

# Why researchers need to understand the importance of yarning for First Nations

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It's essential for non-Aboriginal researchers to establish relationships with First Nations people when conducting research in their communities.

Past research practices have left a legacy of mistrust toward non-Indigenous researchers among many First Nations people. This is because research has been steeped in colonial practices, including viewing research as something done *to* Indigenous peoples without them having a say in how they are represented.

First Nations people and [communities](#) have had data about them collected with little or no input into the processes or questions asked. Even now, standard questions used for [data collection](#) do not always acknowledge that First Nations ways of living may be [different](#) from the rest of the population.

This includes things like the effects of intergenerational trauma, the fact First Nations family systems often involve more people than are blood related, and different cultural needs within health services.

This is where research practices such as "yarning" can offer an opportunity to [establish relationships](#) with these communities.

Once researchers establish a connection with people from the place they're wishing to conduct their research, a mutual and inclusive relationship can be forged. This is essential to ensuring First Nations research participants are included in research, and not seen as [research subjects](#).

[Being able to build a relationship is vital](#) to ensuring the lives of First Nations people are accurately portrayed and recorded, participants are not taken advantage of, and communities can benefit from the research.

## **A history of research 'on' instead of research 'with'**

Since colonization, Indigenous people have had negative experiences of Western research. Through fields such as anthropology, First Nations

peoples were observed without permission, and had [remains stolen](#).

Because non-Aboriginal researchers lack significant knowledge about First Nations people, their cultures and societies have often been judged by the degree they [conform](#) to Western customs and norms. As a result, misconceptions have followed, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have received very [little benefit](#) from the research conducted about them.

However in the past two decades, research has been undergoing a [significant transformation](#). This is through incorporating First Nations practices such as yarning into the way research is conducted, providing additional insight into First Nations ways of being, doing and knowing.

Not only does yarning have the power to decolonize Eurocentric research practice, but it can also contribute to non-Indigenous researchers gaining a [better understanding](#) of Indigenous peoples and their communities.

## What is yarning?

[Yarning](#) is a tradition practiced for thousands of years by many First Nations people in Australia. It is an integral part of Indigenous ways of learning and sharing.

It is usually undertaken by Aboriginal people coming together informally to unwind or in more formal ways such as discussing community or cultural matters. Storytelling is an important part of yarning that allows for reflection on recent or past histories and lived experiences and sharing knowledge.

Researchers can take part in "yarning" by talking to First Nations people about where each of them is from, people they know in common, and their connection to the place on which they meet, just to give a few

examples.

## **Relationships are important in research**

[We have explored](#) relationships between researchers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, and have found building trust is essential, but can be difficult.

For example, we found when a young non-Indigenous teacher started work in an Aboriginal community it took her roughly a year before the Aboriginal community decided she was ready to know about their land and culture. According to the teacher, the time proved she was "serious" about being the children's teacher.

Researchers in First Nations communities need to make connections through sharing dialogs and lived experiences, mutual investment and building trust and credibility. This can be done by taking trips out to the bush and demonstrating commitment to the communities they wish to learn about.

Establishing relationships with the community like this also allows researchers to become acquainted with non-verbal communication such as [body language](#) and gestures fundamental to how some Aboriginal people interact.

Ideally these relationships should extend beyond local Aboriginal communities to relevant Aboriginal service providers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, academics and even park rangers. This will ensure additional background information, cultural contexts, and by extension, more robust research.

Researchers need to ask themselves how the research they are undertaking could have useful outcomes for communities, not just

academia. This reciprocity can potentially address mistrust with some First Nations people.

It's important researchers undertake culturally appropriate research that gives back to communities. Through establishing relationships and taking the time to listen to these communities, this will better ensure research undertaken is safe, ethical and useful for them too.

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