

Yuwaya Ngarra-li

Research Protocol

Update: August 2022

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Purpose of this Protocol

The purpose of this Research Protocol is to set out the context, principles and processes for research undertaken as part of the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW.

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History of research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subjected to research by non-Indigenous researchers that collected data, classified and represented Indigenous people and cultures primarily in terms of physical and social deficits, often serving to legitimise and perpetuate the processes of colonisation.¹ Describing research as ‘one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary’, Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith has reflected that it is difficult to discuss research methodology and Indigenous peoples together without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of colonial practices.² Aboriginal academic Juanita Sherwood has written about injury as a recurring theme that has resulted from the Western colonial practice of research on Indigenous peoples; a product of a dominant way of knowing and constructing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that has led to violence, trauma, and destructive policy and practice.³ Research in and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is still regularly something which is ‘done to’ rather than undertaken in collaboration with or controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Research in this context is inherently political. Data sovereignty and intellectual property are two areas where this is particularly evident, as articulated in a 2018 Communique from the Maïam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute:

*Data is a cultural, strategic, and economic asset for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous Australians have always been active in what is now known as ‘data’. Yet in modern times we have been isolated from the language, control and production of data at community, state and national levels. This has resulted in data that are overly focused on Indigenous peoples as the problem. Existing data and data infrastructure does not recognise or privilege our knowledges and worldviews nor meet our current and future needs.*⁴

¹ Sherwood, J. (2010) *Do No Harm: decolonising Aboriginal health research*, PhD Thesis, UNSW, March; Bagele (2012) *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications; Dodson, M. (2000) ‘Human genetics: control of research and sharing of benefits’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, Spring-Fall, 71; Rigney, L-I (1999) ‘Internationalisation of an Indigenous Anti-Colonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies. A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and its Principles’ reprinted in *WICAZO SA Review: Journal of Native American Studies*, Fall, Vol. 14, Number 2, 109-122; Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999) *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*, University of Otago Press: Dunedin.

² Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999) *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*, University of Otago Press: Dunedin, 67, 1-2.

³ Sherwood, J. (2010) *Do No Harm: decolonising Aboriginal health research*, PhD Thesis, UNSW, March; Bagele (2012) *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 279.

⁴ Indigenous Data Sovereignty Communique (2018) Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit hosted by Maïam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, Canberra, June <http://www.aigi.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Communique-Indigenous-Data-Sovereignty-Summit.pdf>

Ethical research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

As a result of the history and context described above, ethical standards and guidelines have been developed for researchers seeking to undertake research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These are intended to ensure that researchers have given thought to the political, social and cultural context of their research, to the risks and sensitivities involved, and to how the project may work in collaboration with and to the benefit of the communities with whom they wish to work.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has a Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, structured around four principles of Indigenous self-determination; Indigenous leadership; Impact and value; and Sustainability and accountability, with integrity as a core ethical value at the centre. Each principle gives rise to responsibilities, as represented in the following diagram:⁵



⁵ AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Resesarch
<https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/aiatsis-code-ethics-jan22.pdf>

The NSW Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AHMRC) has also set out five key principles to be addressed by applications for NSW projects with a health and wellbeing focus for approval by its ethics committee:⁶

1. Net Benefits for Aboriginal people and communities: The benefits of the research may be for Aboriginal health in general or specifically for the health of Aboriginal people and communities participating in the project
2. Aboriginal Community Control of Research: Aboriginal Community Control must be a key focus of all projects affecting Aboriginal people. This means that at all stages of the research project, Aboriginal people and communities participating in or affected by the research will be fully informed about and agree with the purposes and conduct of the project.
3. Cultural Sensitivity: Cultural protocols and community decision making processes will vary between Aboriginal communities, researchers should consider this when designing a project.
4. Reimbursement of costs: There must not be any imposition upon Aboriginal people and communities to be involved in the research project.
5. Enhancing Aboriginal skills and knowledge: Build the capacity of Aboriginal people to participate in and lead research projects. Individuals may be from an Aboriginal Community Organisation, Aboriginal Reference Group, participants or researchers on the project team.

⁶ AH&MRC Ethical Guidelines: Key Principles (2020) V2.0 <https://www.ahmrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/V2.0-Key-principles-Updated.pdf>

The role of research in the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership

Yuwaya Ngarra-li seeks to build on the elements set out in these guidelines and integrate with the core principles that underpin the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership.

Five core principles were developed collaboratively between the DEG and UNSW and underpin all the work of the YN partnership. These were then further elaborated and grounded culturally and conceptually by Virginia Robinson, Walgett Aboriginal Elder, and Secretary of the DEG:

Community-led: Aboriginal Elders and local community organizations are best placed to lead the development of sustainable solutions that empower and strengthen their community. The focus is oriented to self-determination, with Aboriginal people being the leaders, engaged, and employed wherever possible.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li benefits from DEG's collaborative working relationships with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in Walgett to achieve positive outcomes for the community and implement programs using existing community strengths ... Local Aboriginal leadership in the planning, design and implementation of programs is a critical factor for Yuwaya Ngarra-li success in Walgett; something that is upheld as a primary operating principle. (Robinson, [2020](#))

Culturally connected: Aboriginal culture and knowledge is central and vital to strong, resilient, and flourishing communities. Elders have a significant role in contributing to family and community life.

Aboriginal culture is diverse, constantly changing and is a source of strength and healing ... For Aboriginal people living in a remote community like Walgett it is vital for them to connect with their culture to help them hold strong to their Aboriginal identity. Culture is important as it is what keeps Aboriginal people strong and happy; and is therefore acknowledged by Yuwaya Ngarra-li as a key strength and source of resilience. (Robinson, [2020](#))

Strengths-focused: Taking a strengths-based approach seeks opportunities to complement and develop existing strengths and capacities. This approach recognizes resilience and focuses on potential, interest, ability, knowledge and capacity, rather than deficits and disadvantage. The key strengths of the Walgett community relate to cultural beliefs, connections to country, family and community loyalty, and strong local community organizations. DEG Speaker Clem Dodd described the strengths-based approach of Yuwaya Ngarra-li in the following terms:

We work with the community where change requires the community to push a little and we push back a little – like a bow saw. Sawing together shows our partnership. We give them

the tool to see their strengths and identify their resources and then work together (quoted in Robinson, [2020](#)).

Holistic: Evidence in particular, from the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector supports a holistic model of care that understands individual health and wellbeing in the context of the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of their whole community (Brown, [1999](#)).

Most agencies and organisations cannot possibly meet every need in helping people to achieve goals/outcomes, however, by adopting a holistic approach Yuwaya Ngarra-li will be more in tune with the areas of assistance that people need and can achieve comprehensive and integrated service delivery using a referral network of appropriate local and accessible professionals, services and community groups. (Robinson, [2020](#))

Rights-based: Australia is a signatory to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which affirms that Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies to exercise their right to development, to be actively involved in determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them and to administer such programs through their own institutions. Australia is also a signatory to Conventions on the Rights of the Child and Rights of Persons with Disability and is a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals, all of which are relevant in the context of YN's work in Walgett.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li acknowledges that it is often due to the lingering effects of colonisation and oppression that Aboriginal people are vulnerable to discrimination and mistreatment and excluded from effectively participating in processes that affect their rights and means that today, they are more likely to experience poverty, imprisonment, poor health and restrictions on self-determination. The Declaration [on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples] creates a paradigm for Yuwaya Ngarra-li to make sure that issues are addressed by working directly in partnership with the DEG and the Aboriginal community, especially the gaps in health, their lives and imprisonment rates for Aboriginal people today. (Robinson, [2020](#))

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership was built from a qualitative research partnership between UNSW researchers and the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and Dharriwaa Elders Group that was investigating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with mental and cognitive disability in the criminal justice system.⁷ This research was informed by critical Indigenous methodologies,

⁷ The research was undertaken as part of an ARC Linkage project: 'Indigenous Australians with Mental Health Disorders and Cognitive Disability in the Criminal Justice System' The final report of that project including the research methodology is: Baldry, McCausland, Dowse & McEntyre (2015) [A Predictable and Preventable Path: Aboriginal people with mental and cognitive disability in the criminal justice system](#)

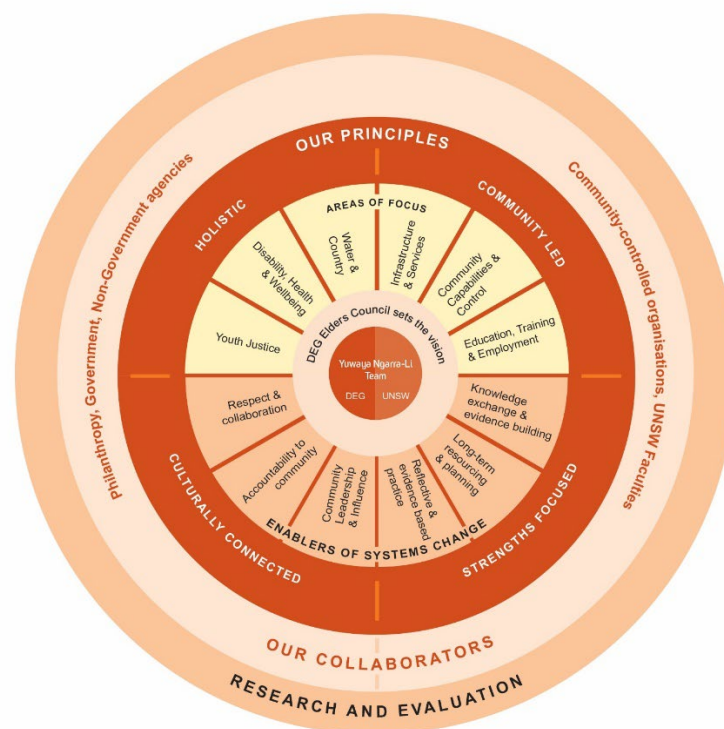
and sought to collaborate with community-controlled organisations and to privilege the voices and worldviews of Aboriginal peoples.

Building on this research collaboration, and after decades of observing and attempting to influence poor policy and practice by government agencies in Walgett, the Dharriwaa Elders Group invited UNSW to work in partnership to better inform and build the evidence base for improved holistic government service delivery, natural resource management and infrastructure planning. Yuwaya Ngarra-li also seeks to continue to contribute to quality research and education across all disciplines that builds Aboriginal community capabilities and control.⁸

The diagram below represents the way that research and evaluation underpin all aspects of Yuwaya Ngarra-li, and are guided by the core principles and priorities of the partnership.

YUWAYA NGARRA-LI

A community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW



COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

⁸ McCausland R; Spencer W; MacGillivray P; Robinson V; Hickey V; Baldry E; McEntyre E, 2021, 'CommUNItY-Led development: A partnership to realize Aboriginal Elders' vision for change', *Community Development*, pp. 1 - 19, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2021.1923044>

Building Walgett Aboriginal Community Capabilities and Control

Yuwaya Ngarra-li strives to ensure all research undertaken as part of its partnership adheres to its key principles and seeks to respect and build Walgett Aboriginal community capabilities and control in all aspects. In line with this, researchers wishing to work with Yuwaya Ngarra-li need to understand and commit to the following:

1. **Dharriwaa Elders Group sets the protocols, priorities, timeline and terms of engagement** for research and collaboration as part of Yuwaya Ngarra-li. While the timeframes and requirements of grants, ethics, field work and reporting prescribed for researchers are taken into consideration, the onus is on researchers to manage, adapt and negotiate these to fit around DEG protocols and priorities.
2. The process for becoming a research collaborator involves **invitation by the DEG, cultural induction, relationship building and ongoing accountability**. This will involve an initial visit to meet Elders and other community members once invited; completion of induction; negotiation of research questions in consultation with DEG to ensure it meets community priorities; designation of primary YN contact and how to communicate with various collaborators; periods of more intensive collaboration, relationship building and data gathering as required; reporting back on draft findings in appropriate formats, and follow up to ensure appropriate community input and impact.
3. **Respect for Indigenous Knowledges and local expertise**. Yuwaya Ngarra-li builds on the broader field of Indigenous Knowledges, however our partnership is grounded in local Walgett Aboriginal community expertise. Listening to and learning from local Walgett Aboriginal community expertise is critical, as is giving primacy to Walgett Aboriginal Community collaborators' voices and perspectives, even if researchers have worked with Indigenous communities in other contexts.
4. **Learning from existing knowledge, experiences, methodologies and past research** in Walgett. The Dharriwaa Elders Group holds significant research literacy and expertise given the long history of research that has taken place in and about their community, involving both positive and negative experiences. Researchers seeking to be a Yuwaya Ngarra-li collaborator should inform themselves of past research involving DEG, including qualitative research methods informed by critical Indigenous research methodologies (see Appendix 4).
5. **Building control, participation and capabilities** of Aboriginal people in all aspects of our work is a core responsibility of research collaborators. There are many ways to contribute

to this that can be advised by DEG, including developing and employing Aboriginal researchers in Walgett wherever possible.

6. **Data sovereignty and intellectual property** are to be negotiated by research collaborators with DEG and the YN Research Committee, including the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, storage, management, dissemination and reuse of data relating to the Walgett Aboriginal community. Community ownership and control of data should be prioritised, and the contribution and IP of DEG and other Walgett Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and individuals valued and acknowledged in all presentations and publications.
7. **Accountability and reporting back** to DEG and other Aboriginal community collaborators on research findings, outcomes and impact is a key responsibility of research collaborators through forums and mediums advised by the DEG, such as community workshops hosted at DEG and accessible community-oriented publications.
8. **Co-presentation and co-publication** of research methodologies and findings with Walgett Yuwaya Ngarra-li collaborators. Researchers should seek permission to speak and write about their YN-associated research and collaboration through the processes set out in this protocol. This includes inviting and ensuring resources are available for conference attendance for Walgett collaborators, and reporting back on any feedback and impact of presentations and publications.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Committee

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Committee is set up to ensure research conducted as part of our partnership is community-led, transparent and accountable to community interests, while not creating too much of an administrative, resourcing or time burden for the Dharriwaa Elders Group and other Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and community members in Walgett.

All discussion and documentation relating to research projects including grant and ethics applications, draft presentations and publications are coordinated by the UNSW Director for consideration and approval by the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Committee. The Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Committee is made up of:

- Associate Professor Ruth McCausland, UNSW Director
- Wendy Spencer, Walgett Partnership Manager
- Peta MacGillivray, UNSW Youth and Legal Advisor
- Professor Eileen Baldry, Academic Lead

Where deemed necessary by the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Committee and for all new research projects, documentation will be submitted for consideration and approval to the DEG Elders Council.

INTERNAL YUWAYA NGARRA-LI TEAM PROCESS

When Yuwaya Ngarra-li team members receive invitations to present or publish, or wish to propose presentations and publications regarding our work, the process is:

- Fill out Presentation or Publication proposal form and send by email to other members of the YN Research Committee for consideration and approval
- Referral to DEG Elders Council if deemed necessary by YN Research Committee

Presentations

- Powerpoint presentation and other draft materials should be distributed to other YN Research Committee members one week in advance of presentation
- Reporting back on presentation to DEG and other YN colleagues

Publications

- Distribution of draft publication to YN Research Committee in advance of submission for comment
- Report back on reviews, progress and publication to DEG and other YN colleagues

UNSW COLLABORATOR PROCESS

Research Projects

For all proposed research projects by UNSW collaborators other than student projects, the process is:

- Fill out YN Research Project Proposal Form (Appendix 1) and send to UNSW Director: ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au
- YN Research Committee will consider proposal and then refer to DEG Elders Council for consideration and approval
- UNSW Director will provide feedback on outcome and next steps, including who the primary contact person will be for researchers to liaise with

Investigators

- All potential investigators wishing to be involved in research projects must be approved by the DEG Elders Council. The Walgett Partnership Manager will advise on the appropriate process of introduction, induction and involvement of new investigators.

Ethics

- Individual researchers/projects are responsible for submitting their own ethics application to the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee and Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council Ethics Committee as required
- Draft ethics applications should be sent to the UNSW Director for input two weeks before they are due to be submitted
- DEG and UNSW Director can provide letters of support for ethics application with two weeks advance notice of deadline for submission

Student Projects

For all proposed student projects, the process is:

- The student with their supervisors fill out YN Student Project Proposal Form (Appendix 2) and send by email to UNSW Director: ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au
- (YN staff will not co-supervise research projects unless specifically negotiated, but can provide advice at key points in the research process, ie submitting ethics application, arranging induction and timing for visits to Walgett, reporting back)

- YN Research Committee will consider proposal and then refer to DEG Elders Council for consideration and approval
- UNSW Director will provide feedback on outcome and next steps, including who the primary contact person will be for the student and supervisors to liaise with

Ethics

- Students and their supervisors are responsible for submitting their own ethics application to the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee and Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council Ethics Committee if required
- Draft ethics applications should be sent to the UNSW Director for input two weeks before they are due to be submitted
- DEG and UNSW Director can provide letters of support for ethics application with two weeks advance notice of deadline for submission

Presentations

As a principle, all proposed presentations should include an invitation to the YN team to co-present, in particular considering Walgett collaborators.

For all proposed presentations on YN-related project methodology or outcomes, the process is:

- Fill out YN Presentation Proposal (Appendix 3) including abstracts and send to UNSW Director: ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au for consideration by the YN Research Committee at least two weeks before the deadline
- Powerpoint presentations and other draft materials should be sent by email to UNSW Director: ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au at least one week in advance of presentation
- Researchers should report back on the presentation and event, documenting any questions/interest/possible future collaborations or opportunities relevant to YN that arose as a result of the presentation

Publications

As a principle, all proposed publications should include an invitation to the YN team to contribute, in particular considering Walgett collaborators. YN understands that researchers need to publish peer reviewed articles to meet faculty and grant requirements and for career development purposes. All publications should make clear the various contributions that the DEG and other Aboriginal community collaborators and the YN team have made to the research and publication, and acknowledge data sovereignty and intellectual property.

For all proposed publications on YN-related project methodology or outcomes, the process is:

- Fill out YN Publication Proposal Form (Appendix 4) for articles and send to UNSW Director: ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au for consideration and feedback by the YN Research Committee
- Draft articles should be sent by email to UNSW Director: ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au for consideration and feedback before submission
- Researchers should report back on article submission and publication

Appendix 1: Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research Project Proposal Form

(complete and email to ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au)

What is the proposed title of your project?

Which investigators/researchers would be involved? From which faculties/centres/institutes?

Who is the primary research contact person? Who is the alternative contact person?

Do you already have funding for the project (ie for travel and accommodation, cultural and community induction, Aboriginal community participation, reporting back and co-presentation of findings)?

If yes, from what source?

If not, where do you hope to secure funding from?

Which YN or Walgett collaborators do you propose may be involved in your project?

Why do you think this research would be of value?

Which priority area/s for Yuwaya Ngarra-li does your project contribute to?

- Greater Aboriginal community control and capacity
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal young people in education, training and employment
- Reduced numbers of Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system
- Improved social determinants of health and wellbeing amongst Aboriginal people
- Increased sustainable management of water and country
- Redirection of government funding towards strengths-based, holistic, community-led initiatives

What is the proposed approach, methodology and timeframe for your research project?

What are the anticipated outputs and outcomes for your research project?

Appendix 2: Yuwaya Ngarra-li Student Project Proposal Form

(complete and email to ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au)

What is the proposed title of your project?

What is your name and degree?

Who are your supervisors? What faculty are they in?

Do you already have funding for your project if needed? (ie for travel and accommodation, cultural and community induction, Aboriginal community participation, reporting back and co-presentation of findings)

If yes, from what source?

If not, do you or your supervisors have ideas about where to secure funding from?

Why do you think this research would be of value?

Which priority area/s for Yuwaya Ngarra-li does your project contribute to?

- Greater Aboriginal community control and capacity
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal young people in education, training and employment
- Reduced numbers of Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system
- Improved social determinants of health and wellbeing amongst Aboriginal people
- Increased sustainable management of water and country
- Redirection of government funding towards strengths-based, holistic, community-led initiatives

What is the proposed approach, methodology & timeframe for your research project?

What are the anticipated outputs and outcomes for your research project?

Appendix 3: Yuwaya Ngarra-li Presentation Proposal Form

(complete and email to ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au)

What is the proposed title of your presentation?

Where and when would the presentation be, and who is likely to be in the audience?

Who are you proposing would present?

Do you already have funding for you/YN/Walgett collaborators to attend? If yes, from what source? If not, where do you hope to secure funding from?

Why do you think this presentation would be of value?

Appendix 4: Yuwaya Ngarra-li Publication Proposal Form

(complete and email to ruth.mccausland@unsw.edu.au)

What is the proposed title and abstract of your publication?

Who are the proposed co-authors?

Where are you hoping to publish?

Why do you think this publication would be of value?