



Australian Government
Department of Education

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples NDRI – Summary

Targeted Discussion Series (September 2024)



Summary

The consultation identified several key considerations and potential investment priorities for digital research infrastructure:

Indigenous-led programs: Further investment should be directed into Indigenous-led programs of work. Empowering Indigenous leadership in these programs promotes self-determination and ensures that data practices align with community values and needs.

Capability building: Building capabilities of NDRI users, data suppliers (researchers) and operators, and ensuring cultural safety and competencies for Indigenous people working on country. This includes training Indigenous communities on their rights under Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) principles, ensuring that the university sector and other institutions develop cultural safety competencies to ethically handle Indigenous knowledge and data, aligning with priority reform 4 in the Closing the Gap initiative and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics.

Indigenous data governance: Elevate Indigenous data governance across the national research infrastructure (NRI) landscape for all disciplines. This includes adopting and adapting Indigenous data governance frameworks and investing in training for their application. Governance includes effective process for discovery and triage of Indigenous Knowledge that may be unknowingly stored in existing systems.

Equity of access to materials: Support efficient delivery of cultural and language materials. This includes upgrading the way holding institutions produce material, identifying what material they have, and recognising that Indigenous people seeking materials for language revitalization programs often face delays in accessing these resources.

Indigenous data catalogue: Support the development of an Indigenous data catalogue that is tailored to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems. Important to address the issue of legacy data, which often gets lost or becomes inaccessible after project funding ends, and to recognise that many corporations (e.g., BHP and Rio Tinto) hold significant amounts of Indigenous knowledge, often without the communities' awareness. Noted that the Office of the National Data Commissioner (ONDC) is currently collecting information from government agencies regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's data holdings.

Indigenous data security and protection of secret/sacred data: Educate Traditional Custodians that their data will be secure and that they will retain the rights to how, who, when, where, and what it is used for. Also important to recognise that some data is secret and sacred, needing specialised access control. Trust and identity systems need to go beyond the Australian Access Federation and include communities. Create data classifications for Indigenous Knowledge to allow it to be discovered and labelled as such in-situ prior to any further action to secure and repatriate.

Inclusion and participation: Move from consultation and engagement with Indigenous communities to inclusion and participation, ideally Indigenous led. Control over data is the sovereign right and responsibility of Indigenous communities, and it is not a jurisdictional decision but a place-based

decision. Gaining consent from Indigenous communities is generally managed well, but withdrawing consent can cause issues, especially when the data was collected with public funds

Long-term investment: Ensuring that investments in Indigenous data governance and infrastructure are not funded on an ad hoc basis but are seen as a permanent part of the NRI. Long-term funding ensures the sustainability of data initiatives, supports continuous community engagement, and upholds ethical standards in handling Indigenous data.

Risk management and algorithmic governance There is an urgent need to invest in algorithmic governance to safeguard Indigenous knowledge in the age of AI. Without proper protections, Indigenous data can be misappropriated or misused, leading to irreversible consequences. Strengthening AI guardrails and implementing robust governance frameworks are necessary to prevent the exploitation of Indigenous data.

Collaboration and integration across departments and initiatives Promoting collaboration between government departments, research institutions, and Indigenous communities is vital. Building on existing initiatives, such as those by the Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC), and integrating efforts can reduce fragmentation, avoid duplication, and enhance the effectiveness of Indigenous data governance. A focused yet integrated approach ensures that data practices respect Indigenous sovereignty and support broader research efforts.

In summary, these investments would aim to make NDRI more culturally appropriate and aligned, build capabilities within communities, and ensure the sustainability and ethical use of Indigenous data and knowledge systems. It should be acknowledged that a good start has been made with recent investments managed through ARDC.

If you'd like to provide any additional comments or feedback on the above summary, you're invited to provide these views via the online NDRI Investment Plan Consultation Survey, which can be found on the department's NDRI webpage.