AES23 INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION CONFERENCE: **EVALUATION REPORT**

27 to 29 September 2023, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

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Overview

This report presents the design, planning, approach and findings for the evaluation of the Australian Evaluation Society's (AES) annual International Evaluation Conference which was delivered in Brisbane, Queensland from 27 to 29 September 2023. The evaluation was commissioned by the AES, and undertaken by University of Melbourne Master of Evaluation students, supported by the AES.

The evaluation was undertaken as a mixed methods approach, with the key performance indicator focusing on delegates' satisfaction with different aspects of the conference. The evaluation answered two key evaluation questions (KEQ) as set out below.

Throughout this evaluation, particular attention was paid to the diverse perspectives of conference attendees, particularly through the lens of First Nations delegates, evaluators at the beginning, middle, and expert levels of their careers, and non-evaluators who interface with the evaluation profession in varying capacities.

KEQ1: How valuable was the conference for the range of delegates?

Most delegates **found the conference to be valuable or very valuable** (86%, n = 222) overall, and felt the conference delivered overall value for money (88%, n = 222). There was also already strong interest in delegates to attend next year's conference in Melbourne (77.5%, n = 222).

The main reasons delegates attended the conference was to **hear from evaluation experts, learn about evaluation,** and **connect with people with common interests**, and responses showed a high level of satisfaction with these areas, and relevance of conference content. In particular, the **conference was incredibly successful at supporting attendees to make professional and social connections**—with connections made mostly in the breaks between sessions, the Gala Awards Dinner, and within sessions.

The rates of delegates' **evaluation-related learning at the conference have also been increasing over time** and peaked in 2023 with 85% (n = 222) of delegates confirming they learned about evaluation-related concepts at the conference they intend to incorporate into their work or workplace.

Overall, **delegates were highly satisfied across the different aspects, with interactivity, networking and skill-building opportunities being most highly valued**. There was no particular element that could be classified as 'least valued' across the board, however venue capacity was a commonly referenced challenge—stemming from the context of the Brisbane conference being postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and demand increasing beyond original expectations.

KEQ2: To what extent did the conference contribute to advancing the strategic priorities of the AES Board?

Delegates felt **the aes23 conference helped to advance the four strategic priorities of the AES Board**. Unsurprisingly, strongest support was shown for the 'relationships' priority, with nearly two thirds of respondents (65.9%, n = 222) viewing the conference as strongly contributing to this priority, and over half saw the conference as strongly supporting the 'building cultural capacity' and 'vitality' priorities (54.5% and 53.6% respectively).

Introduction

This report presents the design, planning, approach and findings for the evaluation of the Australian Evaluation Society's (AES) 2023 International Evaluation Conference (the conference).

The evaluand—AES23 International Evaluation Conference

The conference is designed and delivered over three days by the AES each year—with an organising committee established in the host state. For 2023, the conference was held in Brisbane, Queensland, from 27 to 29 September, with 589 conference tickets registered (Registration data, 2023).

The conference theme was 'through the lens', considering 'the power (of evaluation) to be the lens that transforms the way we see the world' (AES website, 2023). The theme had four parts:

- **Reflect:** *Understanding different ways of knowing to inform our theory and practice*

- **Refract:** *Adapting, growing and embracing diversity*

- **Refocus:** *challenging norms, practicing on the edge while maintaining our core*

- **Resonate:** *Building the translational process and transformative impact of evaluation*

The conference is a key activity of the AES, contributing to both its aim of improving the theory, practice, and use of evaluation, and to the financial viability of the Society.

The conference includes two days of 'pre-conference workshops'. These are out of scope of the evaluation due to time and resource constraints, however where collected data and feedback refer to these, they will be collated for AES awareness.

Evaluation purpose and approach

The goal of the evaluation is to provide summative findings on the merit (quality) and worth (value) (Davidson, 2005) of the conference for the AES, and with some formative information to identify areas for improvement for future conferences. This is a stand-alone evaluation for the AES, but will build on previous evaluations to support continued improvement.

This is a utilisation-focused evaluation (Patton, 2008), with the intended users and uses clearly identified and considered throughout the evaluation. It applies Scriven's (1991) logic of evaluation to systematically generate justified evaluative judgements about the conference. The evaluation also considers a values-based approach (Aronsson & Hassnain, 2019) to capture broad perceptions of value from multiple perspectives. This approach mirrors the conference theme—understanding and embracing diversity of views and values of delegates at the conference through different lenses.

Project stakeholders and deliverables

Primary intended users and uses

The primary intended users for this evaluation, and the intended utilisation of the evaluation, are:

- The **AES Board** (who commissioned the evaluation): to understand the impact and value of the conference to members and non-members in the evaluation community, including its contribution to the AES' strategic priorities.
- The **2023 AES conference organising committee**: to understand the impact and value of the conference they had organised.
- The **2024 AES conference organising committee**: to learn from the experience from the 2023 conference, aspects that were the most and least value to delegates, areas to retain and areas to improve for the coming year.

Other stakeholders

Other stakeholders who have an interest in the evaluation of the conference include:

- **Conference participants:** the key 'impactees' of the conference (including members and non-members, people with different roles in evaluation, and people from different backgrounds and cultural perspectives, including First Nations participants) who, as part of the evaluation community, have an interest in sharing their experiences and supporting continued enhancement of the conference.
- **Presenters (current and future):** those who are sharing their knowledge, expertise and experience with participants, to understand the reach and range of interests being catered for through the conference.
- **Sponsors and exhibitors (current and future):** those who have (or will) support the conference financially or in kind, will be interested in understanding the reach, impact, and alignment of values of the conference as part of their investment decisions.

Evaluation team

The evaluation has been commissioned by the AES Board, and was led by Helen McInerney, a Capstone student undertaking the Melbourne University Master of Evaluation in a volunteer capacity, supported by a research assistant and fellow Masters' student, Carla Pozo. Roles and responsibilities between Helen and Carla are delineated as follows:

- **Helen:**
  - lead on evaluation design, quantitative data collection and analysis, synthesis of findings
  - support on the ground qualitative data collection at the conference and transcription of interviews
  - deliver final report and presentation to the AES Board of key findings
- **Carla:**
  - lead on qualitative data collection, transcription of interviews and qualitative data analysis
  - support for the synthesis of findings

This evaluation has been supported by Dr Marion Norton, an AES Fellow and evaluation practitioner in the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General, as a dedicated evaluation fellow for this project.

Deliverables and milestones

An overview of the activities and indicative timeframes for this evaluation are outlined in **Table 1.**

Phase	Activity	Due date
Pre-Conference	Planning and development of data collection tools: • Design of the evaluation and planning for data collection and analysis • Drafting evaluation plan including Key Evaluation Questions and sub-questions • Design and build of post-conference survey • Development of interview guides and observation guides for conference-based data collection	10 September
	Feedback loop: ensure planning and design meets needs of 2023 and 2024 planning committees	17 September

Phase	Activity	Due date
	Final testing and refinement of data collection tools	21 September
Conference	Short interviews with delegates	27 – 29 September
	Observations from conference sessions	
	Other data collection activities that could be utilised at the conference to get 'live' feedback from delegates *(subject to capacity)*	
Post-conference	Invitation to complete survey to all delegates *[open for around two weeks, close 15 October]*	3 October (post-Public Holiday after the conference)
	Data cleaning (incl. transcription of interviews), analysis and synthesis between qualitative and quantitative data	30 November
	Draft report	15 December
	Final report	31 January 2024
	AES Board presentation	2 March 2024

TABLE 1: AES CONFERENCE EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND TIMEFRAMES

Key evaluation questions and sub-questions

The key evaluation questions (KEQ) for this evaluation are retained from the 2022 conference evaluation and are in close alignment with the KEQ from evaluations of the previous four AES conferences. Their continued relevance was confirmed by the 2023 and 2024 organising committees.

The sub-evaluation questions were developed through analysis of the previous four years' evaluation reports, with adaptation to remain relevant to the 2023 conference and future years. Feedback received from the 2023 organising committee was incorporated into the final set of sub-evaluation questions.

The structure and content of the sub-evaluation questions for KEQ2 were informed by the AES *Strategic Plan 2019-22* (AES website, 2023).

KEQ1: How valuable was the conference for the range of delegates?

1. What are the characteristics of delegates who attended the conference?
2. Why did delegates attend the conference?
3. What elements of the conference were most valued by delegates?
4. What elements of the conference were least valued by delegates?
5. To what extent did delegates perceive the conference as a good use of time and money?
6. To what extent did delegates perceive the 2023 AES conference as showing continuous improvement on previous AES conferences?

KEQ2: To what extent did the conference contribute to advancing the **strategic priorities** of the AES Board?

1. To what extent did the conference contribute to building **cultural capacity** within evaluation, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use?
2. To what extent did the conference promote excellence in evaluation practice and support clear professional and career **pathways** for evaluators?

3. To what extent did the conference represent **vitality** of the AES—meeting diverse member needs today and into the future?
4. To what extent did the conference support building of **relationships** and networking—enhancing collaboration and partnerships to strengthen the field of evaluation?

For this evaluation, 'delegates' encompasses conference participants, exhibitors, sponsors, presenters and organisers. This breadth helps ensure consideration of multiple perspectives.

Noting the diversity of the evaluation community and delegates at the conference, these KEQ were also explored through the lenses of delegates from different backgrounds to better understand what is of value for different cohorts and help the AES to target future efforts around cohorts of interest. Priority groups for consideration include:

- **First Nations people** – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from Australia, and First Nations delegates from other countries
- **Novice, junior or emerging evaluators** who are new to the profession
- **Intermediate evaluators** who are mid-way into their evaluation careers and developing expertise
- **Advanced or experienced evaluators** who have greater depth of understanding of evaluation
- **Participants who work adjacently to and in collaboration with evaluators** (e.g. government officials who commission and utilise evaluations in policy and program development and implementation).

Performance criteria

The evaluation of the conference is largely focused on the experience and perceptions of attendees around its value. The performance criteria for this evaluation are delegates' satisfaction with different aspects of the conference and with the conference overall. While a single performance measure is a limitation of the evaluation, where creating satisfaction for members and attendees is a primary goal of a service (as it is in the case of the conference), delegate satisfaction is a meaningful and legitimate measure (Lee & Nowell, 2015).

Methods and Methodology

Evaluation design

The evaluation adopts a mixed methods convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), utilising quantitative and qualitative data collected during and after the conference.

This evaluation was undertaken over three phases—

- **pre-conference** (late July to late September) in planning and designing the evaluation;
- at the **conference** (27-29 September) to undertake qualitative data collection; and
- **post-conference** (throughout October to December) collecting of survey responses, analysis and synthesis of data, and preparation of the final report.

The pre-conference work included:

- Document analysis to understand context and history of the evaluand and inform scope and design of the evaluation
- Developing and refining the KEQ and sub-questions to ensure they meet the needs of the primary intended users of the evaluation

- Development, testing and refinement of data collection tools
- Planning for phases two and three

The activities during the conference focused primarily on face-to-face data collection from delegates and direct observation of conference sessions and activities. The evaluation team also undertook additional data collection activities at the conference to get 'live' feedback from delegates, including incorporating questions into the 'Slido' app for the opening and closing sessions; designing a 'chart creation' interactive activity for participants with the different chart to contribute to each day; and providing a 'suggestion box' at for the final two days of the conference to allow for impromptu and anonymous feedback.

Post-conference activities focused on data collection from delegates and others through an online survey, followed by analysis of all collected data, synthesis and reporting on findings.

Cultural considerations

As many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participate in the conference, cultural consideration was critical for each stage of the evaluation, and the approach has been guided by the AES First Nations Cultural Framework (Gollan & Stacey, 2021). For example, in the designing of questions within the data collection tools, approaches that had been confirmed with First Nations people as culturally appropriate were adopted. When undertaking the interviews with First Nations delegates at the conference, the interviewers ensured they were open and listening actively to the interviewees. In the analysis and final reporting, care was taken to accurately reflect First Nations peoples' perspectives as they were provided. More holistically, throughout the evaluation, the evaluation team applied critical self-reflection to understand and acknowledge our different cultural lenses and how this could impact cultural safety for Australian First Nations people.

Data collection

Data collection was undertaken during and in the two weeks following the conference. At the conference, it included semi-structured interviews with delegates and observations captured by the evaluation team. Post-conference, a survey of delegates was undertaken using the AES Survey Monkey account.

In-conference interviews

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken during the conference as an opportunity to garner more detailed responses from attendees around their motivations for attending, their experience so far, and their perspectives on specific aspects of the conference.

Interviews were conducted by the evaluation team, with responses digitally recorded and high-level demographic information captured in writing on the one-page interview guide.

Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants—with interviewers utilising a standard script to ensure participants were aware of the context of the interview and how their data would be used. Participants were also offered a 'participant information sheet' with a written explanation of the evaluation, data collection, and contact details for the evaluation team if they have any further questions or concerns about the use of their data in the evaluation.

The sampling approach was a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The purposeful sampling ensured views and experiences could be sought from each of the priority cohorts, and those who had attended different session types (see Table 2 for categories and number of interviews sought for each).

Category	Sub-category	Minimum number of interviews sought	Achieved number of interviews
Level of evaluation expertise / involvement in evaluation	Novice or beginner evaluator	2	6
	Intermediate or experienced evaluators	2	27
	Non-evaluator (e.g. commissioner of evaluations such as government official)	2	3
Cultural background or nationality	First Nations	2	7
	International	1	5 (2 of them also Indigenous)
Session modalities	Skill building	1	5
	Ignite	1	8
	Interactive	1	12

TABLE 2: PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The minimum sample sought for interviews was 16—to ensure coverage across the purposeful sample, and a breadth of views were collected. In total, with two interviewers, 36 interviews were conducted from the afternoon of Day 1, through to the lunch break on Day 3 of the conference.

The 2023 in-conference interviewees shared the following characteristics:

Demographics

86% of the respondents were based in Australia, and 14% were from overseas (mainly from Asia/Pacific). In terms of cultural background, 7 out of 36 participants identify as Indigenous people.

State/Country	N Participants
WA, Australia	1
NT, Australia	0
QLD, Australia	5
SA, Australia	2
NSW, Australia	6
VIC, Australia	12
ACT, Australia	4
TAS, Australia	1
Cambodia	1
Fiji	1
New Zealand	1
Papua New Guinea	1
Solomon Island	1
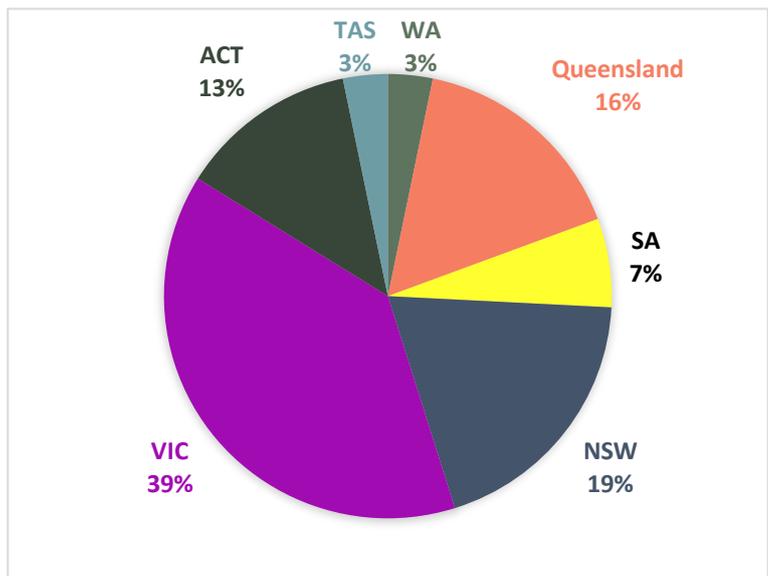
FIGURE 1. WHERE ARE YOU FROM? INTERVIEWEES BASED IN AUSTRALIA - AES 2023

Capacity attending and level of expertise

Most interviewees attended as participants (n=22, 61%) and participant/presenters (n=6, 16.6%), with 1 Participant/part of ICDC. Also, 4 interviewees identified as presenters (only), 2 identified as participant/scholarship recipients, and 1 as presenter/sponsor.

The sample captured the opinions of participants with different levels of self-reported expertise (see Figure 2 below).
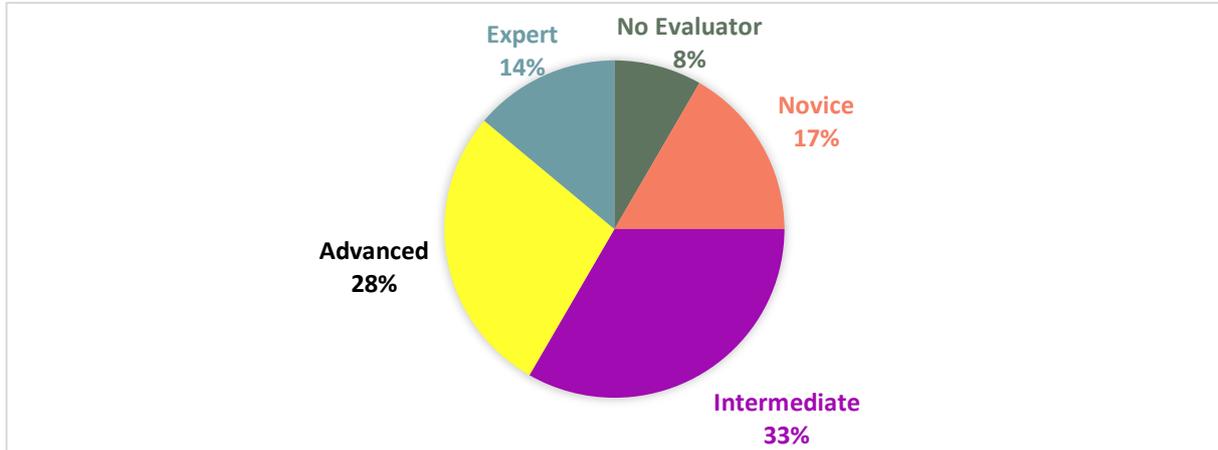
FIGURE 2. LEVEL OF EXPERTISE IN-CONFERENCE INTERVIEWEES 2023.

AES attendance and Memberships

Nearly half of the interviewees (47%, n=17) were attending an AES conference for first time, the other 53% (n=19) had attended two or more AES conferences over the years.

Twenty out of 36 participants were AES Members, ranging from 1 to 36 years as active members. Some of the participants who are not AES members declared that they did not know how to become members.

Roles (occupation) and Sector

Participants described a wide range of roles and sectors. The most common occupations were related to Research, Consultancy, MEL, Evaluation, Project lead/Manager, among others.

FIGURE 3. WORD CLOUD IN-CONFERENCE INTERVIEWS 2023, OCCUPATION.

In relation to the sectors, participants declared work in Cross-sector (3), Agriculture (1), Creative industries (1), NFP/NGOs (4), Education (4), Government & Public sector (7), Health (3), International development (3), Indigenous language (1), indigenous women health (1), Universities (2), Evaluation (3), Youth & Family (2), Other (1).

In-conference observations

The evaluation team attended the full range of session types throughout the conference to capture informal observations on sessions about how they were conducted. An observation guide was developed to assist the team to capture consistent information—focusing primarily on the audience response, mood and atmosphere and how sessions were managed, as well as considering the extent to which sessions contributed to the AES' strategic priorities to inform KEQ2. Actual session content is not included within the scope of this evaluation.

The range of sessions covered for observations included:

- Keynote speakers / plenary sessions
- Interactive sessions
- Skill building sessions
- Ignite sessions
- Short and long paper sessions

Sessions covered a mix of target audiences, including sessions directed to beginners, intermediate, and/or experts in evaluation, as well as those directed to all attendees.

Post-conference survey

The post-conference survey was built and distributed via Survey Monkey, using the existing AES account. It built on the survey used for the 2022 conference, informed by analysis of the past four evaluation surveys (2017, 2018, 2019 and 2022) with revised questions informed by feedback from the 2023 and 2024 conference organising committees.

The survey was designed to enable responses from conference attendees and non-attendees, including those who attended the pre-conference workshops only, or those who did not attend either event.

The survey was distributed via email to 605 conference and pre-conference workshop delegates on Tuesday 3 October—the week following the conference and taking account of a public holiday on the Monday for many jurisdictions in Australia. From the email, 196 complete and 33 partial responses were received (229 total—38% response rate).

To enable feedback from non-delegates around the conference, the survey link was also shared via the AES Newsletter (AES Alert 4 October 2023), receiving 34 additional responses.

The survey was open for just under two weeks—closing on Sunday 15 October, with two reminder emails sent out to delegates ahead of the closing date.

Other data sources

The evaluation also considers in-session data gathered through the conference application (Slido) and an in-conference 'chart creation' activity to get 'live' feedback from delegates (see below).

The AES23 Conference Program was analysed to understand the type and spread of sessions—particularly how this related to conference feedback.

A 'suggestion box' was also created and hosted at the information desk from Day 2 of the conference to allow for any quick, timely, and anonymous feedback to be provided. The box was promoted in the email notifications to delegates on Day 2, and three comments were received.

Slido in-conference application

In the opening and closing plenary sessions, the Slido app was used to ask delegates questions about their experience at the conference (mirroring post-conference survey questions). From the evaluation perspective, this allowed for a strong sample as nearly all delegates would have attended the plenary sessions, and most were engaged with using the app.

Response rates were high for the opening session in particular, with up to 402 responses. The final session had a lower response rate, with up to 105 responses.

Chart creation activity

The chart creation posed a different question on a poster each day with an empty chart grid, and invited delegates to place a colour-coded sticker as their 'data point' on the chart.

The colour coding for responses was: green = novice/emerging evaluator; yellow = intermediate evaluator; red = expert evaluator; and blue = not an evaluator.

The questions posed were:
- Day 1: *What are you most excited for at the AES23 Conference?* Four response categories were provided: *Connecting with people; Key-note speakers; Sharing my knowledge;* and *Learning about evaluation* (with a four-square grid for responses)
- Day 2: *How valuable and informative have you found the AES23 Conference so far?* A two-axis chart was provided with 'informative' on the x-axis and 'valuable' on the y-axis, with the scale from "not very" to "very"
- Day 3: *How has the AES23 Conference made you feel?* Four response categories were provided: *Inspired, Informed, Part of a Professional Community,* and *Professionally Satisfied* (with a four-square grid for responses)

While this was not scientific data collection, the activity was useful in collecting indicative views from delegates across the conference, and also opened up opportunities for the evaluation team to speak with people and conduct interviews.

Data analysis and synthesis

Analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data was undertaken separately, with results brought together for comparison and triangulation against the KEQ. This approach builds on similar approaches undertaken for previous conference evaluations (see Figure 4 below).

Source: Creswell and Plano Clark (2017)
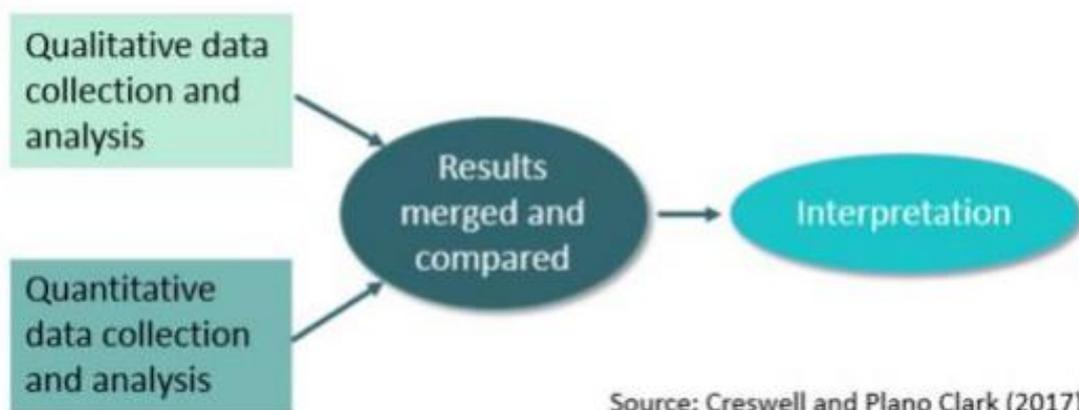
FIGURE 4: MIXED METHOD CONVERGENT DESIGN—AS PER 2022 AES CONFERENCE EVALUATION (LEE, 2022)

Interview analysis

Interviews were recorded using voice recorders and were transcribed verbatim by the conference evaluators. Data was imported into the computer software package NVivo V14 Plus to be analysed following a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019). An initial coding framework was developed based on the interview questions, and then distinct and independent subordinate themes were created using an iterative process until the lead researcher determined that the interviewees' experiences were well represented. As part of the quality assurance process, coding was cross-checked by evaluators, and the findings were discussed during analysis.

Survey analysis

The post-conference survey was primarily quantitative data, but also included some qualitative data from open text responses.

Quantitative data were analysed in Survey Monkey and Microsoft Excel (via data exports), allowing disaggregation of responses by various characteristics as well as comparison with previous years' responses to the same or similar question as appropriate and relevant to the KEQ. An initial extract of survey responses was shared with the AES team for early review by the conference organising committees.

Analysis included a range of steps, depending on the form of the question, including:

- Cleaning the data to identify the primary sample (i.e. those who attended the conference)
- Descriptive statistics from responses
- Checking against previous years' conference survey questions and results for comparisons
- Comparison between 'all' responses and those of the priority groups identified
- Thematic analysis of open text responses (inductive and deductive), and some transformation into quantitative data

Synthesis of data

Information gained from the different data sources were mapped against the KEQ and sub-questions (see the Evaluation Map at Table 3 below), and then compared to verify consistency. For the most part, the different data sources provided consistent responses—strengthening findings in the evaluation. In some instances, there were points of difference, however this is anticipated from data reflecting a broad range of views, and assists the evaluation reflect this diversity.

Ethical considerations and limitations

Ethical considerations

The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the AES' Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations (2013) and ethical considerations were applied to all data collection and use.

Informed consent was gained from all of those contributing data for the evaluation. In the interviews, this was verbal consent, with additional supporting information offered and available for participants. In the survey, information on the data collection and how the data would be used was provided up front before the survey commenced.

To protect privacy, in all analysis and reporting undertaken, care has been taken to remove any personal information of respondents and avoid responses being identifiable.

Ensuring cultural safety for First Nations participants was an overriding consideration in the shaping of interview and survey questions, undertaking the interviews, and analysing survey and interview responses.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this evaluation is that the data collected is not necessarily representative in a way that can be generalised to the whole population of attendees. As part of this, responder bias may also influence results—including whether they participated in interviews or the survey in the first instance, and for areas such as self-assessment of their evaluation expertise level.

It was also observed upon interview analysis that the question around the 'least valuable' aspect of the conference was confusing for some of the participants. We recommend replacing that question with an improvement or suggestion-focused question in the future. There is also a limitation on the self-reported levels of expertise, as we could observe that participants will judge their level differently based not only on the years on the field but also considering their personal standards of what an expert 'looks like'.

After the survey was undertaken, there were two instances where flaws in the survey question were identified. Where this occurred, analysis was either excluded, or included with explicit detail on the limitations of the data.

TABLE 3: EVALUATION MAP – KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS, DATA SOURCES, INDICATORS AND DATA COLLECTION

KEQ	Sub-question	Indicators	Data source: collection method
KEQ1: How valuable was the conference for the range of delegates?	1.1. What are the characteristics of delegates who attended the conference?	• Profession / industry • Evaluation experience level • AES membership • Role at the conference • Age / Gender / Nationality / Cultural background • Number of conferences attended • How much of this conference they attended	• Registration system: questions asked at ticket purchase • Delegates: survey, interviews
	1.2. Why did delegates attend the conference?	• Delegates' perspectives on importance of different elements of the conference • The value delegates were seeking from the conference	• Delegates: survey, interviews
	1.3. What elements of the conference were most valued?	• Conference organisation elements with highest degree of delegate satisfaction • Conference presentations with highest degree of delegate satisfaction • Delegates' perspectives on elements of most value	• Delegates: survey, interviews
	1.4. What elements of the conference were least valued?	• Conference organisation elements with lowest degree of delegate satisfaction • Conference presentations with lowest degree of delegate satisfaction • Delegates' perspectives on elements of least value	• Delegates: survey, interviews
	1.5. To what extent did delegates perceive the conference as a good use of time and money?	• Delegates' perspectives on value of the conference • Delegates' perspectives on whether conference represents value for money • Source of funding for conference attendance • Extent to which delegates planning to attend future conference	• Delegates: survey, interviews,
	1.6. To what extent did delegates perceive the 2023 AES conference as showing continuous improvement on previous AES conferences?	• Delegates' reflections on experiences from different conference events • Delegates' perspectives on what would like to see more or less of • Delegates suggestions for improvements • Extent to which delegates perceptions of the conference had improved on previous years	• Delegates: survey, interviews

KEQ	Sub-question	Indicators	Data source: collection method
KEQ2: To what extent did the conference contribute to advancing the **strategic priorities** of the AES Board?	2.1. …. building **cultural capacity** within evaluation….?	• Extent of participation by First Nations delegates • Extent of focus on cultural capacity within conference program • Degree of relevance of presentations by Indigenous evaluators for delegates • Delegates' perspectives on the balance of presentations by Indigenous evaluators • Delegates' perspectives on degree to which conference contributed to building cultural capacity • Degree to which delegates' learned about cultural capacity-related concepts that will be incorporated into their work	• Delegates: survey, interviews • Document: AES23 Conference program • Slido app: analysis of question responses / participation levels
	2.2. …support clear and professional career **pathways** in evaluation?	• Extent to which delegates formed professional connections • Delegates' perspectives on degree to which conference contributed to supporting clear and professional career pathways	• Delegates: survey, interviews • Document: AES23 Conference program
	2.3. …represent **vitality** of the AES—meeting diverse member needs today and into the future?	• Proportion of new and returning delegates • Perspectives of different groups of AES members on the conference organisation and presentations • Delegates' perspectives on the effectiveness of the theme • Delegates' perspectives on the effectiveness of the attracting participation (presentations and attendance) from range of industry sectors	• Delegates: survey, interviews • Slido app: analysis of question responses / participation levels • Document: AES23 Conference program
	2.4. …building of **relationships** and networking—enhancing collaboration and partnerships to strengthen the field of evaluation?	• Extent to which delegates formed professional connections • Delegates' perspectives on how social and networking experience can be improved	• Delegates: survey, interviews • Document: AES23 Conference program

Evaluation findings: perceptions of value (KEQ 1)

What are the characteristics of delegates who attended the conference? (SQ1.1)

Personal characteristics

Most respondents were 30 and 49 years old (60.4%, n = 212), around a third (32.1%) were over 50 years old, and a small proportion were under 30 (7.6%) (see Figure 5, Survey Q38). While not directly comparable, these demographics are in line with ages of respondents at the 2018 and 2022 conferences (Survey comparison, Survey Q38).
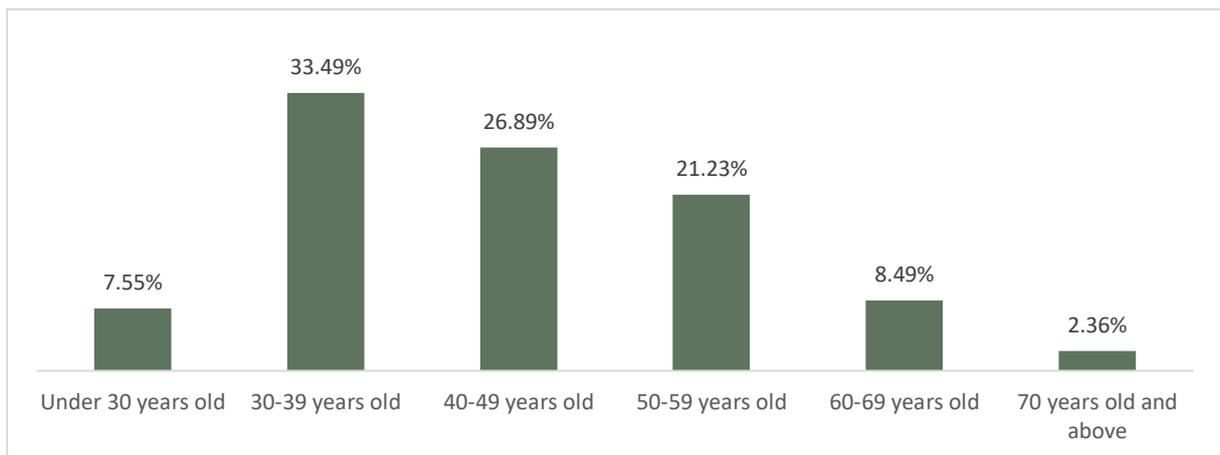
FIGURE 5: RESPONDENTS' AGES

A **large majority of respondents were women** (78.5%, n=214), 19.2% men and 2.3% preferring not to answer. No survey respondents identified as non-binary, genderqueer or transgender (Survey Q39)**.** This representation by women at the conference is consistent with previous years, with women representing 76% and 74% of respondents in 2022 and 2018 (Survey comparison, Survey Q39).

There was strong representation by First Nations people—**13.6% of respondents identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Māori, Pacific Islander and/or other Indigenous origin**, 85% identified as non-Indigenous, and 1.4% preferred not to specify (n = 214) (Survey Q41). This is similar representation as in 2022 (where 14.9% of respondents identified as Indigenous), and maintains growth from 2018 and 2019 (9.5% and 7.1% respectively) (Survey comparison, Survey Q41).

Geographical characteristics

In 2023, **most respondents were from Australia (89%), and 11% from overseas** (n = 402) (Slido 1, 2023). Australian respondents came from all states and territories, with strongest representation from the Eastern States: Victoria (28%), Queensland (17% local to Brisbane and 4% from elsewhere in Queensland), New South Wales (20%), Australian Capital Territory (10%), Northern Territory (3%), Western Australia (5%), South Australia (1%), and Tasmania (1%).

Similar results were found in the **survey**—most respondents were living in Australia (88.8%, n = 214), and a comparable share of representation across states (see Figure 6, Survey Q40).

For those from overseas, most were from New Zealand (3.7%) and 7.5% from other countries including Fiji, Cambodia, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Timor-Leste, Tonga, the United States of America, and Vanuatu (Survey, Q40).
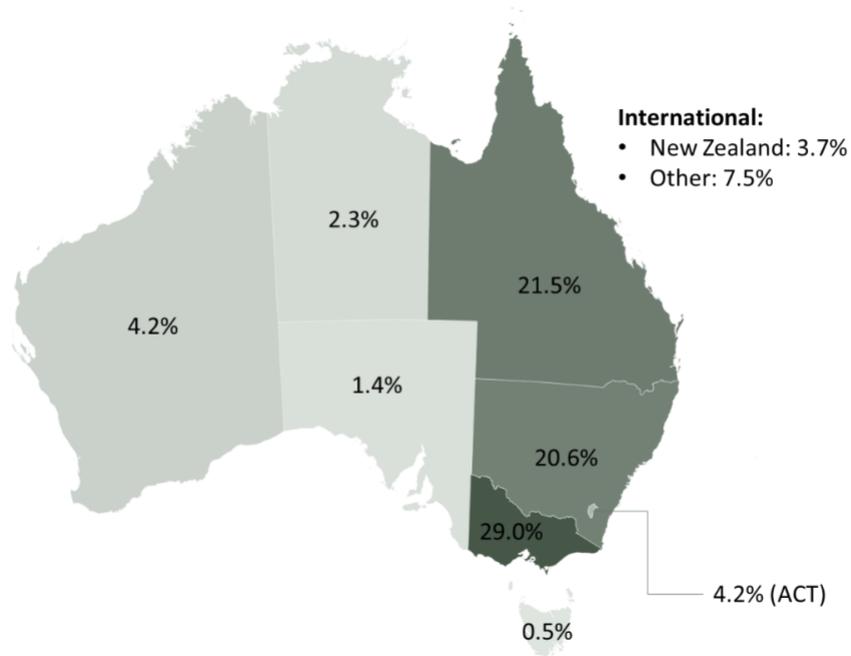
FIGURE 6: WHERE RESPONDENTS LIVE (N = 214) *MAP POWERED BY BING USING ABS DATA, SURVEY Q40*

This was an increased representation from international respondents from the 2022 conference (7.8%), however still lower than international representation from pre-COVID years of 2017 (17.25%), 2018 (15.5%) and 2019 (12.6%) (Survey comparison, Survey Q40).

The shares of attendances between states and territories within Australia has remained relatively steady over the past few years, except for the increased representation from the hosting jurisdiction. For example, Queensland's representation in 2022 was 9.7% and in 2019 was 7.5% (compared with 21.5% as the host state). For South Australia hosting the 2022 conference, their representation was 11.9% (compared with 1.4% this year and 4.3% in 2019), and New South Wales hosting the 2019 conference had 29.1% attendance, compared with 20.6% this year and 22.3% last year (Survey comparison, Survey Q40).

Professional characteristics

The conference attracted a diverse range of attendees from **different areas of the evaluation profession** and a variety of **expertise**. Around **half the conference attendees (48%) would call themselves an evaluator**, nearly a fifth (19%) wouldn't, and for a third of attendees (33%) 'it depends on who is asking' (n = 402) (Slido 1, 2023).

Most respondents' main role in evaluation is designing or conducting evaluations (55.9%) (see Figure 7, Survey Q36). A quarter of respondents (25.5%) were from the other side of the evaluation process—including commissioning or contracting evaluation projects (10%), contributing data or information to evaluations (9.1%), running programs or projects evaluated by others (3.6%), or reading or using evaluation reports and findings (2.7%). A smaller proportion (16.4%) were involved in the academic contexts, either studying or learning about evaluation (1.8%), teaching evaluation (0.9%), or teaching *and* conducting evaluations (13.6%). Only a small number of respondents indicated no current involvement in evaluation (2.3%, n = 22).
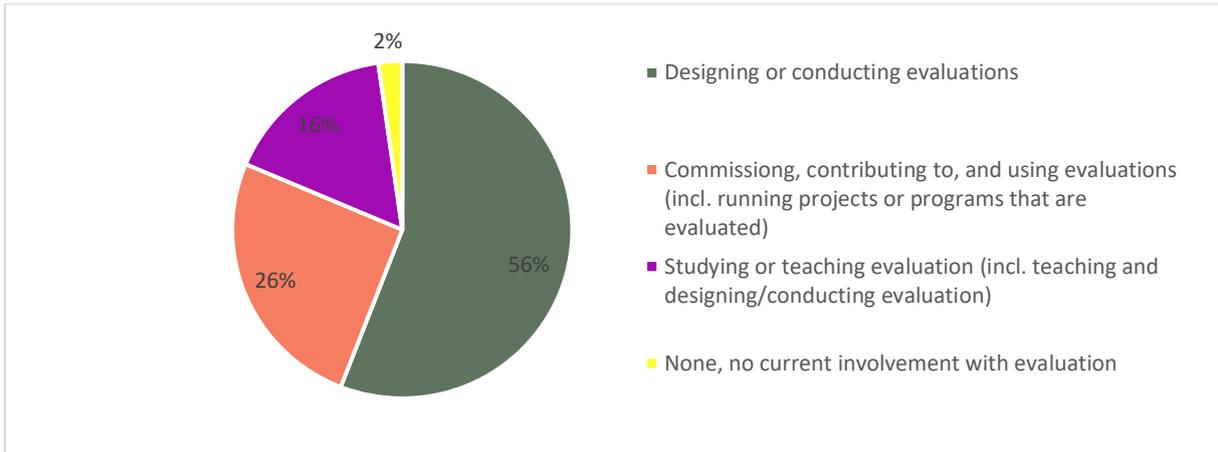
FIGURE 7: RESPONDENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN EVALUATION

This balance has been consistent across recent years. While the proportion of respondents whose main role is designing or conducting and evaluation is a decrease from previous years—since 2017, this has always been over 60% of respondents' main roles, peaking in 2022 at 68% (Survey comparison, Survey Q36)—this anomaly is likely due to the inclusion this year for the category to capture those who both teach and conduct evaluations (Survey comparison, Survey Q36).

Most respondents had an intermediate level of expertise (41.4%, n = 220), 17.7% were novice or beginners in evaluation, and 36.8% were advanced or expert (see Figure 8, Survey Q32). These shares have been relatively consistent over the past four conferences (Survey comparison, Survey Q32).

Only 4% did not own any expertise in evaluation—which is relatively higher than previous years (1.5% in 2022, 2% in 2019 and 2.7% in 2018) (Survey comparison, Survey Q32).
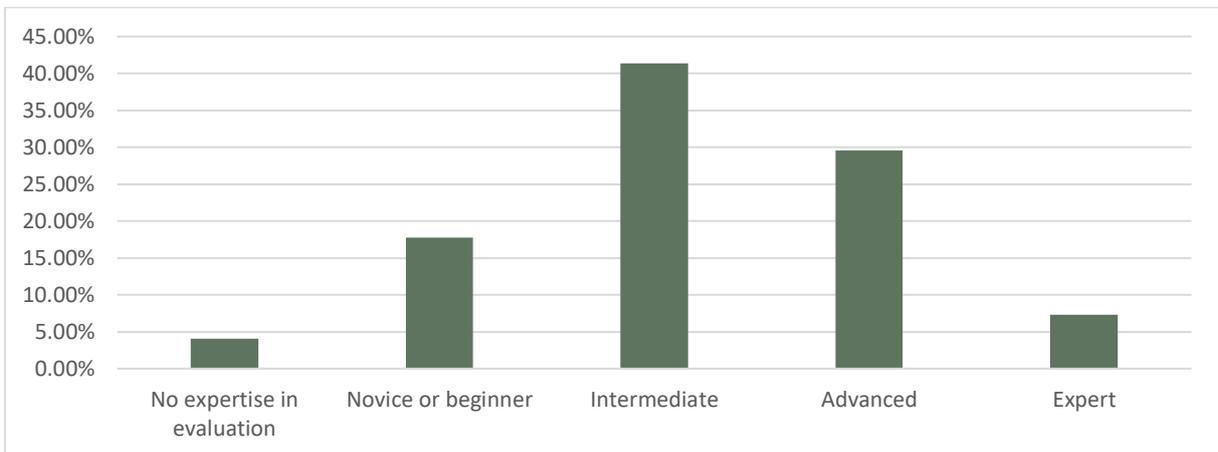
FIGURE 8: RESPONDENTS' EVALUATION EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Respondents represented a range of **sectors and industries**. **Sectors** represented included government (35%, n = 220) (mostly Australian federal, state or territory level); private sector, including consultancies (29.6%); community or non-profit sector (24.6%); and academic sector, including university staff and students (10.5%) (Survey Q33). This was growth in private sector representation from 2022 (which was 21.7%), and slight decline in representation by the community or not-for-profit sector (which was 27.2%) (Survey comparison, Survey Q33).

Most respondents (63.4%, n = 216) worked in **people-focused industries** most of the time such as community and social services (27.8%), health and disability (18.5%) and education and training (17.1%) (See Figure 9, Survey Q34).
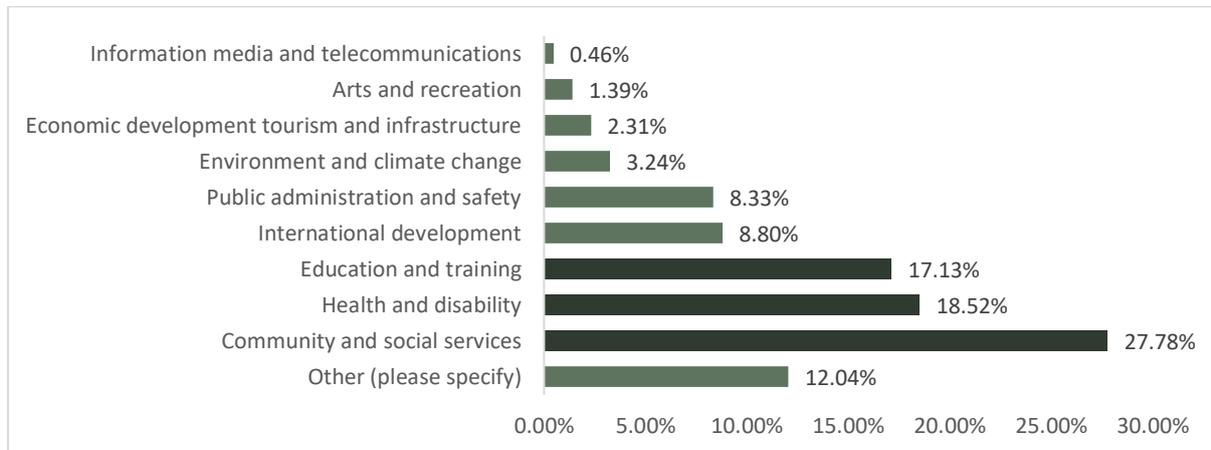
FIGURE 9: INDUSTRIES RESPONDENTS WORK IN

A small proportion of respondents were **leaders in their organisations** (CEOs or equivalent, 5.5%, n = 219). Most attendees (65.8%) were midway or well progressed within their careers, including subject matter experts, technical advisors, senior staff or senior executive leaders and 15.5% were entry level or junior staff in their organisation. Other attendees were self-employed (11.4%) and 1.8% reported themselves as students, academics or researchers (noting that people working in this context may also be captured in the other categories) (see **Figure 10**, Survey Q35).
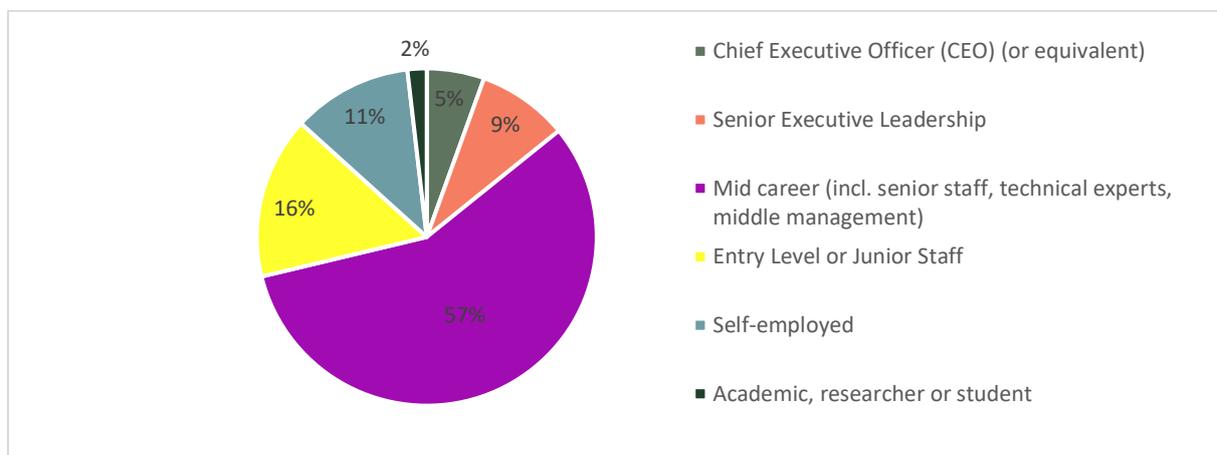
FIGURE 10: RESPONDENTS' PROFESSIONAL SENIORITY

Most respondents were AES members—either individually (58%), through their organisation (13%) or both—or considering joining or rejoining (22.2%, including one of the 'other' respondents). Only 5 per cent of respondents indicated they were not interested in joining the AES (Figure 11, Survey Q37). There have only been a few percentage points difference in each of the categories across the last four conferences (Survey comparison, Survey Q37).
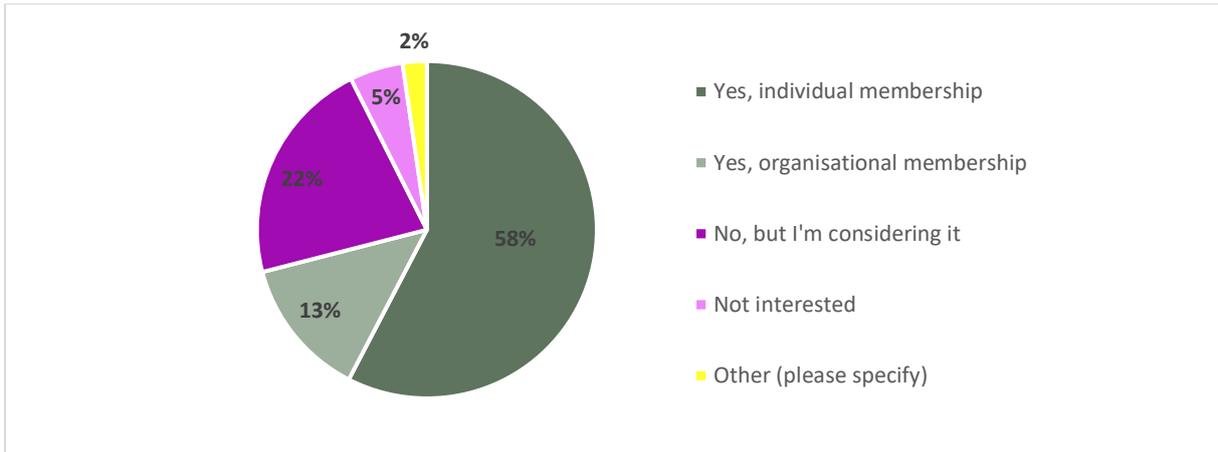
FIGURE 11: RESPONDENTS' AES MEMBERSHIP

Conference attendance characteristics

Delegates attended the conference in a **range of capacities**. Most classified themselves as a **participant** (94%, n = 249), nearly a third as a **presenter** (30.5%), and a small proportion as **exhibitors** (4%), **sponsors** (3.2%) and **organisers or volunteers** (4%). Other capacities included as **session chairs**, and as **grant or sponsorship recipients** (Survey Q2). This distribution has been relatively consistent across the past four conferences—around 90% as participants, and around 30% as presenters (Survey comparison, Survey Q2).

Nearly all (90%, n = 249) delegates **attended all three days of the conference**, 4.4% attended two days (most were Wednesday and Thursday, one attended Thursday and Friday), and 4% attended only one day of the conference (most on Wednesday, one each on Thursday and Friday) (Survey Q3).

While most survey respondents attended the conference only and not the pre-conference workshops (65.1%), 31.7% attended both conference days and workshop sessions (Survey Q3).

In 2023, **56% of respondents attended the AES Conference for the first time** (n = 402) (Slido 1, 2023). This was in line with the survey results—51% noting this was their first conference (n = 249). From the survey, around a quarter of respondents have been to two or three AES conferences (including aes23) (26.9%), and 22.1% have attended four or more AES conferences (see Figure 12, Survey Q4).
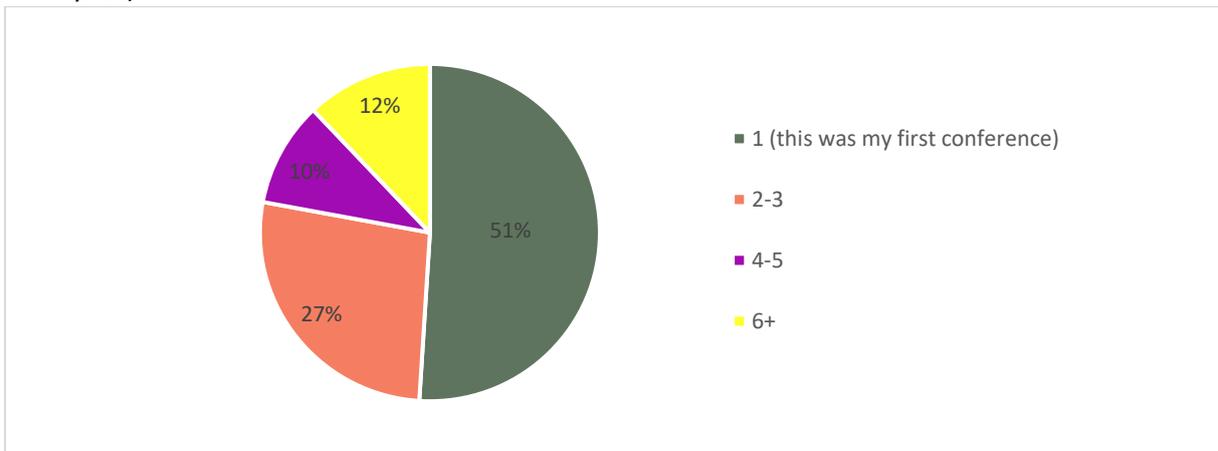
FIGURE 12: NUMBER OF AES CONFERENCES ATTENDED, *SURVEY Q4*

While this was a decrease in the proportion of first timers from 2022 (which was 58%), this result would be expected given the 2020 and 2021 conferences did not proceed (and so there would be a

greater pool of people new to evaluation attending for the first time in 2022). Similarly, in 2023, there has been a jump in the proportion of respondents who have now attended 2-3 conferences (from 18.8% in 2022) (see Figure 12, Survey Q4). It will be interesting to monitor future conferences to determine if there is continuing growth in the profession, or if it starts to consolidate (Survey comparison, Q4).

Three quarters of respondents (75.5%, n = 249) were employer-funded to attend the conference, 18.5% were self-funded, and 6% attended on scholarship or grant. There was some overlap in these categories, for example where costs were jointly covered by employers and participants (Survey Q5). This was fairly consistent with the 2017 and 2018 conferences when this question was previously asked (Survey comparison, Survey Q5).

Most respondents (54.8%, n = 221) did not use social media platforms to talk about the conference. For those who did, **LinkedIn—the professional networking site—was a clear preference (46.6%)**, followed by Facebook (10.9%). Very few respondents posted on Instagram, X or TikTok. In addition to these common platforms, four respondents also noted they used 'within office' communication systems for talking about and promoting the conference (Survey Q18).

Why did delegates attend the conference? (SQ1.2)

The main reasons delegates attended the conference was to **hear from evaluation experts, learn about evaluation,** and **connect with people with common interests**. These reasons were consistent across the opening session Slido poll (n = 399) (Slido 1, 2023), the 'create a chart' activity from Day 1 which asked "What are you most excited for at the AES23 Conference?" (Figure 13) and the post-conference survey which asked respondents what factors were most important in deciding to attend the conference (see Figure 14, Survey Q6).

The motivations showed similar trends across the five priority groups, with particularly strong importance given to 'acquisition of theory or practical ideas about evaluation' from beginner and intermediate evaluators, from First Nations attendees, and from non-evaluators. For advanced

FIGURE 13: DAY 1 'CREATE A CHART'

evaluators, connecting with people was the most important reason for attending the conference (Comparisons, Survey Q6).

From the Slido poll, a small proportion of attendees (16%) noted part of their motivation for attending was to share their knowledge with others (n = 399) (Slido 1, 2023). This was consistent with the 'create a chart' activity (Figure 13), where 'sharing my knowledge' was an exciting factor for more expert evaluators. It also aligned with survey results—being able to present was not important to a third of respondents, but still very important to 28% of respondents (Figure 14, Survey Q6).

Areas highlighted in open text responses to Q6 in the survey (N = 74) reflected the importance of:
- conference content (n = 23)
- quality, reputation of the keynote speakers and presenters (n = 17)
- the theme (n = 13)
- being able to learn about evaluation and stay current on emergent practice (n = 11)
- catching up with friends and colleagues and leveraging networking opportunities (n = 9).
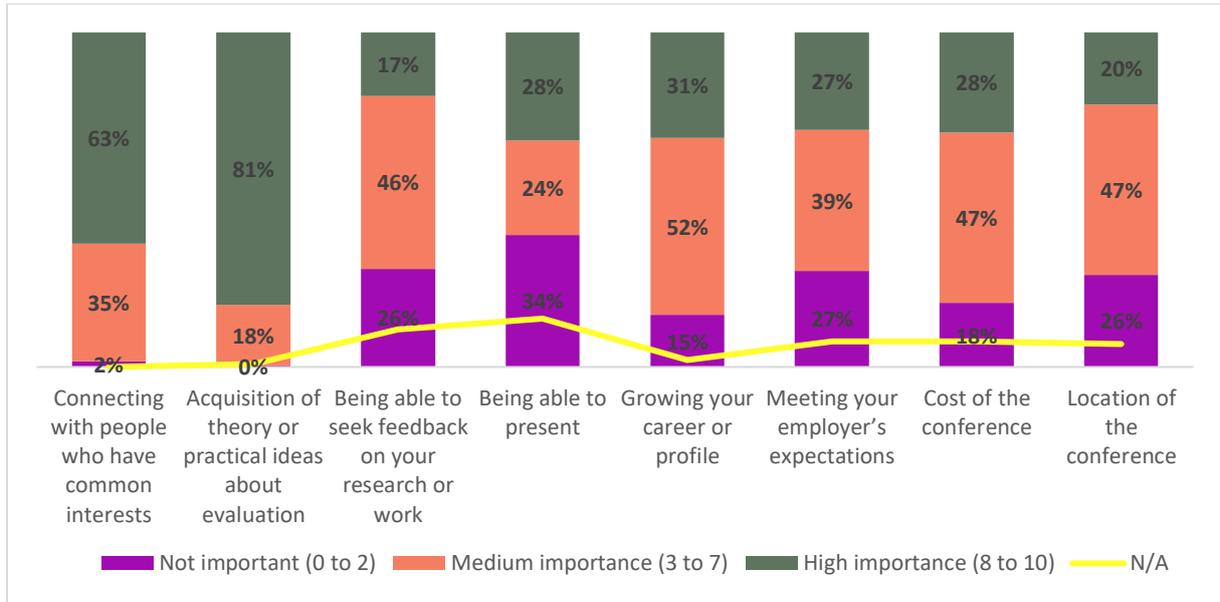
FIGURE 14: RESPONDENTS' REASONS FOR ATTENDING THE AES CONFERENCE

Outside of the most common motivations for attending the conference, other considerations recurring in the survey comments included the value of having early access to the program to make informed decisions, balancing personal and work commitments, the convenience of attending because of the time of year, and the relevance of the content.

Specific areas of interest that respondents referenced included:
- the inclusion of First Nations content (including for the Pacific)
- interest in theory of evaluation
- interest in systems thinking and complexity
- interest in industry contexts – for legal profession and for government

Two respondents also referenced AES-related motivations—as a conference organiser, and in relation to AES business of the AGM, fellows and awards announcements.

In-conference interviewees provide similar reasons to survey respondents for attending the 2023 AES conference. Most mentioned the **'Learning opportunities'** as key motivators, including learning on specific areas of evaluation theory and practice such as qualitative and participatory methods, evaluation and policy decision-making, and ways to collect information from vulnerable or culturally diverse groups.

> *I'm attending the conference because I have a strong interest in policy and in ways to improve policy decision-making. Both my team and my organization are very interested in better understanding how we can use evaluative thinking about it with methodologies, valuation more genuinely, to better inform policy cycle and better inform decision making, particularly around tax policy, but more generally, how we, how we do policy well.* **Interview N12, AES 2023**

> *To hear more about the latest methodologies, methods for evaluation, data collection, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and to hear a bit more about qualitative research techniques like participatory and empowerment techniques like photovoice I've heard some things about, and ways to collect information from*

*people who are particularly vulnerable or cultural groups. Trying to learn new information to take it back to my team in the Centre. **Interview N11, AES 2023***

Interviewees also highlighted their **motivation to learn from experts** and peer evaluators and about the **latest trends in the evaluation** field to improve their practice.

I really like to learn stuff – I always learn new ideas when I get to talk to cool evaluation people, and this is where all the cool evaluation people come out. ***Interview N03, AES 2023***

*To learn more about what's happening in the wider evaluation society. And you know, improve practices based on that. **Interview N20, AES 2023***

*To learn new ideas. I'm kind of an intermediate evaluator, but I'm always learning and all my new clients are always challenging me to come up with new and better ways to support them in their evaluation needs. So I'm here to learn! **Interview N23, AES 2023***

Alongside learning, interviewees also mentioned **'Networking'** as a motivator to participate. They valued the sense of community among peers and the chance to meet new people in the field and potential clients.

*I like having nerdy evaluation conversations with evaluation nerds, and because everyone here is really nice, and because – as someone who works independently, this is a great opportunity for me to make more contacts and get different work with more people. **Interview N03, AES 2023***

*I've been to nearly, I would say, every conference for the last 30 years, because I see friends and I can interact with other evaluators, and I learn all the time. So that's my main reason for coming. **Interview N06, AES 2023***

Some international participants gave relevance to the **networking opportunities across the region**, seeing the conference as an opportunity to build connections and potential partnerships.

*…being new to this part of the world, to network a bit and meet some clients and potential clients or other evaluators or people we could work or partner with. So a bit of everything! **Interview N35, AES 2023***

Finally, a few participants named being a '**presenter**' or a '**work representative**' as some of the reasons for participating in the AES2023.

*To present – that was the main reason. But obviously attending to see and hear about what's going on in the evaluation space in different sectors and in the same sector in different areas. **Interview N07, AES 2023***

*My boss told me to! We were mostly interested in the co-design presentations. So that's something we've been focusing on a little bit in our work. So we were interested to hear all about what people have to share in that space. **Interview N22, AES 2023***

To what extent did delegates perceive the conference as a good use of time and money? (SQ1.5)

Most delegates **found the conference to be valuable or very valuable** (86%, n = 222) overall, and very few (1%) did not find the conference valuable (Survey Q22). Similarly, 88% (n = 222) of delegates felt the conference delivered overall value for money—however some comments reflected on high costs presenting difficulty to attend, particularly for sole practitioners or non-profit organisations to cover the cost (Survey Q23).

These perceptions of value were relatively consistent regardless of whether attendance was self-funded or employer-funded (Survey Q22 and Q23 with Q5 overlay).

In the clarifications provided by survey respondents on the question of overall value (n = 22), only four were critical and fifteen were positive. Areas of criticism included high cost, and requests for different content (more advanced, more entry-level and more sessions focused on quantitative methods). Positive feedback highlighted acquired knowledge, opportunities to be involved and feel welcome at the conference, and inspiration gained from attending the conference and hearing from a diverse range of speakers. (Survey Q22).

The broad sense of value for conference delegates was reflected in the final conference session Slido poll, where conference participants were asked to describe their experience in one or two words, and the overwhelming view of attendees was positive (n = 105) (Figure 15, Slido 4, 2023).

FIGURE 15: WORD CLOUD FROM THE FINAL CONFERENCE SESSION (SLIDO 4, 2023)

At the end of the conference, **most respondents felt inspired, informed, part of a professional community and/or professionally satisfied** (82.8%, n = 257), with the first three categories resonating most (Survey Q19). These feelings were consistent with the 'create a chart' activity from Day 3, which asked "How has the AES23 Conference made you feel?" (Figure 16).

Around two thirds (68%, n = 44) of the comments shared in the 'post-conference reflections' were positive. These reflected a sense of pride and inspiration across the evaluation sector from respondents, as well as commenting on the value of attending such an event in person and the connection with community that it fosters (Survey Q19).

FIGURE 16: DAY 3 'CREATE A CHART'

Some of the critical reflections included some feelings of disappointment or confusion from the conference. These related to a mixture of specific conference content and overall impressions. Three respondents commented around the level of opposition they sensed around randomised controlled trials (RCTs), one noting *"I was expecting the AES community to be more willing to listen to diverse views and experiences"* (Survey Q19).

Perceptions of value can be seen in the range of practical learning that participants gained at the conference to be able to apply back into their work or workplace. Most respondents (85%, n = 222) learned evaluation-related concepts at the conference that they intend to incorporate into their work. For those who indicated they did not learn new concepts, three respondents reflected that they benefited from the conference in other ways—including hearing about good practice Indigenous approaches, learning more about others' experience with concepts they were familiar with, or confirming their own approaches in seeing how others applied them (Survey Q23).

Value is also seen in the level of interest from delegates to return to the conference in 2024. Most respondents (77.5%, n = 222) are interested in attending the aes24 conference in Melbourne in 2024 and very few (3%) indicated they are not interested in returning next year (Figure 17, Survey Q24). This is consistent across the priority groups, with particular interest in attending next year from First Nations people (86.21%) and advanced evaluators (80.25%) (Priority group comparisons).
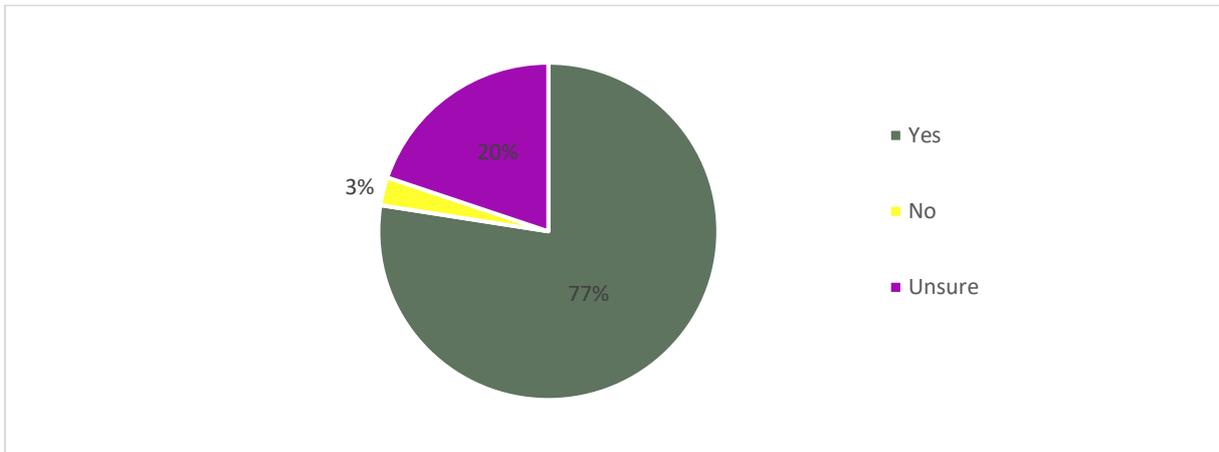
FIGURE 17: RESPONDENTS' INTEREST IN ATTENDING NEXT YEAR'S CONFERENCE

What elements of the conference were most valued and least valued? (SQ1.3 and SQ1.4)

This section examines which conference elements were of most and least value to delegates in 2023, across conference organisation, session types and content, and conference events and networking.

Overall, **delegates were highly satisfied across the different aspects, with interactivity, networking and skill-building opportunities being most highly valued**. There was no particular element that

could be classified as 'least valued' across the board, however venue capacity was a commonly referenced challenge—stemming from the context of the Brisbane conference being postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and demand increasing beyond original expectations.

Most valued

In-conference interviewees mentioned several elements as 'most valued', such as **applicable learning, networking, access to experts**, and **work validation.**

Applicable learning

Many interviewees reflect on the value of practical or applicable learnings from the conference. They mentioned experience-based learnings as crucial for their work, and their aim to learn from different perspectives and from first-hand experience how to improve their evaluation practice. Specifically, some participants mentioned evaluative thinking culture, knowledge sharing, evaluation maturity matrix and strategy, participatory research, and ways to engage with indigenous communities, as examples of applied learning.

> *Most valuable – the stories, the examples, people share of their own practice and what they've done. And where it went wrong and what they did to resolve that – that's super helpful. Interview N23, AES 2023*

> *Yeah, it's a really big part of my work – I work in a First Nations team, so I want to make sure that I can support them as best possible without loading them with questions all the time that I can figure out for myself. So it's directly linked to my work. Interview N01, AES 2023*

> *I think my favourite part – the talks have been fantastic, and the variety of talks and learning about different approaches, and the same approaches applied in different contexts. Because I work in the not for profit sector, I'm always focused on one thing, but hearing how things I've applied are applied in different contexts broadens my understanding of things and challenges the way I do things and makes me more flexible. Interview N09, AES 2023*

> *Some of the sessions that are more practical – so the sessions that are sharing tools or frameworks that people are using and that I might not have heard of in my work already. So I think that practical aspect has been really good as well. Interview N07, AES 2023*

Other participants suggested that for future AES conferences would be interesting to **learn from 'failure' or challenging experiences** to complement the views of the applicable learning, and to use the unique AES community space to reflect on these areas.

> *Making participants more aware of this is an open space (…) share some failure from your work, we know that these are not perfect topics or methodology. It has a lot of issues. And they should feel free to reflect on the failure and be open about going to the challenges that they face. So we don't see much of that part of the discussion here. Most people, what do you see here is having a more success, focus and sales strategy here to pitch into the people. Interview N21, AES 2023*

Networking opportunities

Besides the learning aspect, interviewees also highly valued the **networking opportunities** of the AES2023, noting the positive environment and sense of community as a promoter. Participants mentioned that this was relevant as it allowed them to create connections with people in similar roles, working on similar themes and with similar interests.

> *Some of the networking, 100%. Which I know is a bit cliché, but I often walk away from a conference and have not made contacts necessarily. But **I've actually taken away about four or five phone numbers from this one, so there's some sense of synergy or energy that's drawing people together***. Interview N24, AES 2023*

Participants value the face-to-face format, and the perceived collegial environment of the conference. They see the networking as a door to new possible learning opportunities – particularly from evaluators who do not have extended teams.

> *For me, **it's been coming and meeting people in person like people who you often communicate on video call or by an email** or you say something on LinkedIn and actually being able to talk to people in person. (…) **It's the human element**, and yeah, and even like with my team, we're not always in the same location to actually just being together. And **I feel like the richness of the conversations that you have and the connections that you can make with people just better in person***. Interview N20, AES 2023*

> *I think just in general, be**ing immersed around a lot of people who are of a similar mindse**t. You know **in our office, there isn't a lot of people who work in the evaluation space, so being around such a huge number of people who are all interested in the same thing and you can just learn so much just through the conversations** - not just sitting and listening to presentations – you just learn, you know, in the coffee line – you're still learning. **Interview N31, AES 2023***

Some self-reported beginner evaluators and international evaluators perceived as valuable the creation of **meaningful connections within their local context** (i.e. same state)

> *I think networking with people, realising that there are people in my state who are in a similar boat, and then working connections, I think, is the outside of the content the of the sessions. I think that's been the most rewarding part. **Interview N16, AES 2023***

> *The networking aspect is probably the most valuable meeting different people, especially the Pacific Island community and linking connecting some of the dots and some of the work that's happening, there are a lot of similarities and a lot of threads. **Interview N15, AES 2023***

Access to experts—especially from First Nations experts

Interviewees valued the **access to experts, especially the learnings related to First Nations people**. Some of them compared their previous experiences in other conferences, whereas others liked the personal insights and practical learnings from First Nations academics and presenters.

> *I value the contributions of the indigenous people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and people from other communities and that's something that's been stood*

out as being done better than some conferences I've been to. **Interview N18, AES 2023**

There are so many First Nations academics and other professionals. It has been really valuable to hear from their experiences and their challenges and insights and knowledge. That was really valuable, because I don't get to speak with experts. **Interview N02, AES 2023**

I really liked learning a bit more about these Indigenous evaluation properties – again, coming from the UK, new to me. So even trying to comprehend the different world views and 'how does that effect me and my work?' 'how can I engage or partner?' – so that's probably the most useful thing to understand that a bit better, from those people. **Interview N35, AES 2023**

A space to validate their work/practice

A few participants considered the possibility of **validating their work and practice among peers and learnings from experts** to be the most valuable element of the 2023 conference.

*A lot of **confirmation about the way that we work and are working**, and identification of tools that show the way other people are talking about the same thing – so that's useful – direction to other people's terminology, particularly government terminology.* **Interview N33, AES 2023**

*…. But also, actually, the other thing is that I often find presentations, rather than necessarily telling me something new or giving me… **actually validate what I'm doing already and I just might not have the name for it or have branded that method or whatever. So it's often quite a validation of my work**. Interview N26, AES 2023*

Least valuable

Some interviewees hesitated to respond when asked about **'what was least valuable?'**. Others considered logistical elements such as **room size** (overcrowded), **session schedule**, **food** and **information prior to the conference**. Interviewees also comment on the **30-minute sessions** and their perception of **keynote speakers**.

Room size (overcrowded) and session schedule

Some interviewees referred to some logistical aspects of the conference as the 'least valuable element'. They provide feedback based on their experience in some of the small rooms, which tended to be overcrowded and on some particular elements of the conference schedule (parallel sessions, distance between rooms).

*No, I wouldn't say I don't value it. But **I would just say there's some logistical like the room downstairs is very, very small, and it's really stuffy.** And, you know, that's where the a two one is much bigger than a one is like a little teeny weeny.* **Interview N19, AES 2023**

The organisers of the conference would have anticipated this** – sessions I really wanted to attend I would have had to sat in the seat at the beginning of the break to get in. So I was **really disappointed to miss out on some sessions**, and I do hope – one hope as a consequence of this evaluation – **there's a possibility of re-presenting

some of those presentations again online – whether they are recorded or presenters persuaded to do it again. Interview N36, AES 2023

*I think the schedule **I have never seen a conference schedule so full** - and I've been to quite a few - I think that's amazing in terms of the opportunities that you have. I am mindful that there are going to be sessions that I miss out on because of other times. **And I think just like a real nitpicky moment is, like having a few minutes in between each session would be amazing in order to get from one room to another.** Interview N16, AES 2023*

Information prior to the conference

A first-time participant who is not part of AES believes that there is room for improvement in the communications for new attendees prior to the conference. Particularly regarding **guidance on workshops and presentations.**

*It was probably again more for those participants who maybe don't have existing connections, or aren't existing members who aren't as familiar. **Maybe there could have been some sort of more specific communications to those people who are first-time attendees. Interview N11, AES 2023***

*Probably just in terms of in the lead up to the conference itself, **maybe didn't sort of receive as much information about some of the workshops and the other activities**. As much as maybe it would have been good for someone who hasn't attended the conference before. Not really knowing what maybe the value of those things might have been. And think less about the social activities but maybe more about some of the specific workshop-style activities and whether or not they were going to be relevant. **Interview N11, AES 2023***

30-minute sessions

Interviewees also reflected on the **length of the presentations**, with some of them considering that 30 minutes does not allow them to explore themes in depth. There were also comments from I**ndigenous interviewees, mentioning the relevance of cultural aspects** (such as presenter introduction) as an element to factor in their presentation time.

*I think that some of the sessions that have been half an hour could have been a lot longer. So I think it's hard, when you have such high-quality presenters, I guess it's hard for them to condense their sessions to such a short time. So I think it can be good to have a lot of variety, but **I think some of those sessions need to be in a bit more depth**. Interview N29, AES 2023*

*And in some of them, they had half hour time slots but they had to rush through or miss out on some of their presentation, because the thirty minutes is gone *clicks* - very very quick. And **because as Indigenous people we always introduce ourselves and where we come from and that sort of stuff, so that takes at least 10 minutes, so you've only got 20 minutes to present. And that's the way that we do our presentations**. Interview N32, AES 2023*

Keynote speakers

Finally, a few interviewees mentioned **the keynote speakers** as the least valuable element of the conference. This perspective was justified by their preference for more practical approaches and another level of engagement.

Um, least valuable – probably the keynotes? I don't know why – I just like the more grounded stories and I take more from that. And the keynotes are useful, but I feel like I want to have a one on one conversation to dig down a bit more. **Interview N23, AES 2023**

Uuuum, let's see…. The keynotes are hard to get right, I think. So I have, not just this year, but I've often found the keynotes often the least kind of engaging or something – but maybe that's because I'm not a deeply theoretical evaluator, I'm more really practical stuff. So the keynotes can sometimes be a bit patchy for my particular interest. **Interview N26, AES 2023**

Conference organisation

Overall, delegates were **highly satisfied with the conference organisation**. Of the aspects that were put to respondents, over two thirds reported very high levels of satisfaction with the start and finish times (88.4% and 76%, n = 225), the venue and registration process (80.4% and 77.8%), both conference digital applications Slido and Sched (72% and 71%), the program guide (76.6%) and the assistance received from conference organisers (71.6%—noting this category also had 11.1% indicate not applicable) (Figure 18, Survey Q8). These trends were fairly consistent across each of the priority groups (Comparisons, Q8).

Most delegates were **highly satisfied with the catering** (65.8%), only 4.4% very unsatisfied. The open text responses provide more insight into these results—feedback on catering was one of the most frequent topics, appearing in a quarter of the comments. While a number of comments praised the food generally, some concern was raised around the options for people with dietary requirements, and seven people suggested more availability of fruit as snacks would be a positive addition. One person suggested that this could be available throughout the day as "*a healthy sugar kick in the afternoon or a healthy alternative for breakfast when the morning tea is usually cakes.*" While not a broad response, three people commented on the amount of food and potential for waste and impact on cost (Figure 18, Survey Q8).

Only one interviewee with dietary requirements considered the limited options for catering (in contrast with the AES 2022 Conference) as one of the 'least valuable' elements of the conference:

> *The food – I've got dietary requirements, and I've found the dietary requirements table offers very limited options compared to the non-dietary requirements. And compared with the last conference, I really enjoyed the food at that conference, so I had high expectations and they've not been met.* **Interview N10, AES 2023**

A **small proportion of respondents were unsatisfied with the Sched app (4.9%)**, with the comments reflecting this may be connected with some platform issues around the users' planned schedules not updating or the system not working on a user's phone, as well as some interface frustrations. Some of the practical suggestions provided included '…*defaulting to displaying the sessions that are on at the time the app is opened, instead of starting at the top of the list every time…*' or *'…be able to select which day, and hide sessions already attended'* (Figure 18, Survey Q8).

Common topics across the comments related to:
- Room sizes and capacity at the venue, and other venue issues
- Session programming (including non-conference activities and timing of session)
- Food and catering
- The digital applications Sched and Slido
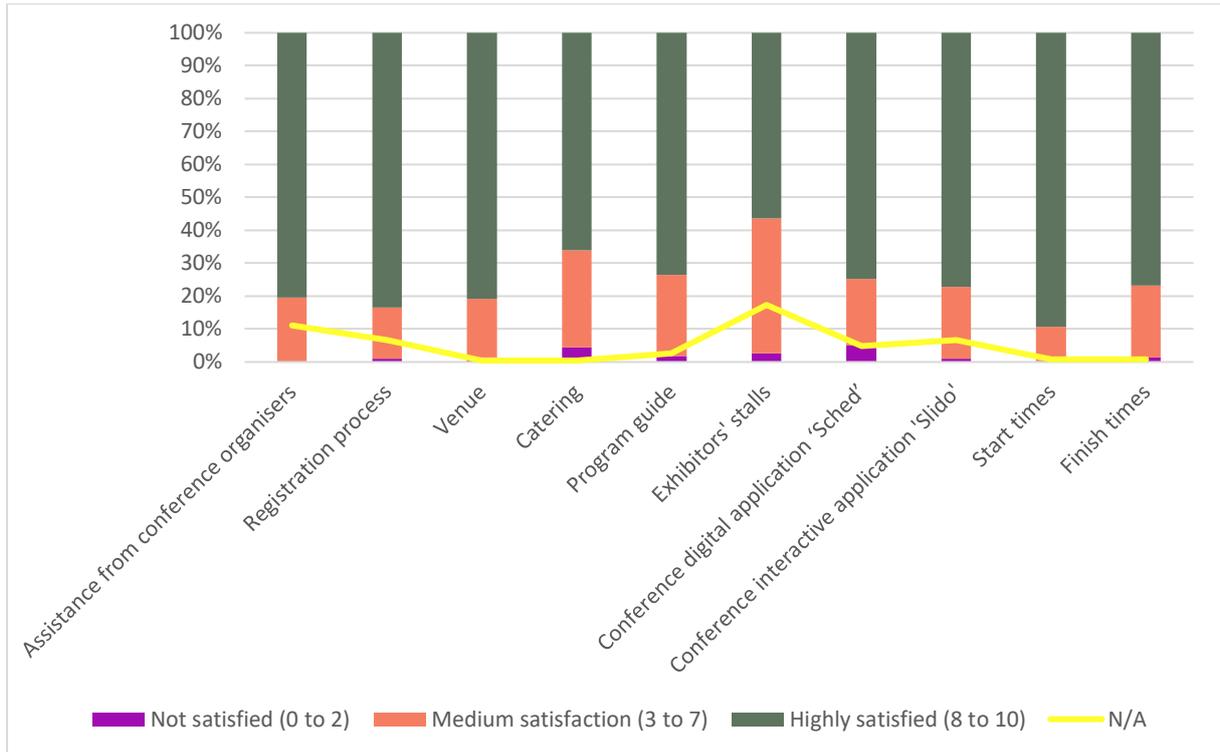
FIGURE 18: RESPONDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH CONFERENCE ORGANISATION

Respondent feedback indicated **opportunities to strengthen the new program function to be able to filter the program by nine industry categories** that was introduced in 2023. As a new function, there was not broad awareness of it in 2023 (only 20% of respondents indicated awareness, n =225), and while a number of respondents noted the transferability and applicability of evaluation across industries, there was general support for the function in terms of being able to inform which sessions to attend. Specific feedback included suggesting inclusion of international development, differentiation between public administration and safety, and inclusion of philanthropy and/or non-government organisations (Survey Q14 and Q15).

Relevance of sessions

Across the different types of sessions, **nearly all respondents found the session contents relevant or highly relevant**. Individuals' average responses across all session types were very high—nearly half (47.1%, n = 223) of respondents rated sessions between 8 and 10 on average and for 42.6% gave average ratings between 6 and 7 (Figure 19, Survey Q10).
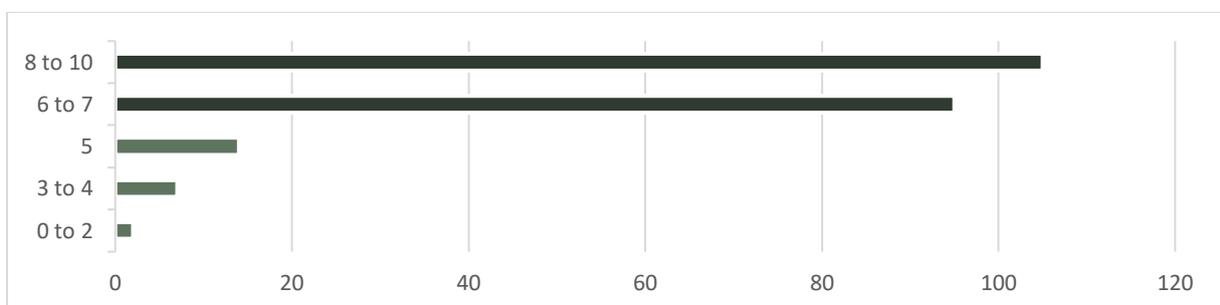
FIGURE 19: COUNT OF AVERAGE RELEVANCE RATING (EXCLUDING 'NOT APPLICABLE') (N = 223)

Sessions resonating most with most respondents were the key-note speakers (68.9% rating as highly relevant, n=225), skill-building sessions (67.6%), and presentations by Indigenous evaluators (64%)

(Figure 20, Survey Q10). These type of sessions were particularly relevant for First Nations delegates, non-evaluators, and beginner and intermediate evaluations (Comparisons, Q10).

Interviewers perceived that the sessions were valuable due to their practicality, the diversity of themes, and how engaging the presenters were. The analysis shows a general positive perception of the presenters and the diverse formats used.

> I think **this is one of the most engaging conferences I've attended**. Sometimes, I have a tendency to sort of glaze over and just go into almost like a daydream mode - particularly in workshops - when you know, it's just someone talking it doesn't matter how interesting the topic is, it's just very heavy content. And it takes it takes it out of you. But **this has just been really, really engaging and energis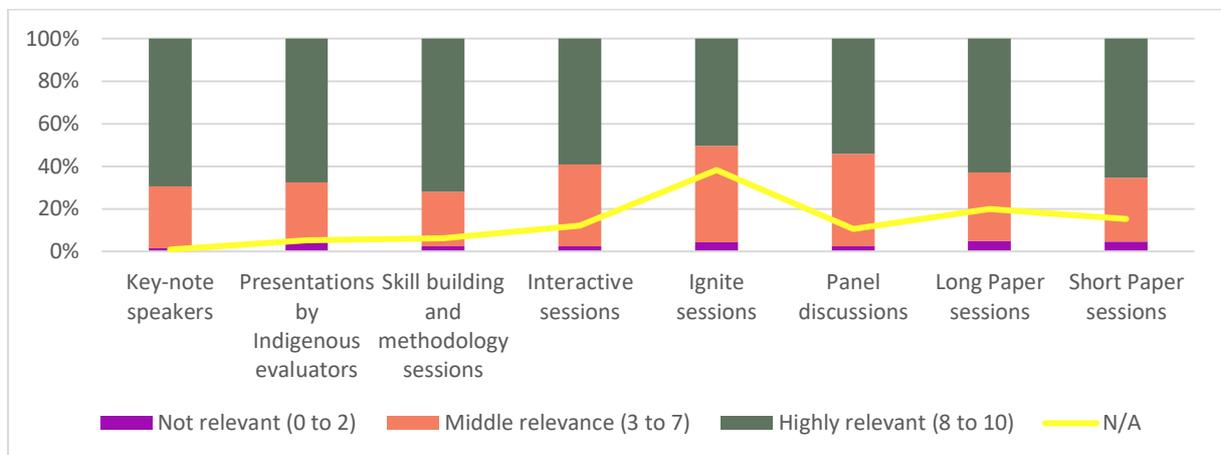ing. And I can't believe it's the last day already.** It's been, four days of madness already. I think the energy of the presenters adds to it as well, and the passion of the presenters.
> **Interview N16, Indigenous participant, AES 2023**

FIGURE 20: RELEVANCE OF SESSION CONTENTS TO RESPONDENTS (N = 225)

A **very small proportion found some of the sessions not relevant.** The strongest examples of these were around presentations by Indigenous evaluators (4.4%), short paper sessions (4%), and long paper sessions (4%) (Figure 20, Survey Q10).

The types of sessions that were **most frequently 'not applicable' for respondents** were generally around the concurrent sessions, and those less frequently scheduled. The **'skill building and methodology sessions'** were the only types of concurrent sessions that **had low 'not applicable' rates (at 6.2%)**—potentially indicating a higher level of value from respondents in accessing these types of sessions at the conference (Figure 20, Survey Q10).

The **ignite sessions**—a series of strictly timed 5-minute sessions for short 'bites' of information sharing—had the most mixed responses. They were 'not applicable' for 38.2% of respondents, and where they did apply, **relevance of these sessions for people balanced fairly evenly** between middling to high (28% to 31.1%) (Figure 20, Survey Q10). Of the priority groups, the ignite sessions had most relevance for First Nations attendees, non-evaluators and beginner evaluators (with 55%, 50% and 43.4% rating these sessions as highly relevant respectively) (Comparisons Q10).

Interviewees were also asked about their general perceptions of the different session formats. A majority of the comments from **Ignite sessions** attendees were positive, valuing the sense of urgency and how informative the sessions were.

> *We were just talking about this this morning!* ***Love the short, sharp variety, but I wish they even seven minutes instead of five minutes, or whatever the timing was. There was a sense of urgency****, like "I have to get through this really really fast" – and if they could just relax a little bit more and have a couple more minutes, that would have been very helpful.* ***Interview N25, AES 2023***

> *I really liked the format,* ***I was super impressed that they could actually present something in five minutes*** *– it was really good. It was* ***really quick, really informative*** *– yeah, I really liked it, it was good. And it was good to get through a lot of different topics in a very short amount of time.* ***Interview N27, AES 2023***

> *Yeah, format and length were good.* ***I think there was a couple of them that I attended that felt like they just crammed so much in****, and it did almost feel like there were too many slides – I was struggling to pull a key takeaway from some of them. So,* ***some of them I've been to were fantastic and "cool – there's only a few key messages****, I can remember this,* ***this is bite-sized***"*, but some of them, I just went "that five minutes is over, and I don't know what happened".* ***Interview N31, AES 2023***

Balance of session types and contents

For the most part, **the balance of session types and session contents across the conference was considered 'about right'.**

For the **session types**, this was particularly in relation to the networking and social opportunities (77.3%, n = 225), the keynote and high profile speakers (69.8%), and the short paper sessions (66.7%). There was a strong call for the program to have more skill building and methodology sessions (52%) which exceeded those who felt it was 'about right' (40.4%). There were also sizeable calls for more interactive sessions (32%) and keynote and high-profile speakers (26.2%), however in the balance of these categories there were larger proportions of respondents who thought the mix was 'about right' (Figure 21, Survey Q12).

While calls for 'less of' various aspects were all in minority, the highest rates were for panel discussions (15.1%), long paper sessions (15.1%) and ignite sessions (14.2%) (Figure 21, Survey Q12).

Across the priority groups, notable differences include higher rates of intermediate evaluators calling for more skill building and methodology sessions (58.2%) and more keynote and high profile speakers (33%) (Comparisons, Q12). Beginner and advanced evaluators were more likely to consider the mix of keynote and high profile speakers about right (79.5% and 75.3% respectively), and advanced evaluators were also more likely to consider the mix of skill building and methodology sessions about right (54.3%). Higher rates of First Nations attendees and intermediate evaluators felt there could be more networking and social opportunities (27.6% and 20.9%, compared with 17.3% for all respondents) (Comparisons, Q12).
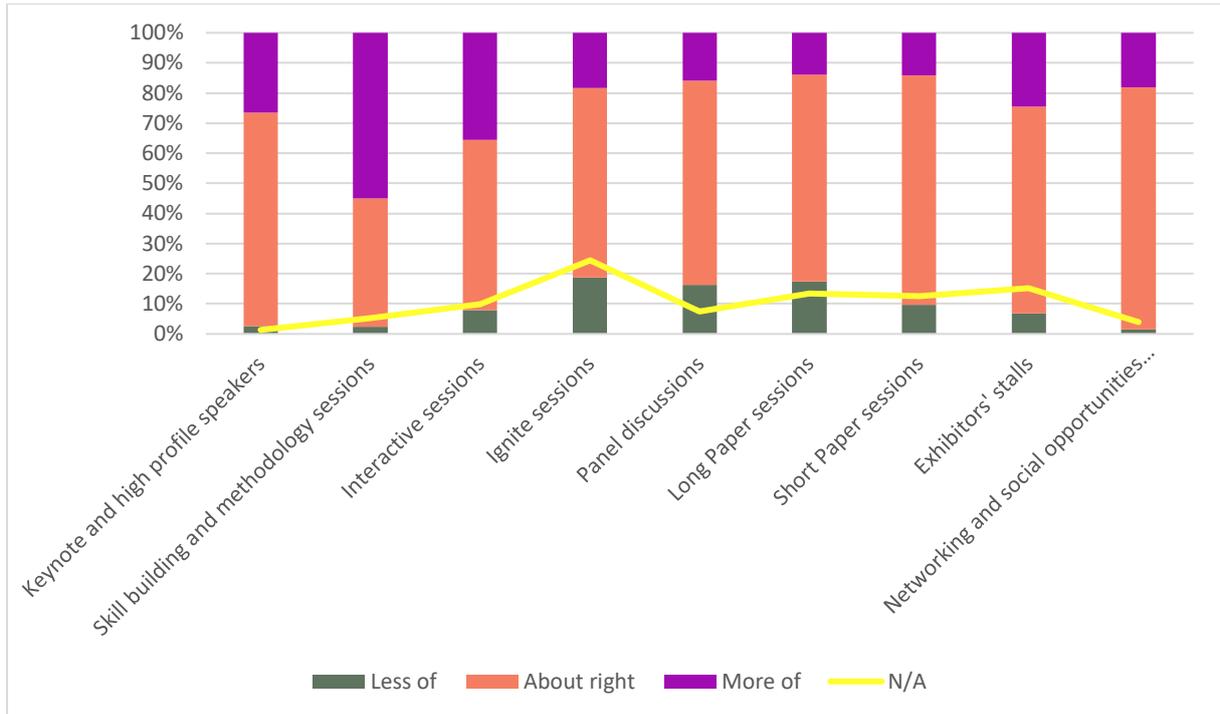
FIGURE 21: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE BALANCE OF CONFERENCE ASPECTS (N=225)

Most respondents felt there was **about the right balance of different presentation topics and presentations targeted to different levels of experience**, however large proportions did call for more of all of these. The strongest calls for more content was in relation to presentations on evaluation capacity building (43.1%, n = 225) and presentations on evaluation theory (41.8%). The areas with the highest level of satisfaction in the balance was for presentations by Indigenous evaluators (56.4% about right), and for presentations on cultural capacity and cultural safety within evaluation (52.9 % about right) (Figure 22, Survey Q13).
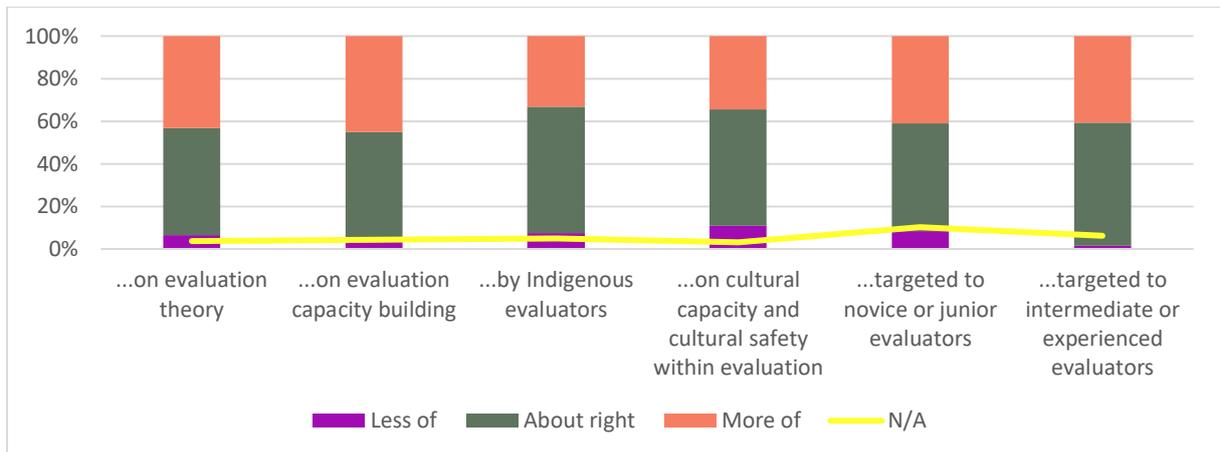
FIGURE 22: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE BALANCE OF SESSION CONTENT (PRESENTATIONS…) (N = 225)

These results did vary across the priority cohorts. In particular, fewer First Nations respondents felt the balance of presentations by Indigenous evaluators, presentations on cultural capacity and cultural safety within evaluation, and presentations targeted to junior evaluators were about right. Across these three categories, around three quarters of First Nations respondents felt there could be more of them (69%, 75.9% and 75.9% respectively)—compared with around one third for all respondents. Three quarters of beginner evaluators supported the strong call for more presentations targeted to junior evaluators (76.9%) (Comparisons, Q13).

Regarding **content** (keynote speakers), one interviewee (expert evaluator/presenter) offered an interesting **counterpoint**. In their perspective, the conference content has been shifting to 'quite ideological' rather than focusing on evaluation, requesting new formats (such as debates) to assure a wide range of perspectives around certain themes/topics.

> *I feel like there's a lot of very high level statements. There's **not a lot of detail underneath**. And they almost seem like that, like, not mission statements, but like visions and ideals, but they're not practical, if that's what if that makes sense.* ***Interview N20, AES 2023***

> *And then, on the other hand, **I think I have felt that increasingly, over the years - the conference feels quite ideological, as opposed to empirical**. And I've seen the move towards more and more discussion about indigenous evaluation approaches, and I think that all is really important and has a place, but I think some presenters are throwing out the baby with the bathwater. And I think there's not enough debate - kind of, **let's unpack what some of these presenters 'assumptions are. Because I think some people are just given a platform to say something that's actually ideological, and not really about evaluation**. Interview N20, AES 2023*

Most **respondents were highly satisfied with a range of aspects around conference presentations**. Individuals' average levels of satisfaction with all the presentation aspects were very high—over half of respondents (54%, n = 224) had average ratings between 8 and 10, and for 34.4% between 6 and 7 (Figure 23, Q11).[1]
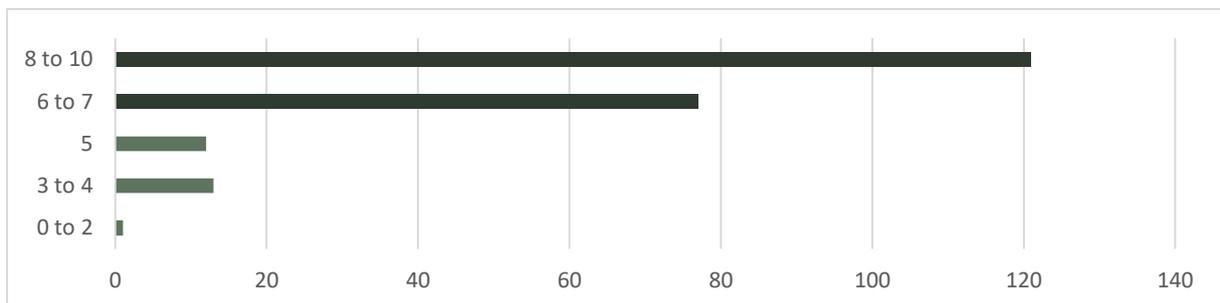
FIGURE 23: COUNT OF AVERAGE SATISFACTION RATING (EXCLUDING 'NOT APPLICABLE') (N=224)

There was little variation across the different categories—highly satisfied ratings ranged from 58.9% for the targeting of presentations to 65.3% for the breadth of presentation topics (Figure 24, Survey Q11). Around a third of respondents indicated middle-levels of satisfaction—on average 31.1%—however, responses were on the higher end of the satisfaction scale (5 or above).

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[1] *NOTE: analysis of responses to question 11 should be used with caution. There was a flaw in the survey where the response of '4' in the 11-point scale was missing. As this error was referenced by only one comment in the open text, and as the vast majority (over 80%) of responses were 6 or higher for each category, analysis has been retained as indicative.*
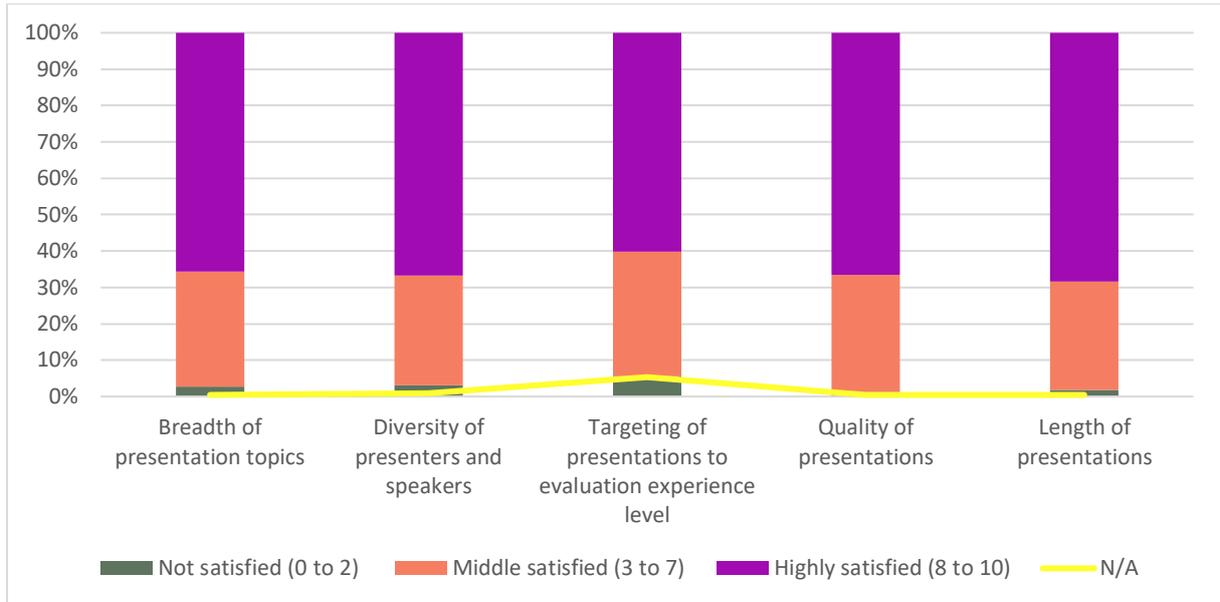
FIGURE 24: RESPONDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS (N = 225)

There was some variation between priority groups' levels of satisfaction across the elements of conference presentations, with more First Nations, beginner and intermediate evaluators, and non-evaluators, generally showing much higher rates of satisfaction (see Table 4). While the majority of advanced evaluators were highly satisfied with these elements, this group was more likely to rate session elements within the middle satisfaction ranges (Comparisons, Q11).

	ALL	First Nations	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	Non-evaluator
Breadth of presentation topics	**65.33%**	75.85%	79.49%	70.33%	55.55%	76.78%
Diversity of presenters and speakers	**66.22%**	72.40%	74.36%	68.13%	59.26%	75.00%
Targeting of presentations to evaluation experience level	**56.89%**	68.96%	61.53%	59.34%	51.86%	62.50%
Quality of presentations	**66.21%**	79.31%	71.80%	70.33%	56.78%	78.57%
Length of presentations	**68.01%**	75.86%	66.66%	71.42%	62.95%	78.57%

TABLE 4: COMPARISON OF PRIORITY COHORTS' HIGHLY SATISFIED RATINGS (8 TO 10)

Learnings from the conference

Delegates' reflections on their learnings at the conference was broad (51 categories identified from 96 comments), the word cloud at Figure 25 highlights some of the more common themes of respondents' learnings from the conference, which included (Survey Q21):

- Indigenous evaluation approaches and cultural considerations that are required
- Evaluation methodologies, especially realist evaluation and transformative evaluation
- Evaluation capacity and capability building, and organisational change
- Application of rubrics
- Confirmation of their previous knowledge, or understanding new terminology for practices

Despite this diversity, there were some calls for more content in relation to specific areas, including more presentations on research methodologies, theory and practical issues, and four calls for more focus on environmental evaluation and three seeking more sessions on economic evaluations (Survey Q11).

FIGURE 25: WORD CLOUD USING KEY WORDS FROM COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS WHO TOOK LEARNINGS FROM THE CONFERENCE FOR THEIR WORK OR WORKPLACE

Of the 28 comments provided around aspects of session content (Survey Q13), six indicated they would like to see more focus on practical skills or tools for evaluation, for example, *'presentations really focused on skill building i.e. not just showing what is done but how they did it'*. Others sought more examples from actual evaluations, including governance (and *'best ways of getting independence without compromising relevance'*) and evaluation results. Three respondents requested more technical or in-depth content for more experienced evaluators, and two others suggested more entry-level sessions for beginners, including *'"basic" sessions. history of evaluation, theory, social impact. More university lecture style to get new people up to date with the basics.'*

Similarly to the survey findings, in-conference interviewees also reported several areas of '**takeaway learnings'.** Themes such as 'confirmation of prior knowledge', 'cultural considerations', 'indigenous evaluation approaches' and methodologies such as transformative evaluation were coincidently part of the findings of the qualitative analysis.

Interviewees shared their reflections around **cultural considerations/competency and Indigenous evaluation approaches** as part of their takeaway learnings and *'aha moments'* from the conference. The core ideas were the key learnings from non-indigenous evaluators on **methodologies, culturally sensitive approaches to engage with First Nations people**, and how to maintain rigour in the evaluation approach.

> *Some ideas rather than learning – **how do I, as a white person from the UK, deal with this environment in New Zealand in terms of how we engage with Maori communities in evaluation or not – so that's a takeaway**. And some interesting ideas about new, well not new but different, approaches that I might take to evaluation to try to make it more useful. **Interview N35, AES 2023**

In the eyes of a **First Nations Presenter/Participant, the key 'takeaway' learning was the awareness** that others do not share (yet) their perspective on Indigenous approaches.

> *For me, all of the answers to the questions I have about Indigenous evaluation, all come back to Indigenous leadership and ownership in the evaluation process. And it's cool when you come to a conference and you see the experts in the field affirming the same thing. I think that will be something I will be very conscious about going back to the work we're doing – and are we integrating it enough? is it present enough? Could we be doing it better?* **Interview N06, First Nations Participant, AES 2023**

> **I think I was maybe a little bit surprised**. *And it could be because my only experience in evaluation has been in Indigenous evaluation and obviously my background – but a little bit* **surprised to see how foreign some of the concepts that are so normal to me are foreign to other people.** *Maybe the 'aha' is –* **some of the research I've seen going into Indigenous approaches to me seems like stating the obvious, but seeing how important it is to articulate those things to people who don't come from that worldview or a different perspective.** *Maybe* **now I have a little bit more awareness that it's not a shared perspective**. *Interview N06, First Nations Participant, AES 2023*

In terms of keynote speakers, there were clear references to the work of Prof. **Donna Merten** when asked about key conference takeaways.

> The **transformative mixed methodologies** *by professor [Merten]… I attended her session on Tuesday. That was –* **I had a lot of 'aha' moments** *– because that was some of the things that we were doing, but we didn't know it was this approach.* **But this session got me to think on how I could improve my current approach in current methods in approaching transformative mixed methodologies and also programs. So, that was very interesting. Interview N30, AES 2023**

> *Yes, it was at yesterday's plenary session –* **transformational evaluation**. *That information and looking at that and all those other issues that it encompasses,* **to me that's a fantastic model, bringing all those elements into it**. *Because that's a really good way to bring – whether you're Indigenous or not –* **it's a wonderful way to do evaluation properly**. *Because you get to know the people in a good way, and their demographics and what affects them and what their barriers are.* **I was blown away by that**. *And of course Maggie was fantastic on the first day too.* **Interview N32, AES 2023**

Conference events and networking

Delegates' **opportunities to connect with people at the conference was highly valued**. Slido polls at the opening and closing sessions asked about what attendees were looking forward to most and then which elements they enjoyed the most. The value of connecting with people began high for over half the attendees at the start (54%, n = 399) and for two thirds at the end (66%, n = 105)—becoming the most enjoyed aspect (Slido 1 and 4, 2023).

The **conference was incredibly successful at supporting attendees to make professional and social connections**. In the survey responses, only three respondents (from 224) indicated they did not make any such connections (Survey Q17, Figure 26).

The **breaks between sessions were the most popular points at the conference for people to make social connections**, with 88.8% of respondents (n = 224) indicating this, followed by the Gala Awards Dinner (55.8%) and the concurrent sessions (including the interactive sessions) (50.5%). Due to the way the question was posed, it is not possible to consider the interactive sessions separately (this was suggested in one of the comments) (Survey Q17, Figure 26).

Where connection were made at the other points—Welcome Drinks, Newcomers' Breakfast, pre-conference workshops, exhibitors stalls and so on—these were predominantly by people making multiple connections across many different points of the conference. (Survey Q17, Figure 26)
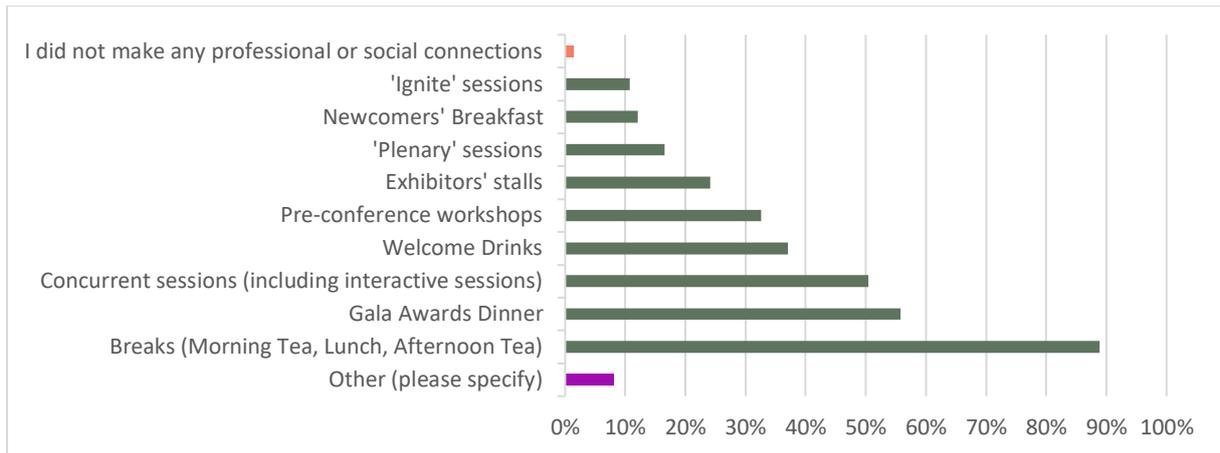
FIGURE 26: POINTS IN WHICH RESPONDENTS MADE SOCIAL OR PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS AT THE CONFERENCE

These connection points were relatively consistent across each of the priority groups, however First Nations attendees were much more likely to make connections at the pre-conference workshops (65.5%, compared with 32.6% for all attendees) (Comparisons, Q17).

Events outside the main conference activities were generally well-attended in 2023. While around a fifth of respondents (22%) did not attend additional events, **71% of survey respondents attended the Gala Awards Dinner**, 41% attended the Welcome Drinks, 16% attended the Newcomers' Breakfast, and 17% attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM) (Survey Q9).

Of the 81 comments from respondents around their experience at the events, 63 included praise and positive feedback for the event organisers, including reflections on opportunities to meet and talk with people, the food and venue quality, and the organisation and coordination of events. In particular, six comments referred to the shortening of speeches at the Gala Awards dinner as a positive step and an improvement from the previous conference (Survey Q9).

Some comments (n = 28) did provide negative feedback around their experience at conference events—some specific to individual circumstances, however many noted noise level and music at the Gala Awards Dinner as too loud or missing the mark (Survey Q9).

Specific feedback from respondents around the conference events (Survey Q9) included:
- At the Welcome Drinks, include networking activities to help newcomers meet people, and option to purchase food
- More non-alcoholic options for the Gala Dinner and Welcome Drinks
- Communication of dress code guidance for events to support new attendees
- Consideration of registration requirements for the newcomers breakfast so that people are not inadvertently turned away.

To what extent did delegates perceive the 2023 AES conference as showing continuous improvement on previous AES conferences? (SQ1.6)

Perceptions of value continues to increase

From 2018 to 2022 to 2023[2], **there has been a continuing increase in whether the conference is perceived as value for money**, from 71% in 2018 (n = 148) to 82.1% in 2022 (n = 272) to 88.3% in 2023 (n = 222) (Survey comparison, Q23). The rates of delegates' **evaluation-related learning at the conference have also been increasing over time** and peaked in 2023 with 85% of delegates confirming they learned about evaluation-related concepts at the conference they intend to incorporate into their work or workplace (2018: 80.4%; 2019: 77.2%; 2022: 83.9%) (Survey comparison, Q21).

In 2023, 77.5% of respondents showed **a strong increase in interest in attending the conference next year**: this was 55.8% in 2018 and 49.5% in 2022 (Survey comparison, Q24). However, given the high proportion of Victorians attending the conference, the 2024 conference being in Melbourne may have contributed to this result.

Social and professional connections continue to be supported

In 2023, only 1.3% of respondents (N = 224) did not make any professional or social connections at the conference. In 2022, 7.38% (N = 272) indicated they did not make any professional connections, however were not asked about social connections. Direct comparisons across years are limited because of the difference in scope of the questions, however these results suggest at minimum a continuity across the conferences in connections being formed, and reinforcing the value and extent of social as well as professional connections (See Table 5, Survey Q17).

Where connections occurred	2023 (Brisbane)*	2022 (Adelaide)*
Welcome Drinks	37.1%	26.4%
Newcomers' Breakfast	12.1%	1.18%
Breaks (morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea)	88.8%	81.9%
Gala Awards Dinner	55.8%	48.4%
'Ignite' sessions	10.7%	4.72%
'Plenary' sessions	16.5%	9.1%
Concurrent sessions (including interactive sessions)**	50.5%	27.17%
Pre-conference workshops	32.6%	31.1%
I did not make any professional *or social* connections*	1.3%	7.4%
*Results are not directly comparable as the survey for the 2023 conference in Brisbane asked about professional *and social* connections being made. The survey for the 2022 conference in Adelaide focused on professional connections only. **The 2022 survey did not specify 'including interactive sessions' which may have impacted difference between the results—in that survey, a number of comments references interactive sessions.		

TABLE 5: COMPARISON 2023 AND 2022—WHERE CONNECTIONS WERE MADE AT THE CONFERENCE [Q17]

Satisfaction with conference organisation remains relatively steady

Across the past three years, satisfaction with aspects of conference organisation has remained steady and high (see Table 6, Survey comparison Q8).

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[2] Comparisons with 2019 data are not possible as a different scale was used on this question

In 2023, there were some areas where levels declined slightly. For the most part, these were small shifts (and often balanced with increased 'not applicable' responses). The main area impacted was in relation to catering. While delegates expressed strong levels of satisfaction with the **catering** (75.1% rated between 7 and 10 on the 11-point scale; 90% rated between 5 and 10), in 2019 and 2022, 96.8% and 96.3% were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the catering respectively. Similarly, there was a slight decline in satisfaction with the **venue** (Table 6, Survey comparison Q8).

Aspect of conference organisation	2023 (Brisbane) *[Satisfaction rating 5 to 10]*	2022 (Adelaide) *[Satisfied / Very Satisfied]*	2019 (Sydney) *[Satisfied / Very Satisfied]*
Assistance from conference organisers	87.6% (n/a 11.1%)	90.33% (n/a 8.9%)	**93.68%** (n/a 5.5%)
Registration process	90.2% (n/a 6.7%)	93.75% (n/a 4.4%)	**94.88%** (n/a 1.6%)
Venue	96.0%	97.41%	**97.63%**
Catering	90.2%	96.32%	**96.83%**
Program guide	**93.8%**	91.17%	92.06%
Conference digital application "Sched"	87.1% (n/a 4.9%)	85.4% (4.5%)	**89.77%** (n/a 5.5%)
Conference interactive application "Slido"	**90.7%** (n/a 6.7%)	86.67% (n/a 7.8%)	N/A
Start times	**98.7%**	95.2 (NB: combined start and finish times)	93.7% (NB: combined start and finish times)
Finish times	94.2%		
In 2019 and 2022, questions around satisfaction with aspects of conference organisation used the following scale: very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, 'not applicable' (n/a). To compare with the 11-point scale (0 to 10, or n/a) used in 2023, response ratings from 5 to 10 (i.e. from neutral to very satisfied) were compared with 'very satisfied' and 'satisfied' responses. **Bold** indicates highest satisfaction rating. **n/a** have been included where over 5% in a category.			

TABLE 6: COMPARISON—SATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF CONFERENCE ORGANISATION 2023, 2022 AND 2019

The **venue satisfaction** ratings are likely linked to issues of room capacity that have been noted above. This is a perennial challenge for conferences, and was reflected in survey comments:

- *The rooms (and therefore capacity) were too small. There were quite a few sessions that people got locked out of very quickly. Same feedback as last year about the set up - few spots for gathering to enable people to network easily without just standing around awkwardly* (survey respondent, Survey Q8)
- *At times, delegates were turned away from presentations because of room capacity. While there are health and safety concerns that require this, it is disappointing when delegates cannot attend their preferred session because of overcrowding. This also happened in Adelaide… it would also be reasonable to book more rooms for additional presentations, this would also help delegates spread out across more options.* (survey respondent, Survey Q26)
- *I felt a bit more rushed this year to get to certain sessions and found many of the ones I wanted to attend were completely full* (survey respondent, Survey Q11)
- *…I was also frustrated that I was unable to attend two presentations due to capacity issues. The rooms were full and at least a dozen of us had to find something else. The conference venue was clearly not suitable for a sold out conference* (survey respondent, Survey Q11)

In terms of **comments reflecting on previous years' catering**, the focus was on variety and support for those with dietary requirements:

- *Catering could have had more varied options. Adelaide 2022 was better* (survey respondent, Survey Q8)

- *This years' catering for those with dietary requirements was abysmal in both quantity and quality of options (compared to those with no requirements). I found this to not be very inclusive for those with dietary requirements* (survey respondent, Survey Q8)

Delegates also expressed views **supporting changes to the conference Gala Dinner in 2023**. From the survey comments that provided comparison of the 2023 conference with previous conferences, seven comments related to support for changes made to the Gala Dinner presentation approach, including:

- *Much better conference dinner length (and of presentations!)* (survey respondent, Survey Q9)
- *the Gala dinner was much better than 2022* (survey respondent, Survey Q26)
- *The truncated award speech times was absolutely a great choice - it was much smoother than Adelaide! Please keep that again* (survey respondent, Survey Q9)
- *Thank you for taking on board feedback from last year* (survey respondent, Survey Q9)

Satisfaction with conference presentations increased

Satisfaction with aspects of conference presentations has been consistently high over the past few years and increased slightly in 2023. In particular, **the 2023 conference saw increases in satisfaction with the quality and length of conference presentations** (Table 7, Survey comparison Q11).

Aspect of conference presentations	2023 (Brisbane) *[Satisfaction rating 5 to 10]*	2022 (Adelaide) *[Satisfied / Very Satisfied]*	2019 (Sydney) *[Satisfied / Very Satisfied]*
Keynote speakers	N/A	86.5%	**92.1%**
Breadth of presentation topics	**92.0%**	82.5%*	88.9%*
Diversity of presenters and speakers	**93.8%**	N/A	N/A
Targeting of presentations to experience level	**87.6%**	N/A	N/A
Quality of presentations	**96.0%**	85.7%	88.1%
Length of presentations	**95.6%**	82.3%	88.9%
In 2019 and 2022, questions on satisfaction with conference presentations used the scale: very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, 'not applicable' (n/a). To compare with 2023's 11-point scale (0 to 10, or n/a), response ratings from 5 to 10 (i.e. from neutral to very satisfied) were compared with 'very satisfied' and 'satisfied' responses. *Question in 2022 and 2019 was 'breadth of presentations'			

TABLE 7: COMPARISON—SATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS 2023, 2022 AND 2019

This continuous improvement was reflected in comments from attendees:
- *One of the best evaluation conferences I've been to in terms of presentation quality. Feels like we're getting better!* (survey respondent, Survey Q11)
- *The material in the parallels was excellent this year* (survey respondent, Survey Q11)

Some participants did comment on the **decision-making process** for selecting presentations, seeking more variety in speakers and opportunities to present sessions:
- *This is my second year attending the conference and I really appreciate how the conference is geared towards learning and took a lot from the conference…I feel that I have seen the same presenters two years in a row, especially from consultancy companies. My organisation put in two abstracts this year and both were not accepted and **I think there needs to be a conscious effort to look at the variety of presenters and ensure it is not geared towards consultancy** which at times it feels like it is* (survey respondent, Survey Q11)
- *After attending multiple AES conferences it appears that your presentation selection process is still very flawed. There were multiple people who presented twice on the same*

topic/project, and people who presented twice on the same day …There needs to be a cross-checking process after the blind-review to ensure that people aren't presenting on the same topic/project from different 'angles' (survey respondent, Survey Q11).

In terms of the 2023 conference improving the balance of different types of sessions, this is inherently a challenge—particularly in the context of the diversity of interests that the conference caters to. From analysis of respondents' feedback from 2023, 2022, and 2019 around the balance of different aspects of the conference (Figure 27), there are three categories:

- **Areas of higher demand**—in 2023 compared with previous years, there are more people who want more of these elements, and less people who want less of them:
  - presentations by Indigenous evaluators
  - presentations on evaluation capacity building
  - panel discussions
  - keynote and high profile speakers
- Areas of mixed demand—in 2023 more people want less of these elements *and* more people want more of them:
  - presentations on evaluation theory
  - Ignite sessions
- Areas that are closer to getting the balance right—in 2023 the 'about right' category grew (noting both of these categories still have high proportions who 'want more':
  - interactive sessions
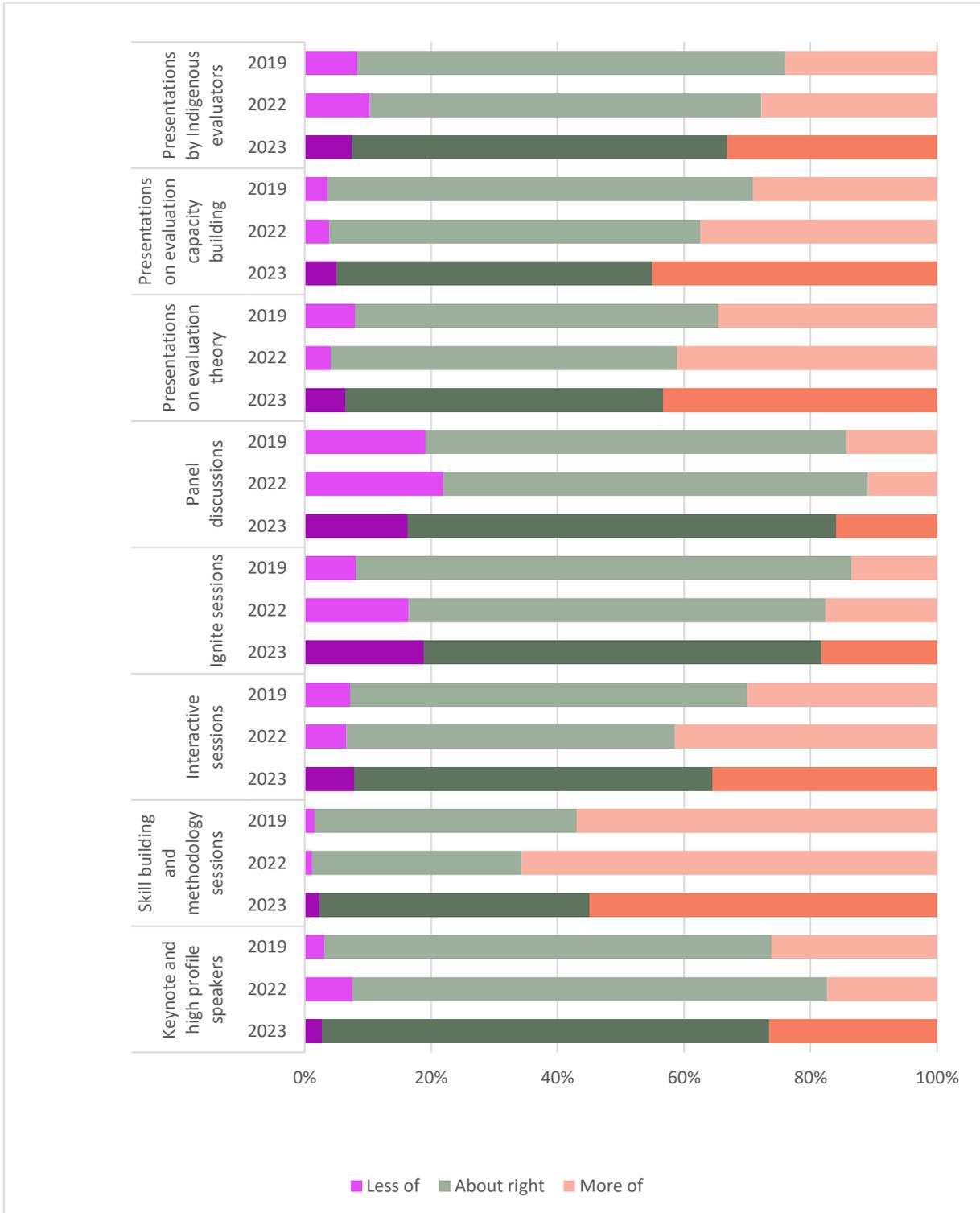 - skill building and methodology sessions.

Final Report

FIGURE 27: COMPARISON ACROSS YEARS—RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON BALANCE OF VARIOUS CONFERENCE ASPECTS

Evaluation findings: Contribution to strategic priorities (KEQ 2)

Summary of findings

Delegates felt **the aes23 conference helped to advance the four strategic priorities of the AES Board**. Unsurprisingly, strongest support was shown for the 'relationships' priority (65.9%, n = 222)—with just over half also strongly supporting the 'building cultural capacity' and 'vitality' priorities (54.5% and 53.6% respectively) (Survey Q20, Figure 28).
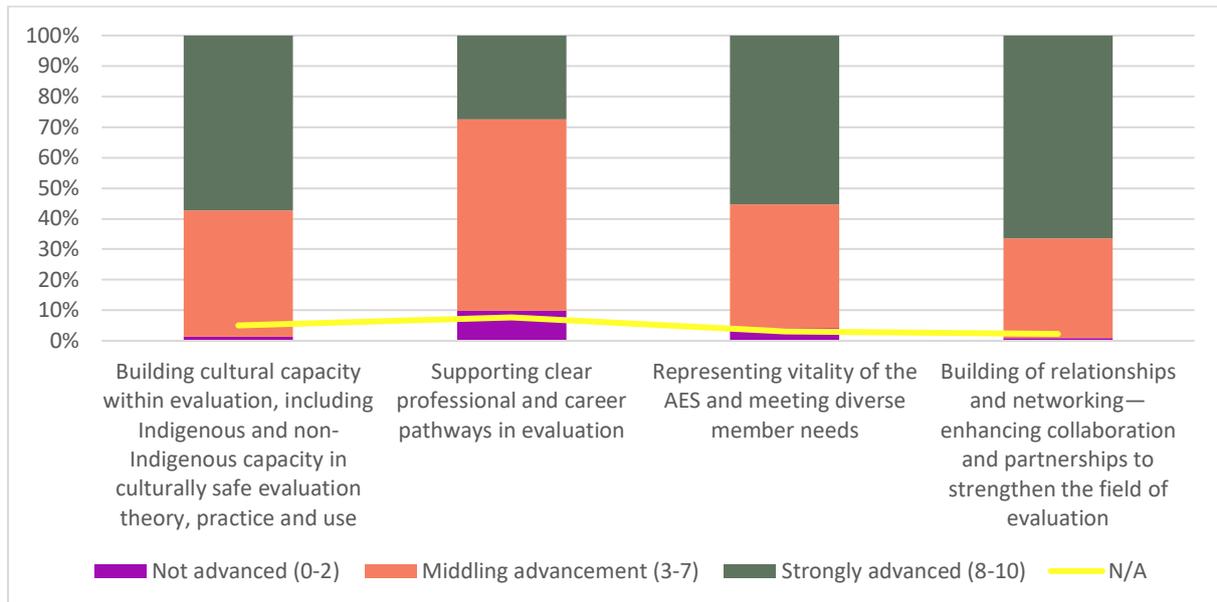
FIGURE 28: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON HOW WELL THE CONFERENCE ADVANCED THE FOUR AES STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Delegates felt the conference advanced the priority around 'supporting clear and professional career pathways' the least, with only 25.2% indicating the conference strongly supported this, and most of the responses falling within the middle categories. A relatively large proportion of respondents (9%) also felt this priority was not advanced (or not well advanced) by the conference, and 7.7% rated this as 'not applicable' (Survey Q20, Figure 28).

Across the priority groups, a higher proportion of First Nations respondents felt all four priorities were strongly advanced when compared with all responses. The biggest area of difference was for the priority around 'supporting clear and professional career pathways', where 48.3% of First Nations respondents felt this priority was strongly advanced by the conference (Comparisons, Q20).

While specific comments are detailed in the following sections, general comments relating to the different perspectives of respondents included (Survey Q20):

- With rating each area with 5 or 6: *I scored low as it seems as though its a tall ask for the conference to 'advance' some of these things*
- With ratings from 7 to 10:
  - *We have been extended a few hands in helping us build our own professional body under mentorship of bigger existing ones.*
  - *The interaction over various sessions helped me to connect and reconnect with evaluators across Australia.*
- With ratings of 10 for all: *The mix of presentations and networking events enabled a focus on these priorities*

To what extent did the conference contribute to building cultural capacity within evaluation, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use? (SQ2.1)

Conference delegates felt **the aes23 conference made a strong contribution to building cultural capacity within evaluation**. As shown in Figure 29, the majority of respondents indicated a rating of 7 or higher for how well the conference advanced this priority (Figure 29, Survey Q20).
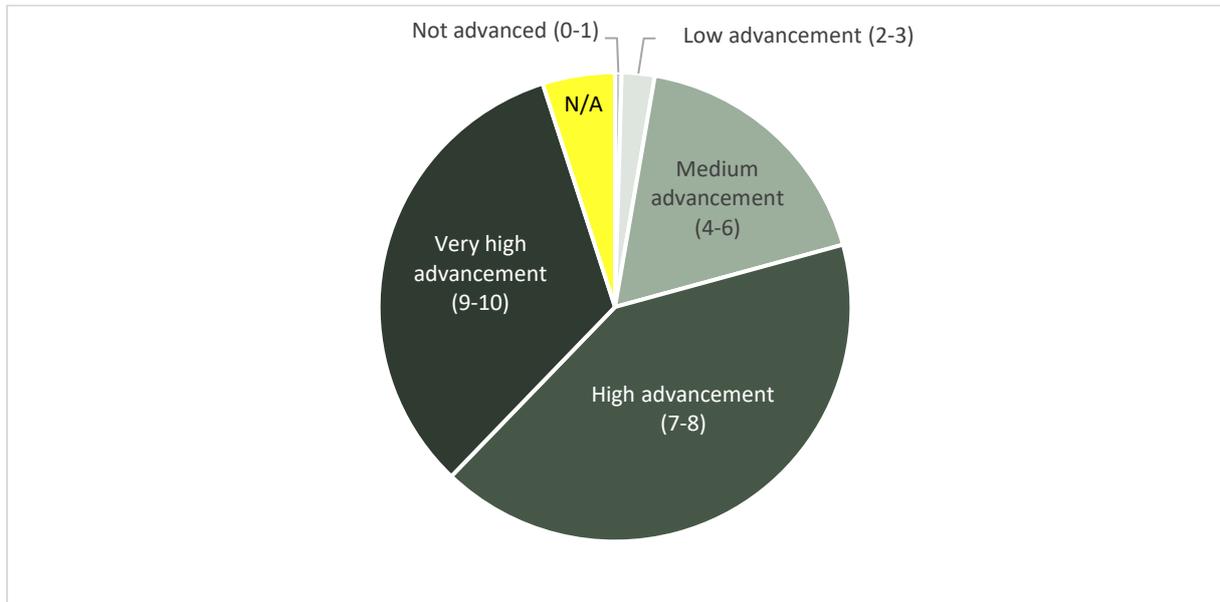
FIGURE 29: RESPONDENTS VIEWS ON HOW WELL THE CONFERENCE ADVANCED THE "BUILDING CULTURAL CAPACITY" STRATEGIC PRIORITY

The focus of the conference on building cultural capacity within the field could be seen throughout the conference program with **25 of the 118 sessions having explicit connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or Indigenous people** (Conference program analysis).

The conference's contribution to advancing this priority can also be seen in delegates' views around the relevance of session content. Of all the categories considered for content relevance, **'presentations by Indigenous evaluators' had the strongest degree of relevance for respondents**— 36% found these presentations 'completely relevant' (10 on the scale) and 64% rated them highly relevant (8 to 10 on the scale). Only 5% of respondents considered this category 'not applicable' (Survey Q10, Figure 20 above).

Most respondents felt the balance of sessions focused on cultural capacity and cultural safety within evaluation were about right (52.9%, n = 225), however a third requested more of them (Survey Q13).

While noting this broad support for the conference's contribution to building cultural capacity, the comments of delegates specifically relating to this priority indicated there is still some way to go, or challenged whether a conference could actually build capacity. For example:

- *I'm not sure a conference can build capacity in culturally safe evaluation theory, practice and use - how would we know? It can promote, share, profile - but its too ambitious to say it has advanced this as a priority* (survey respondent, 8 rating for cultural capacity priority)
- *I feel that there was a strong number and appreciation of cultural capacity, Indigenous methods, and culturally safe theory, but as mentioned in a previous comment, there was still a split in the lens and view of whether evaluation should involve community and culture, or*

be an independent and objective thing. This was not addressed and during some talks was a more present and divisive split than during others (survey respondent, 7 rating for cultural capacity priority)

- *I was hoping for practical examples of Indigenous program evaluations including overcoming challenges. Focus instead seemed to be on policy choices and participant feelings rather than program outcomes and being advocates rather than impartial evaluators.* (survey respondent, 1 rating for cultural capacity priority)

- *Overall, I definitely learnt some important things that will help me carry out more culturally safe evaluation - we are progressing, we're not there yet.* (survey respondent, 6 rating for cultural capacity priority)

To what extent did the conference promote excellence in evaluation practice and support clear professional and career pathways for evaluators? (SQ2.2)

Delegates viewed the conference as advancing the AES priority around clear and professional pathways, but the extent this was achieved was less than for the other priorities. Only 14% rated this priority in highly, compared with over 30% for the other priorities. Similarly, a relatively large proportion (11.7%) also felt this priority was not advanced or not well advanced by the conference, and 7.7% rated this as 'not applicable'—higher than other categories (Survey Q20, Figure 30).
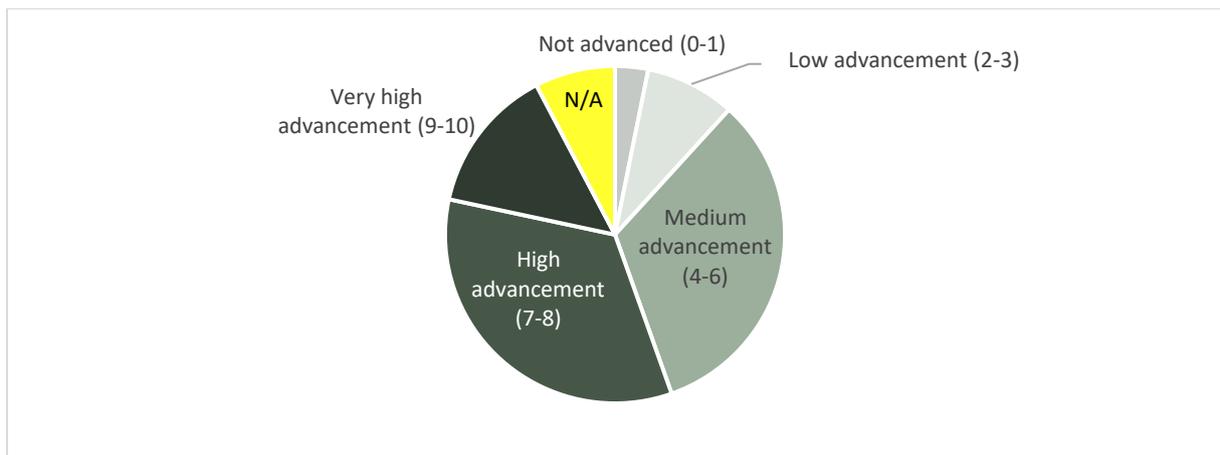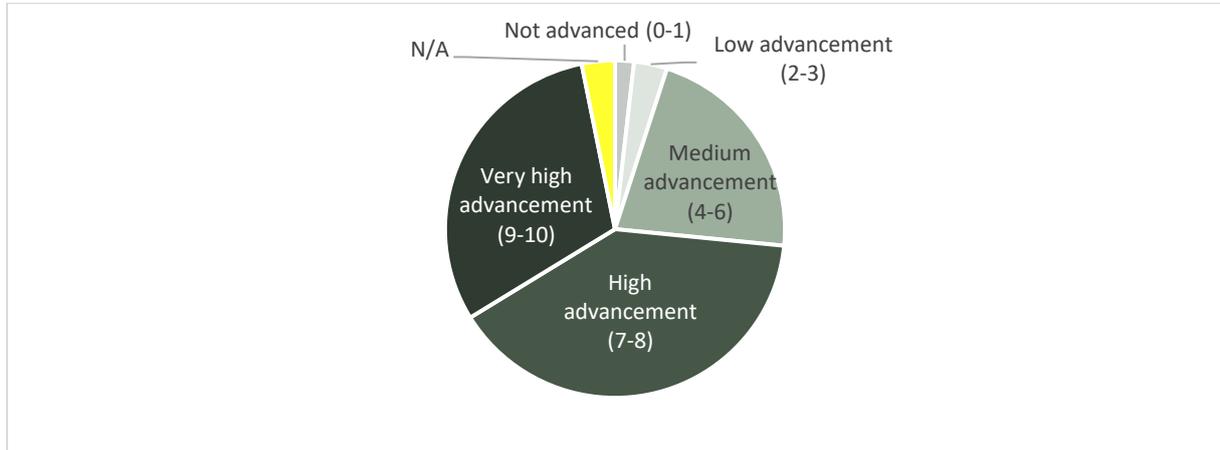

FIGURE 30: RESPONDENTS VIEWS ON HOW WELL THE CONFERENCE ADVANCED THE "CAREER PATHWAYS" STRATEGIC PRIORITY

There was little specific commentary about this priority in this survey question—potentially indicating the middle-range of views around the conference's contribution to career pathways (i.e. general support but less strong views from delegates in either direction). Two of the comments were (Survey Q20):

- *Some of the presenters were so poised, they modelled the 'clear professional career pathways' for us.* (survey respondent, 10 rating for career pathways priority)

- *I'm not sure about the professional and career pathway goal. It wasn't clear to me from the program what sessions were meant to target 'early career' evaluators and 'mid career' evaluators. Therefore, it is hard to say how the sessions supported the career pathway.* (survey respondent, 3 rating for career pathways priority)

While conference delegates did pick up a range of learnings from sessions they attended (see above page 26), the responses around this priority indicate and opportunity for greater focus on the evaluation profession and career pathways at future conferences.

To what extent did the conference represent **vitality** of the AES— meeting diverse member needs today and into the future? (SQ2.3)

Conference delegates felt **the aes23 conference strongly represented the vitality of the AES** in being able to meet diverse member needs today and into the future. As shown in Figure 31Figure 29, most respondents indicated a rating of 7 or higher for how well the conference advanced this priority (Figure 31, Survey Q20).

FIGURE 31 RESPONDENTS VIEWS ON HOW WELL THE CONFERENCE ADVANCED THE "VITALITY" STRATEGIC PRIORITY

The **conference theme of 'through the lens' embedded consideration of diversity and different perspectives throughout the conference**. In the comments provided by respondents about the theme (n = 93), most (65%) were positive—reflecting on the opportunity that it provided to give focus to other peoples' cultural and social perspectives, and reflect on their own ideas and vantages (Survey Q7[3]).

Similarly, the **large proportion of first-timers** attending the conference, as well as those **expressing interest in returning to the conference next year** (see pages 22 and 26), signal a strong future outlook for the Society and continuing meeting of members' needs.

However, while making progress on the vitality of the AES, comments highlighted some areas for continued improvement (Survey Q20):

- *We need to work on the vitality aspect. I think evaluation should be about learning and accountability, but the accountability aspect was met with hostility. We need to think about who is not attending the conference but perhaps should - where are the other government evaluation units? Why are they not attending? The informal feedback I've had from them is that they don't feel included.* (survey respondent, 4 rating for vitality)
- *Didn't seem to address lack of diversity experienced because of over-representation of usual clique of consultants who seem to dominate presentations, [SIC]* (survey respondent, 5 rating for vitality)
- *Serving and including people with disability is underserved in AES. There was difficulty with access for some people. And despite Donna Mertens discussions on her work with the deaf, there was nothing in braille or sign for their inclusion. I thought that was a bit embarrassing. [SIC]* (survey respondent, 6 rating for vitality)

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[3] Note – statistical analysis of responses to Q7 (re conference theme) have been excluded due to a question flaw where "none of the above" was not available and respondents were forced to select at least one option.

To what extent did the conference support building of relationships and networking—enhancing collaboration and partnerships to strengthen the field of evaluation? (SQ2.4)

Conference **attendees felt most strongly about the conference's contribution to the AES' priority to build relationships and networking**, and enhance collaboration and partnerships within evaluation. It was the most highly rated priority – with **82.4% of respondents acknowledging high to very high advancement** (rating of 7 to 10, Survey Q20, Figure 32).

As noted above, the value for conference respondents on relationships and networking can also be seen in the Slido poll results, where 54% were (n = 399) were most looking forward to 'connecting with people' on Day 1, and **by Day 3, 66% valued 'connecting with people' the most from their conference experience** (n = 105) (Slido 1 and 4, 2023).
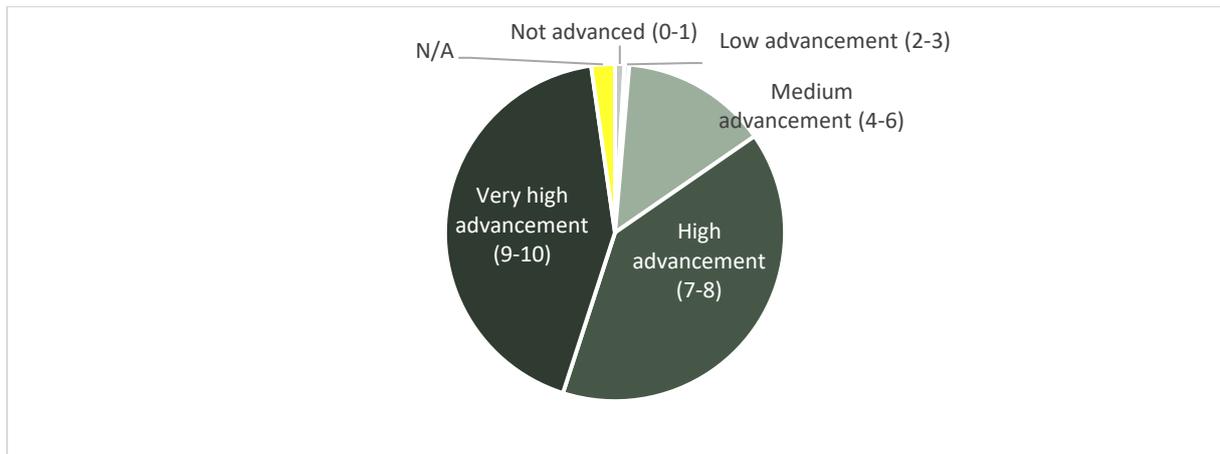
FIGURE 32: RESPONDENTS VIEWS ON HOW WELL THE CONFERENCE ADVANCED THE "RELATIONSHIPS" STRATEGIC PRIORITY

The **balance of networking and social opportunities before, during, and after the conference was well-received by attendees.** Over three quarters (77.3%) thought the balance was 'about right'— although 17.3% did suggest there could be more (Survey Q12). Comments relating to this priority reflected this diversity between satisfaction with opportunities provided and seeking more (Survey Q20):

- *Lots of good stuff - connection is perhaps one of the key ones. I think the other element is the distinction between professional pathways (i.e. practice / skills) and career - which to me speaks to the emerging evaluation growth gap. Still some more to be done there, which likely also intersects with the other priorities* (survey respondent, 7 rating for relationships and networking)
- *there were a lot of people from different backgrounds, but some people stuck to the group of colleagues they knew, so being able to network got difficult. It would have been great to have a bit of a "speed date" type sessions where you could get to know other people in the field* (survey respondent, 5 rating for relationships and networking)
- *Really liked the support offered for early career evaluators. Loved how humble the whole spectrum of evaluators engaged in the conference seemed, and everyone was welcome to participate, and had their perspective valued.* (survey respondent, 9 rating for relationships and networking)

- *Some ad hoc meetings of SIGS or regional groups set up, but better if these were planned and programmed beforehand - and maybe with program times, not just at lunch* (survey respondent, 7 rating for relationships and networking)

Suggestions for improvement

Interview participants were asked to provide suggestions to improve the conference in 2024. Some of them did not provide suggestions as they believed the conference was delivered to the maximum standard.

> *This year was amazing, the organization is phenomenally good. The quality of the whole venue, the technology, everything is completely spot on. It is very hard to think of anything that could be improved. It's just so outstanding.* **Interview N11, AES 2023**

Other participants provided recommendations for improvement, which were divided into content, logistics, format, and networking. Key themes are synthesised in Table 8.

TABLE 8: KEY THEMES FROM INTERVIEWEES' SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions	Area	Interviewee comment
Differentiated streams (advance, beginners)	Content	*I would like to see more of an advanced stream. And I think I was just in some rooms that I had to as chairperson, I had to turn people away. And they were more theory based. And I turned away almost half again as what the room could feel because the room was full. So I think there's a real desire for it.* **Interview N14, AES 2023** *More of those beginner level things – you might not get a lot of people, but the people who go to them would really appreciate it. I noticed there's a group of emerging Indigenous evaluators – I'm thinking 'emerging' is 'beginner' – there's definitely a cohort of us that fit into the category of beginners.* **Interview N04, AES 2023**
Communications (first-timers, overseas groups and social aspects)	Logistics	*It's not impossible to find out about these things, but you do have to have an awareness that they're there and then actively look for the details, which I find challenging. The social aspects are super valuable and they're not communicated as well as they could be.* **Interview N02, AES 2023** *I think for us, we were registered by our organization, and we missed a lot of communications and emails, I think they must have gone to a central location. But we did notice, even from a presentation perspective, there were key communications that we had missed, I think, because someone else registered us as a big group. potentially, if they're putting everybody's email addresses in then the email should be going to like the list versus the person who signed up because I think a lot of our emails have ended up there in hindsight.* **Interview N15, AES 2023**
Cultural considerations on catering	Logistics	*Yes, this is just around the conference dinner. We've had Traditional women, or had women – there was five, but some had to go back. We need to look at dietary requirements for them. There needs to be conversations with Traditional people – and I mean who still live in their traditional communities – what would*

Suggestions	Area	Interviewee comment
		they like served up as a meal. I was a bit worried about the ladies last night, because they were served up the same as everybody else. And someone said, 'well, look, they can experience other foods', but no, that's not the point, the point is traditional people may want – not saying traditional foods, but they need to have their say on what they like served. The conversation needs to be had – even for morning tea and things like that. **Interview N32, AES 2023**
Access to presentations and materials after conference	Content Logistics	*I think, hopefully, there'll be an opportunity to kind of engage with the materials after the conference and get in touch with various presenters and speakers and so on. But, again, aside from that, it's been it's been it's been great.* **Interview N11, AES 2023** *I don't know whether there is any way that you guys can share the presentations. Maybe put them into the portal because members can access through the portal or something like that, because people are worrying about the content. They try to take the photo so they miss some time even it happened to me. So this is maybe one thing that if you can think about like sharing in advance, you tell participants 'don't worry about taking pictures' - we are sharing the presentation.* **Interview N13, AES 2023**
New format for keynote speakers: debate	Format	*Yeah, maybe having more? I don't know. Is there a format we could have? Which is more, you know, like, high school debating clubs? Could we have? Here's a topic, or there's a you're for the argument you're against? Go? Like, because otherwise we'll be just in an echo chamber, and everyone's saying the same thing. Maybe that would be a good idea.* **Interview N20, Expert Evaluator, AES 2023** *The conference feels quite ideological, as opposed to empirical. And so it kind of like and I've seen the move towards more and more discussion about indigenous evaluation approaches, and how many of I should and I, and I think that all is really important and has a place, but I think some presenters are throwing out the baby with the bathwater. And I, and I think there's not enough, maybe obsession, where there's more debates or more, kind of, let's unpack what some of these presenters' assumptions are. Because I think some people are just given a platform to say something that's actually ideological, and not really about evaluation.* **Interview N20, Expert Evaluator, AES 2023** *I would have loved to have seen some sort of plenary debate with conflicting or opposing views, to actually have a real dialogue – rather than someone promoting their book, you know what I mean?* **Interview N35, AES 2023**
Opportunities to connect (speed dating, specific lounges)	Networking	*I do think, I just don't know – I like the opportunities, kind of prompted opportunities, to connect – 'speed dating' kind of stuff.* **Interview N26 AES 2023**

Suggestions	Area	Interviewee comment
		I know last year they had the First Peoples' lounge. I thought that was fantastic area and if you could have like things like that a little lounge areas that obviously the first peoples Lounge is specific group but you could have one that then people could be up for non-profit lounge, so that people and it could change each day. So one day, it could be not for profits and another it could be health or something so that people could know actually, I can go into that vicinity. And I will find people that are interested in talking about that with me. (…) based to actually make it a bit more sector based or something specific. That could be really fun. **Interview N14 AES 2023** *Maybe have… we were talking before - some of the social events, like you're not really sure what you're getting into, like with the welcome and that, so maybe not necessarily ice breakers, but a bit more space for people to get to know where each other is from. So outside of the totally informal and the sessions, maybe some kind of networking that is a bit more formalised so that people know what to expect.* **Interview N29 AES 2023**
Room sizes	Logistics	*Some of my colleagues got turned away from one or two of the sessions, we pushed our way in to one of them, he tried to shut the door. And I was like, I don't think so. So we went and stood in the back, which was fine. And a lot of times once a group less than another group could sit down, leaving more room for more people to come in. But there were a couple of sessions that some of my colleagues couldn't even get into, because they said there was no room in the room. And it's a pity, because some of those were the, what I thought were the better richer sessions, especially for our type of work.* **Interview N15, AES 2023** *I think, I'm not sure if it was done. But some of the sessions, the rooms were quite small and very crowded with standing room only. And other sessions were in much bigger rooms, with not a lot of people. So I'm not sure if people were monitoring the types of sessions that people were choosing to attend and potentially thinking about what types of rooms might be needed for future conferences, if similar sessions get delivered?* **Interview N15, AES 2023** *Maybe, bigger venue with bigger rooms. The reason I'm not in a talk right now is because I tried to go to one and they said it was full.* **Interview N09, AES 2023**
Yarning Circle	Networking Format	*Some people have suggested it would have been good to have a yarning circle space for certain things. But that space didn't allow that, or the numbers didn't allow that. So I have seen that happen. Even just at the Pacific trade conference upstairs, I saw they had a yarning circle set up. So that's something to consider, but I'm sure that the leadership's already considered whether that's viable or not.* **Interview N18, AES 2023**

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Referenced evaluation data sources

- **AES Strategic Priorities, 2021:** aes_strategicPlan2019_22_finalWeb.pdf
- **Comparisons:** survey data analysis comparing 'all' respondents with the following priority groups:
    - First Nations
    - Beginner evaluators
    - Intermediate evaluators
    - Expert or advanced evaluators
    - Non-evaluators

  Note: these groups are not mutually exclusive.
- **Registration data, 2023:** administrative data extracted from the conference registration system for 2023
- **Slido 1, 2023:** Wednesday 27 September 2023 poll at conference opening session
- **Slido 4, 2023:** Friday 29 September 2023 poll at conference closing session
- **Survey:** data from the 2023 post-conference survey, with question number referenced "Q#"
- **Survey comparison:** 2023 survey data mapped against survey results from conference evaluations from 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2022