody, so for instance, we do work with missing murdered Indigenous relatives in the state of Wisconsin and we're a subcontractor. And so I we're the native subcontractor and the prime is non-native. And I said, if I get any data from native folks on surveys or whatever else we're doing, you don't get any of it. Neither does the state of Wisconsin.

Nicky ([40:08](#)):

I need that in my contract because I have to be a layer of protection. And I found out, I don't know, maybe eight or 10 months after that from one of the co-chairs of the movement in Wisconsin, that they used my contract language for all 11 tribal nations so that they would also be protected. So if tribes got data, they wouldn't have to fork it over because we don't know what, you know, data has been used against us by government agencies and others. And so that's what it means, being a good relative. It also means when you have to receive constructive feedback, it means you take it with humility and you adjust your team, your resources, timelines, instruments, whatever it might be. You don't like hold data hostage. You don't try to act like you're some big shot, and use a lot of technical language to create additional barriers or frustrations.

Nicky ([41:04](#)):

And it means if they have folks that want to actually learn more about Indigenous evaluation or help with data collection analysis, you sort of open the door to say, okay, if you wanna be part of that, let us know. We really love when communities have somebody who almost functions like an internally evaluator to sort of help because that's like on the job practice, you get to practice Indigenous evaluation on a real project with the community. So those are all different ways being a good relatives shows up there. There's lots more, but those are the ones off the top of my head I can think of.

Gladys ([41:38](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Such great examples. Thank you so much. So when you think about what's needed, so based on your experiences and the reflections you've shared with us today, what is needed to support or strengthen the field of Indigenous evaluation based on your experience?

Nicky ([41:56](#)):

I think there needs to be more opportunities for voice and visibility in meaningful positions. So for instance, the American Evaluation Association has a working group, they have lots of working groups, but this is a standing group that is right in the board policies and it's called the Evaluation Policy Task Force. We now have an Indigenous person on this group, it's me, and we also have LGBTQ two-spirit on this group. It's Dr. Gregory Phillips II. And it means that, how can I say this? Professional organizations and government agencies or programs or departments are requiring evaluators all to have skills and competencies in culturally responsive Indigenous and equitable evaluation. I mean, if we were asked to do a social network analysis and evaluation, you wouldn't send somebody in who didn't know what they



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were doing. There are skills, knowledge, and competencies around these technical things besides then just having lived experience to understand appropriate ways to act in a cultural context, a cultural and community context.

Nicky ([43:09](#)):

And so we definitely need more resources put into these efforts, whether it's professional development that everybody is required to go through. I know that First Nations has OCAP. If you become a credentialed evaluator for the Canadian Evaluation Society, you must know about treaty rights. You must understand about data protections and agreements and things about Indigenous evaluation. They're the only professional evaluation organization on the planet that does that in order to be certified. So others need to step up. I also think that publishing houses, those who publish our journals, need to, I think the professional associations and those other, this is where white and male and or privilege can step up. And this is part of, to me, truth healing reconciliation. It's part of active land acknowledgement and it's part of self-acknowledgement of not to continue to cause more trauma and harm. When you're publishing a journal article, when you're publishing a book, if you're Indigenous, all the rights should be yours.

Nicky ([44:18](#)):

They should not become the publishing house's rights. You're not going to get rich. It's not a New York Times bestseller, you know what I'm saying? But these are things, if you're on stolen land, you should not add more to the trauma pot, if you will, by also expecting us to write for free and then you own our information. And so I can tell you that in 2022, some of the biggest wins for me that will live well beyond Nikki Bowman's *Years of Life*, the *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*, which is also an open access journal, that's another thing. Journals could make things open access to Indigenous people and be co-sponsoring events where non-Indigenous are learning things that they don't get in college regarding this type of evaluation. But I can tell you that the *Journal Multi Multidisciplinary Evaluation* and the *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, both are open journals so you can get free access to full articles, now have brand new agreements that will start at the beginning of 2023 that if you're an Indigenous author and you have to sign an author agreement before it actually your article or your submission gets published, you will own Indigenous people will be 100% owners of that article.

Nicky ([45:43](#)):

It will no longer be given to the publishing house or the journal. So I'm really happy to hear about those things, but those are some of the things that need to change. We need more people calling others out. So it's not just on the backs of Indigenous people to do it, we're evaluators who are also Indigenous. So we know evaluation stuff plus our Indigenous stuff or what has been given to us and that we practice and learned and refined over the years. But I mean, why when the United Nations has their global gathering of how to save the Earth, why are there not any evaluators are there? Why are there not any Indigenous evaluators or Indigenous caretakers of the earth who know how to protect and save our planet? And by scientific studies, the healthiest places on earth are those that have where tribes have sovereign status and are able to use their sovereign status to protect our natural resources.

Nicky ([46:40](#)):



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But yet they're not at these big summits. I don't understand. I don't understand why the permanent forum isn't busy. The United Nations Indigenous Permanent Forum isn't busy engaging with funders and with corporations and these people who are supposedly trying to solve global problems. It's amazing to me. We need to be there. And I don't mean be there just in terms of, okay, let's have a prayer in the native tongue and be done with it. Like nation to nation, tribes are nation states, First Nations governments, and folks need to start inviting tribes, for us, 578 First Nations. And if you count all the First Nations in Canada, it's like over 1200 when there are national policies being created. Why aren't all tribes invited to the table? If you go back to treaty rights, we were supposed to have representation. Where is that? It's rough. It's rough out there. But all you can do is keep working and keep questioning and keep hoping you find the right person in inside of these funding or government agencies or corporate agencies that are truly engaged in liberatory work, and want the world to be a better place and to be sustainable for many future generations. I got on a soapbox, but I mean all of it.

Gladys ([48:00](#)):

I love it. And you know, made some connections there that I hadn't thought about before, particularly around COP and Indigenous Evaluator is presence and the opportunity there when we think about advocacy within funding spaces to think about how to support Indigenous evaluators at a global scale, thinking about and contributing to some of the transformation that could be possible if our voices were in those spaces.

Nicky ([48:28](#)):

Yep,

Gladys ([48:29](#)):

Definitely. We're getting to the top of the hour end of our time together. This has gone by so quickly and you've shared so many amazing insights that I know that the listeners are going to be excited about. But I wanted to give you an opportunity to, if you have any hopes or words of wisdom or experience or something that's just burning within you that you really wanna share with listeners as they sit with everything you've shared so far around Indigenous evaluation.

Nicky ([48:59](#)):

The first thing I wanna say is believe in yourself, and quiet yourself down to listen to your inside voice or your intuition. Build in regular time to rest and to be in ceremony. And sometimes ceremony might just be driving an elder around who's old and can't get around good and it's winter, and you clean their house or you do their groceries. You know what I'm saying? The ancestors find a way to get things to come to you if you're doing the right things here on earth. I truly believe that. I think the second thing is that to remember his frontal lobes and footnotes are only going to get you so far. We need to have more Indigenous people publishing. So I will say in January, Larry Bremner and I, past president of Canadian Evaluation Society where the co-editors for the Roots and Relations section, that's the Indigenous only section inside a Canadian Journal Program Evaluation.

Nicky ([49:53](#)):



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We're having another call for proposals and anybody who provides a submission will be published, that's part of that academic lodge. Nobody gets turned away, and you can turn in songs or artwork, a regular journal article or whatever. But I want to see more people with and without PhD publishing and sharing their insights, their stories. I mean, I've seen people do bead work and ribbon skirts around climate change. And tell me how you evaluated that, and why this regalia was important. These beautiful medicines that we have buried in our DNA need to be woke up and applied to the field. And for those of you who don't have a spirit name, don't be ashamed if you're mixed, I'm mixed. Get your spirit name, use it. Use the tools that you have. I remember one of the most, something that I'll remember my rest of my career is I had a student come up to me, and I visit, I don't care if you're a big name or a no name so to speak.

Nicky ([50:51](#)):

I love visiting with emerging and new evaluators, especially Indigenous evaluators, or just young evaluators. They said, Dr. Bowman, I always wanted to publish in my spirit name, and I told my advisor, well if Dr. Bowman can do it, then why can't I? And I thought, well, you never know how using your medicine is going to help. And in academia they always want you to be thinking about the literature, quoting someone or what's the latest thing? And I say, well let's balance that out. Cause balance is a teaching, right? Go inward, recover your language. Even if it's just saying hello or learning how to introduce yourself in the language, learning how to make cedar tea, or whatever it is, that's your jam. Do that, because who knew that me publishing my name, using my spirit name or organizing my information according to our Lenape Medicine wheel and using language was helpful.

Nicky ([51:51](#)):

That really still gets me, and that comment was shared a long time ago. And I think the last thing - is don't forget to think about the legacy that you want to leave. Build on origin stories, build on what you know others have done, but don't be afraid to be your own person and to let that person out there. Find a good mentor or mentors, a circle, that will keep you strong, and just be brave and put yourself out there. Because to me that's what's innovative, that's what's exciting, and that's what really hits home. I may have used a medicine wheel, for instance. Not all tribal communities, Indigenous communities have medicine wheels. So what is it that you use? What is the teaching, or something that you're have permission and responsibility to share? How do you apply cultural protocols or symbols or teachings to evaluation? Don't be afraid to share.

Nicky ([52:46](#)):

My model isn't the be all end all. It's just to say, here's one way that I use it. And I hope that inspires others to do the same, because I just love seeing what else is out there. There's so much timeless wisdom that's in our traditional knowledge that's transferred through ceremonies orally by singing. And I know that timeless wisdom will produce things that will create true and lasting change. Not just more information. More information, got the Western way, got us to where we are. We want wisdom applied so that we solve things, heal things, transform, and move to the next, whatever the next thing is that our communities need. So that is about as wise as I can be right now.

Gladys ([53:30](#)):



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Thank you, thank you. And you know, you certainly are leaving some pretty deep footprints for others to follow, and we never know the impact that we might have. And so I appreciate the invitation to be brave and to step out there and to show up as our whole selves because we never know who we will be inspiring in generations to come. And you certainly are an inspiration. Nikki, I appreciate you so deeply for taking the time and for speaking sometimes hard things into spaces that need to change.

Nicky ([54:05](#)):

I'm sick of shame. We carry so much shame that we share and we don't share, and I want more sassiness and more love and applicability that's out there. Let yourself out, share with us the medicine that was put in you.

Gladys ([54:19](#)):

Beautiful, beautiful. And those are wise words. So I'm going to leave the audience with the beauty of your wise words, and Ekosi, thank you so much for spending time with me today, Nicky.

Nicky ([54:31](#)):

Anushiik, thank you.

Gladys ([54:35](#)):

I'm so glad you spent time with us today. I have a few notes to wrap up this episode. If you're enjoying the podcast, please subscribe on your favourite streaming service, including PodBean, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts, so that you don't miss an episode. Also, this podcast is self-supported and I'm hoping to make the work more sustainable. So if you're finding the content interesting and valuable, please consider supporting Indigenous insights through Buy Me a Coffee. You can find the link in the show notes. Finally, I would like to extend an invitation. If you are someone who has an interest in Indigenous evaluation and would like to have a conversation on this podcast, I would love to hear from you. Please send me a note and we can connect about your work, what you're learning, and the questions you're thinking about. That's it for this week. I look forward to sharing the space with you again soon. Ekosi.