Appendix G: Dhukarr'kurr Yan Marrtji: Larrum Yuwalkku

A Pathway for Collecting True Stories in Remote Indigenous Communities

This guide offers a pathway to assist people to work effectively with local Aboriginal people to collect information in remote community settings.

Sometimes when new people come into a community they work by themselves, and according to their own pre-existing cultural and/or professional ideals. These people can only collect the 'surface story'.

The process of collecting information, for research or other reasons, needs to involve people working together, who can complement each others skills and share understandings.

Following is a step-by-step process that provides a framework and pathway when undertaking research and collecting true stories in remote Indigenous communities.

THE FIRST STEPS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONDUCTING SAFE & ETHICAL RESEARCH IN A REMOTE INDIGENOUS SETTING

Step 1.1:
All researchers should be aware of ethical concerns and document ethical considerations and obtain ethical clearance accordingly

This link to the Menzies ethics website states the different documents that need to be referred to in preparing ethics applications and considering ethics issues:

http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Ethics_approval/

This link is a guide to Indigenous ethics as seen within one context:

http://yalu.cdu.edu.au/healthResources/research.html

Step 1.2:
When planning research, first find and form connections within the community

– Enter the community through existing relationships.

– Spend genuine and sufficient time with community people.

– Listen deeply.

– Introduce yourself and share some of your own story

– Take steps to be accepted; bring people together; demonstrate reciprocity or two-way actions: that is responding to positive actions with other positive actions.

– Avoid a "hurry hurry" attitude and approach.

Step 1.3:
Selecting local co-researchers/local workers

– Be guided by community elders, custodians and local advisors.

– Follow fair employment processes.

– Work with a group to maximise perspectives and inputs, and minimise individual pressures.

It is often best to collect stories slowly over a longer period – this allows more flexibility.

Step 1.4:
Researchers and co-researchers work together side-by-side

Discuss, negotiate and plan the research methods and the roles and responsibilities of all involved. Ensure shared understandings. Guide each other and work to individual strengths and social etiquette.

Understand and seek out the required training and resources – other people; knowledge; money; time.

Non-Indigenous researchers need competence in working collaboratively with local experts who have a deep understanding of communication practices and protocols in the local setting.

Indigenous co-researchers need a clear understanding of the research aims and desired outcomes.

Step 2.1:
Share the Research Story with the Community

Providing a clear understanding of the research project enables community members to create a picture in their minds. This process is important for finding both co-researchers, and participants who are interested to share their story.

Explain why you are doing the research and what you want to achieve.

Allow time for sharing of the research story within the community then seek support from community people.

If people recognise something – if it is familiar or understood by them, then they will be more likely to accept it; work with it; respond to it.

Step 2.2:
Finding Participants

Do you want to interview a broad demographic sample, or a more specialised sample?

Potential participants might hear about the research story when it is shared with the community, or through family, friends or colleagues. Some might be approached by a local co-researcher who has an understanding of a person's availability and potential.

Be opportunistic.

Share your research story again. Allow people to ask questions. Assess their level of interest. If willing and able to contribute, make a plan with participants about when, where and how they will participate in an interview.

Step 2.10:
Feeding Back the Story to the Community

Give participants the option of hearing the ideas and information collected from all of the stories. This might be done in larger or smaller groups. In addition to sharing the stories and research findings this provides an opportunity for checking the consistency and completion of ideas.

As appropriate, feed back the themes derived from the interviews to other groups of people in the community. This can help to share, verify and understand the ability to generalise the findings. Other community members may have more stories to add.

It can be great to share the project and the community's contribution at a community event such as a Healthy Life Festival.

The findings of the research should also be written up and fed back to the community in a formal report. Think about providing an oral report on video to communicate more effectively with people who are not literate in English.

Let the participants and others know what you will do with the findings.

Step 2.8:
Translating and Transcribing the Interviews

Reflecting on each interview and taking time & care during translation and transcription helps to ensure that we have captured the true story – that the person's true voice is being heard.

When translating into Standard English, interpretations need to stay true to the original meaning:

– Discuss specific words to find an appropriate translation

– Go over and over ideas/themes/words – listen to the interview again

– Researchers and co-researchers should reflect on interviews again after translating & transcribing each story

Step 2.9:
Cross-checking and Verification

Give participants the option to check that you have recorded their true story. Community researchers can advise how people may best verify the story, for example by reading the transcription or though a verbal discussion.
It may be necessary to translate the story back into the original language.

Allow participants to alter or add to their story.

Ask again if quotes can be used in reports or publications, and how the individual wishes to be identified/de-identified. If necessary, add this to the consent form.

REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Step 2.3:
Conduct the Interview When, Where and in the Language that Suits the Participant

In order to make people feel comfortable and to help to equalise any 'power imbalance', allow each participant to choose when and where they would like to share their story.

Use people's preferred language throughout all communication at every stage of the research – consultation and planning, obtaining consent, conducting interviews.

Researchers should be flexible and also consider other relevant cultural factors such as seating, location, timing, arrangements.

Indigenous co-researchers may conduct the interviews in local languages while the non-Indigenous researchers are present. Sometimes however, it may not be advisable for non-Indigenous researchers to be present.

Step 2.4:
The Process of Informed Consent

All participants will need to be provided with details about the process and purpose of the study, and provide informed consent. Consider:

– The details that needs to be conveyed in the project statement.

– The clearest language & expression.

– How to maximise and verify participant understanding.

– Written versus oral consent.

– Whether it may be most appropriate to obtain final formal consent after the interview process.

– Does consent need to include later use of quotes, names or images?

– Provide choice about remaining anonymous or being identified.

Taking food/beverages to the interview to share, or providing a food or electricity voucher after the interview may be suitable in order to thank people for their time and valuable contribution.

Step 2.6:
Recording Methods

Recording methods might include audio and /or video recording, or hand-written notes.

Consider participant preference (during the consent process), available resources, data required or desired.

Also remember to record the time taken for the interview.

Step 2.5:
Sharing True Stories: the Interview Process

After the participant understands and agrees to the research process, ask: "are you ready to share your story?"

Allow each participant to tell their story in their own way.

Don't rush – allow people the time that they need.

Follow the agreed research methods and chosen ways of gathering information (see also overpage/later discussion: How will the Stories be Collected?) and recording information (see step 2.6: Recording Methods).

Step 2.7:
Reflecting on the Interview

Researcher discussions following the interview provide an opportunity to synthesize the stories and information collected, and produce a clear shared understanding.

Researchers and co-researchers can share interpretations and reflections immediately after each interview, and add contextual thoughts to provide explanations, such as why someone gave short answers.

People want to know their story is valued and being heard.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS WHEN COLLECTING STORIES IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

HOW WILL THE STORIES BE COLLECTED?

Methods you can use include:

- In-depth/narrative interviews
- Focus groups
- Semi-structured questions/questionnaires
- Structured surveys
- Photographs such as in photovoice methodology
- Video-recordings

ALL STORY COLLECTION METHODS SHOULD CONSIDER:

- Social relationships within the community.

- Social and cultural appropriateness and acceptability.

- Language and effective communication practices.

- The possibility that people will agree, say what they think you want to hear, or say 'yes', when they really mean 'no'.

- Available time and resources.

GATHERING STORIES AND INFORMATION:

Guiding questions, themes, products or images can act as prompts to start people talking, elicit further information, or clarify part of people's stories. It might also be appropriate for one of the researchers to share some of their own story/experience.

Limit and define quantitative aspects in questions. For example, inquiries that relate to time should be linked to known periods such as seasons or community events.

People's sense of individual autonomy or self-dependence means that people will not speak for others. Questions need to be addressed only to the participant, rather than relating inquiries to others or to the community in general.

Pilot test any guiding questions or images. Ensure they successfully guide the process but do not influence people's responses and allow them to share in-depth ideas and knowledge from their own perspectives.

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school of health research
menzies.edu.au

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