



FACTSHEET

# Three Promising Practices to Make Program Evaluation with Indigenous Youth Meaningful

Developed from a YouthREX webinar featuring Gabrielle Fayant, co-founder of Assembly of Seven Generation (AG7) and Program Manager of ReachUp! North in partnership with Digital Opportunity Trust

**When evaluating Indigenous youth programs, it is important to be culturally safe, responsive, and reflective of Indigenous worldviews.**



## 01. Use Talking Circles

Talking circles are a traditional way for Indigenous people to solve problems by sitting in a circle and discussing them. A circle is used because there is no one person in a position of prominence, allowing people to speak freely. Talking circles can be used in evaluation as a way to gather feedback. They can happen at many stages of a program (at the end of every day, week, month), and can include your team, staff, or youth in the program.

One of the major benefits of talking circles is that they ground participants, making sure everyone is on the same level. By going around in a circle, we build on each other’s perspective, and everyone has time to talk and feel heard. Conversations are more open and equal as job titles and positions don’t matter in this setting.

### Tips

- There should be a facilitator who guides questioning, in addition to an eagle feather, talking stick or stone.
- Youth can be encouraged to participate by starting off with simple questions like, “Say one word about how you’re feeling today”.
- Come to consensus with participants about the appropriate way to document the conversation.
- Make sure that participants have agreed to the plan and understand that the talking circle is part of an evaluation.



## DID YOU KNOW?

For many Indigenous peoples, the concept of time is in relation to the sun and natural law; it exists without any other restrictions, as explained by Gabrielle Fayant, co-founder of Assembly of Seven Generation (AG7).

**What needs to happen will happen when it happens.** This is very much in contrast with the Western perception of time, so exercise patience and flexibility with Indigenous youth program evaluation timelines!

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## What Are Some Grounding Approaches for Non-Indigenous People Facilitating Indigenous Youth Program Evaluations?

- Look to Elders and knowledge keepers for advice.
- Go out to community events, mingle, and pay attention to who is leading Aboriginal community events – they are potential resources.
- Pay attention to who the young people are listening to / responding to.
- Let the community know what you are doing / would like to do.
- Ask for help!
- Be willing to listen, learn, and accept that you don’t know everything!



## 02. Make Room for Ceremony in Meaningful Ways

Ceremonies can sometimes seem hard to incorporate into youth programs and evaluations, but their value should not be overlooked. It is important to remember that the ceremony should add to what you're doing so that you aren't exploiting a culture (ie. having a drum at your program without explaining why it is there or why it is sacred).

### Tip

- Be clear about the purpose of the ceremony and why it is being included.

### Example

- An example of a ceremony that can be used in youth program evaluation is a Smudging Ceremony. These can be performed at the start of the evaluation process because they are used to remove negative energy and they help with centering and healing.
- Keep in mind that some ceremonies can be difficult to incorporate into a Western context (ie in office spaces etc). Some places may not allow you to burn the required ingredients for a smudging ceremony for safety reasons, so be sure to check the rules of your venue.



## 03. Make Sure there is a Clear Evaluation Purpose and Allow Youth to Lead

If a youth program evaluation doesn't have a purpose that resonates with the participants, they won't feel included or needed. Think about what evaluation might look like for youth. Their views on evaluation may differ from yours, or from traditional forms of evaluation. That's okay! If it has meaning for them, it will allow for a richer, more meaningful evaluation.

### Tips

- Always allow and support young people to reconnect to their culture, families, and communities through the process of finding their own program evaluation purpose.
- Encourage young people to lead conversations (i.e. in a talking circle).
- Never think you know something better simply because of your age; we can all learn from each other.
- Take young people – what they need, are saying and contributing – seriously

### Something to keep in mind:

In this factsheet, "Indigenous people" refers to First Nation, Metis and Inuit. Indigenous peoples are diverse and live on every continent. The tips suggested here are intended to foster good energy for all people, Indigenous or not, but they are not appropriate in every context.