

**aes25**

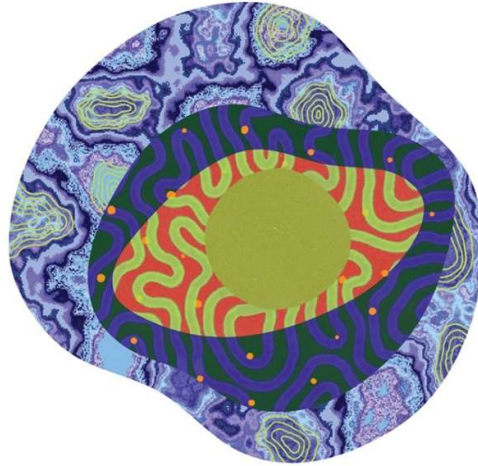
International **Evaluation** Conference

Conference workshops 15 & 16 September

Conference 17–19 September

Canberra | Ngunnawal & Ngambri Country | Australia

## EVALUATION REPORT



Conference Logo Artwork designed by Cause/Affect.

*The artwork reflects the idea of thinking ‘beyond the bubble’ and outside of what we know to connect to new ideas, knowledge, people and ways of doing. Opening up our perspective up, is to open up for opportunity for greater positive impact and connection.*

aes25 was held on the traditional lands and waterways of Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay our respects to the ancestors and elders, past and present.

We also acknowledge all the First Nations people who joined the conference.

Evaluation lead:  
Zach Lee Jin Yong  
Student-evaluator  
Master of Evaluation  
The University of Melbourne  
[zachleejy@gmail.com](mailto:zachleejy@gmail.com)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OVERVIEW

The report presents the design, planning, approach and findings for the evaluation of aes25, the annual international conference of the Australian Evaluation Society. The evaluation was commissioned by the AES. The evaluation was conducted by Zach Lee, an University of Melbourne Masters of Evaluation student, and it was supported by Capstone Fellow, John Stoney. The evaluation was supported greatly by the aes2025 conference committee as well as the AES conference committee.

A utilisation focused approach (Patton, 2012) was used to guide the design and conduct of the evaluation. The evaluation used both quantitative data (i.e. post-conference survey & registration data) and qualitative data (i.e. Face to face interviews).

The report describes results of the evaluation of the conference via answering three key evaluation questions indicated below:

## KEQ1: WAS THE CONFERENCE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE FOR THE DELEGATES?

In this evaluation, the valuable experience was defined by the conference's ability to serve the delegates' intent to learn (Learning), intent to form new networks and reconnect with existing networks (Social), and to provide a comfortable experience (Comfort).

### LEARNING: SERVING DELEGATES' INTENT TO LEARN: **LEVEL 2 – MODERATE**

The conference has served delegates' intent to learn via providing content that is relevant and engaging and also broadening the delegates' perspective of evaluation.

Conference elements that indicated the conference have provided content that support delegate's learning intent	% of delegates agreeing with statement	Evaluative conclusion
Content was relevant	90.2%	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
Content was engaging	88.4%	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
Content was interactive	77.8%	<b>Level 2 – Moderate</b>
Content has helped to broaden their perspectives	87.3%	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>

While the content has been interactive, delegates also shared that more could be done to make the content more interactive, such as providing more space and time for conversations, as well as ensuring speakers is proficient in holding space for interactivity.

**SOCIAL: SERVING DELEGATES' INTENT TO MAKE NEW CONNECTIONS & RECONNECT WITH EXISTING CONNECTIONS: **LEVEL 3 – GOOD****

The conference has succeeded in helping delegate form new connection as well as strengthen their existing professional networks. This was through the provision of ample opportunities to socialise with other delegates and the provision of a quality exhibition space for delegates to meet and socialise throughout the conference.

Conference elements that indicated the conferences have supports delegates' social intent	% of delegates agreeing with statement	Evaluative Conclusion: Serving delegates' intent to socialize		
Conference have helped me to form new professional connections	81.4%	→	90% of the delegates formed new connections OR reconnected with their own network	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
Conference have helped me strengthen their existing professional connections	78.8%			

**COMFORT: PROVIDING A COMFORTABLE EXPERIENCE: **LEVEL 2 - MODERATE****

The conference has mostly succeeded in providing a comfortable experience for delegates, with six of the seven elements have good satisfactory ratings. These results suggests that aes25 was able to provide a satisfactory experience that was comparable to the previous conference.

However, the conference application, while newly implemented, was poorly received resulting in a rating of Level 1 - Poor. The rating suggests aes25 have provided a less comfortable experience when compared to past conference. AES have noted on that application did not provide a satisfactory experience and is currently taking corrective actions to the application. As such, the rating was revised from Level 1 – Poor to Level 2 – Moderate.

Elements of the conferences that support the comfort of the delegates	Average satisfaction rating	Evaluative conclusion: Providing a comfortable experience	Revised evaluative conclusion:	
Assistance from organiser	9.09	Level 1 – Poor: <i>Providing an experience that is less comfortable than aes24</i>	→	<b>Level 2 – Moderate</b>
Registration process	9.11			
Information in booklet	7.93			
Exhibitor booths	8.54			
Conference application	5.78			
Start time of each day	9.08			
End time of each day	8.71			

## KEQ2: WAS THE CONFERENCE A GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY FOR THE DELGATES? – LEVEL 2 MODERATE

The perception of value of the aes25 conference **remained comparable to previous conferences**, where slightly more than half (64%) of the delegates continue to find the conference to be good value for money.







Considerations	Evidence	Evaluative conclusion:
Was the conference a valuable experience?	89% of the delegates found the conference was a valuable experience	Level 2 – Moderate  Value of money of the conference have maintained at similar levels to previous conferences
Did the conference represent a good value for money?	64% of the delegates felt that aes25 represented a good value for money	

## KEQ3: DID THE CONFERENCE PROVIDE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE FOR THE NEW AND EXPERIENCED DELEGATES? – LEVEL 3 – GOOD

Based on post-conference survey, both new and experienced delegates have comparable experience, which aligns with the intent of aes25.

Components of valuable experience	Overall	First timer new delegates	First timer experienced delegates	Returning experienced delegates
Learning	L2 - Moderate	L2 - Moderate	L3 - Good	L2 - Moderate
Social	L3 - Good	L3 - Good	L2 - Moderate	L2 - Good
Comfort	L2 – Moderate (adjusted)	L1 - Poor	L1 - Poor	L1 -Poor

However, the interviews do unveil differences in their intent and experience:

	First timer new delegates	First timer experienced delegates	Returning experienced delegates
Learning	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To assess on their own understanding</li> <li>Exploring potential areas of interest in evaluation</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To strengthen their existing practice</li> <li>Exploring alternate approaches</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To challenge the current understanding and premise of evaluation</li> </ul>
Social	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest to meet the larger evaluation community</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest to meet people with similar competencies and experiences</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest to reconnect with existing connections formed</li> </ul>

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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### RECOMMENDATION 1: PREPARATION OF CONTINGENCIES WHEN IMPLEMENTING NEW INITIATIVES TO ENSURE DELEGATES' EXPERIENCE REMAIN AT COMPARABLE LEVELS

A key point of poor performance was associated with the implementation of the new conference application; **it is recommended for future committees to consider the provision of contingency measures in the event of implementing new initiatives in the future.** This will ensure that the new initiatives to have room for experimentations and improvements while not being detrimental to the delegates' experiences if it was not able to provide its intended purpose.

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### RECOMMENDATION 2: MAINTAINING THE DIVERSITY OF SOCIAL PROGRAMMING

As the social elements of this conference were well received, further conferences could **continue to provide a diverse set of social programming** to engage delegates with different social preferences. The addition of **structured introductions during social programs can further the conference's ability to help delegates form new connections** during the conference as some delegates did indicate that they found difficulties in interacting with other delegates and in identifying delegates with similar experience and sectors.

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### RECOMMENDATION 3: FURTHER DEFINITION OF "VALUE FOR MONEY" IN FURTHER EVALUATION

Lastly, the evaluation acknowledges that the exploration whether the conference represents value for money rather underdeveloped. Specifically, **future evaluation can benefit greatly from a more robust conceptualisation and definition of the concept of "value for money"**, one that is meaningful for both participants and conference organisers.

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# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE CONFERENCE aes25

aes2025 is part of the ongoing series of international evaluation conference organized by Australian Evaluation Society (AES). The intent of the conference is to bring together from evaluator from all around the world, allowing evaluation community to meet and learn from each other. Similar to previous conferences, aes2025 was a three-day conference with two days of pre-conference workshops. It was held in Canberra from 15 September to 19 September, with over 619 registered delegates.

The conference theme “*Beyond the Bubble*” encourages delegates to develop a more holistic and inclusive understanding of the world via the practice of evaluation. The theme was further articulated through four sub-themes:

<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Connecting</b>	<b>Cultivating</b>	<b>Transforming</b>
To acknowledge diverse knowledge systems and perspectives to strengthen the theories, methodologies and techniques of evaluation	To foster networks, relationships, democratising citizen engagement, learning from participatory and people centre-approaches	To celebrate diversity and Indigenous knowledge, building evaluation capacity and awareness and expanding knowledge translation	To embrace ethical use of artificial intelligences (AI), and emerging technologies, and explore adaptive leadership, innovation and learning

The conference provides a mix of formal and interactive presentations to delivered engaging and inspiring content. A new format introduced in aes2025 is the Exploration session, which provides opportunities for participants learn the subject matter via rich discussions facilitated by the speaker(s).

aes2025 also provides a series of social programs for the delegates to interact and network with other delegates. A focus of the aes25 committee was to provide a variety of different social settings, allowing delegates to network through their preferred social settings. Collectively, the social programs further the conference’s intent to provide opportunities for delegates to foster new connections and strengthen existing networks.

The proposed logic model that was used to inform the evaluation can be found in [Appendix 1b](#).

## ABOUT THE EVALUATION

A utilization-focused evaluation framework (Patton, 2012) was used to guide the design and conduct of the evaluation. The framework was chosen to draw greater attention to the intended use of the evaluation findings by its intended users and the underlying context at each step of the evaluation.

The goal of the evaluation was to determine the value of the conference experience for the delegates and to gather information to support the continued improvement of the conference. In support of the goal, the three overarching evaluation questions were:

KEQ 1	Was the conference a valuable experience for the delegates?
KEQ 2	Was the conference a good value for money for the delegates?
KEQ 3	Did the conference provide a valuable experience for both new and experienced delegates?

The detailed evaluation plan can be found in [Appendix 1a](#).

### **INSERT: What’s a valuable experience for the delegates?**

Notably, the evaluation draws a greater focus on KEQ1, as it intent to develop a greater understanding of the delegates’ concept of “value”. While this evaluation is commissioned as standalone project, the evaluation of AES conferences is part of AES’s effort to ensure the delivery of quality experiences by the conference to the evaluation community. With a clearer definition, evaluations can become more precise in determining the conference’s capacity to deliver a valuable experience to its delegates.

This evaluation identified and used three key dimensions to describe the concept of “valuable experience”:

- Conference should serve delegates’ **intent to learn**
- Conference should serve the delegates **intent to meet and network with other delegates**
- Conference should provide a **comfortable experience**

More details can be found in [Appendix 2b](#).

The evaluation had used variations of mixed methods approach to answer each evaluation question. This was supported by two main data collection modalities: Semi-structured interviews and self-administered online survey. The analysis was supported by information gathered by reviewing documents (i.e. registration data, conference programming schedules, past evaluation reports).

The full evaluation design is described in [Appendix 2](#).

## SAMPLE

### POST-CONFERENCE SURVEY

We received a total of 296 responses, with 256 completed response and 48 partial responses, attaining a response rate of 47.8%.

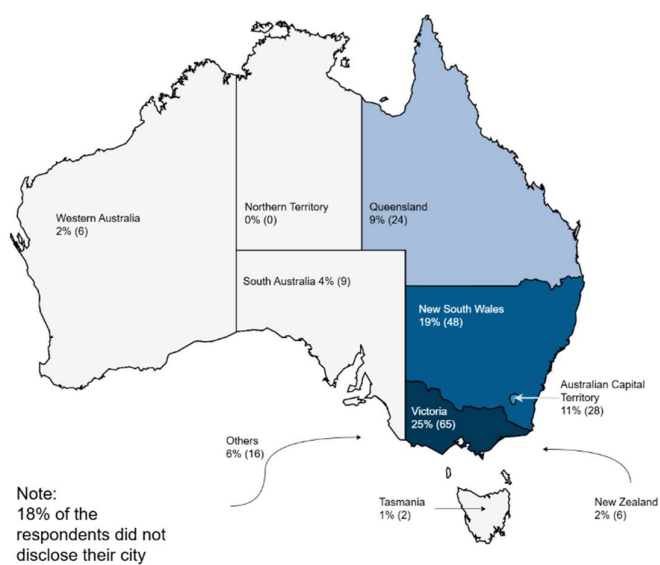
#### Demographics:

The table 1a below describes the demographics respondents who have attempted the survey:

<b>Respondents' age</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
18 to 34 years old	47 (18.36%)
35 to 44 years old	65 (25.39%)
45 to 54 years old	59 (23.05%)
55 to 64 years old	30 (11.72%)
65 years old and above	9 (3.52%)
Prefer to not disclose	46 (17.97%)
<b>Respondents' gender</b>	
Woman	168 (65.62%)
Man	45 (17.58%)
Non-Binary	2 (0.78%)
Prefer to not disclose	41 (16.02%)
<b>If respondent was Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Māori, Pacific Island and/or other Indigenous origin?</b>	
Yes	25 (9.77%)
No	190 (74.22%)
Prefer to not disclose	41 (16.02%)

Similar to previous years, most respondents were aged between 35 to 54 years old. 66% of the delegates identified as woman and 18% identified as man. The proportion of female to males in the sample (79%) remain consistent with past evaluations (72%,79%,76%). 9% of the respondents identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait islander, Māori, Pacific Island or other indigenous origin.

The respondents were consisting mainly of delegates from Victoria (25%), New South Wales (19%), Australian Capital Territory (11%) and Queensland (9%). The next largest group are the delegates from other countries, and this include When compared to 2024, aes25 had a greater proportion of delegates from New South Wales and Australian Capital City, but a lower proportion of delegates from Victoria and lower international representation. This is further elaborated in Figure 1 and Table 1b.



**Table 1b: Respondents' Nationality (N=256)**

City	n (%)
ACT	28 (10.94%)
NSW	48 (18.75%)
Northern Territory	0 (0.00%)
Queensland	24 (9.38%)
South Australia	9 (3.52%)
Victoria	65 (25.39%)
Tasmania	2 (0.78%)
Western Australia	6 (2.34%)
New Zealand	6 (2.34%)
Others	16 (6.25%)

Figure 1: Visualisation of Respondents' nationality

### Professional Characteristics:

**Table 1c: Respondents' professional characteristics (N=256)**

	n (%)
<b>Respondents' competency in evaluation</b>	
No experience	4 (1.56%)
Beginner	27 (10.55%)
Intermediate	83 (32.42%)
Advanced	82 (32.03%)
Expert	23 (8.98%)
Prefer to not disclose	37 (14.45%)
<b>Organisation of respondent's primary occupation (Top 5)</b>	
Private sector/ consultancy	60 (23.44%)
Community or not-for-profit sector	50 (19.53%)
Commonwealth government	48 (18.75%)
State or territorial government	22 (8.59%)
University (academic, student and non-academic staff)	14 (5.47%)
Prefer to not disclose	42 (16.41%)
<b>Industry in respondents worked in in the past year (Top 5)</b>	
Community and Social Services	113 (44.14%)
Education and training	83 (32.42%)
Health and Disability	81 (31.64%)
Public administration and Safety	45 (17.58%)
International development	40 (15.62%)
Prefer to not disclose	14 (5.47%)

<b>Roles played by respondents in evaluation (Top 5)</b>	
Researcher in evaluation practice	141 (55.08%)
Oversee evaluation projects	109 (42.58%)
Supporting evaluation projects	101 (39.45%)
Providing training in evaluation	95 (37.11%)
Plan or commission evaluation work	77 (30.08%)
Prefer to not disclose	10 (3.91%)

The respondents consist of mainly delegates with intermediate and advanced competency in evaluation. Most respondents were from the private sector (23%), community sector (20%) and commonwealth government (19%). Almost half of the respondents have worked on projects that are related to community and social service (44%), and the two other industries where respondents were greatly involved in were the education (32%) and health sector (32%). The top five roles played by the respondents include: researcher in evaluation practice (55%), oversee evaluation projects (43%), support evaluation projects (39%), provides training in evaluation (37%), and plan and commission evaluation work (30%).

When comparing the sample with the registration, we note that there are some notable differences in professional characteristics, suggesting some perspectives in the conference may be underrepresented. This is indicated in Table 1d.

<b>Table 1d: Significant discrepancy in professional characteristics between sample and registration data</b>			
		<i>n (%)</i>	
<b>Sector of work</b>		<b>Sample data (N=256)</b>	<b>Registration data (N=619)</b>
Commonwealth government	Under-represented	48 (18.75%)	153 (24.76%)
Community or not-for-profit sector	Over-represented	50 (19.53%)	95 (15.37%)
<b>Role played by delegate</b>		<b>Sample data</b>	<b>Registration data</b>
Oversee program(s) that are evaluated	Under-represented	31 (12.11%)	122 (19.74%)
Supporting evaluation projects	Under-represented	101 (39.45%)	306 (49.51%)
For full comparison, refer to the <a href="#">Appendix 3</a>			

### **Conference participation**

Half of the respondents (52%) participated in the conference solely as a participant, 32% presented at the conference and 10% were exhibitors at the conference. 36% of the participants have at least one pre-conference workshop. In terms of funding, 71% of the delegates were funded by their employers.

40% of the respondents were first-time participants, and 31% have attended 2-3 of the past AES conferences and 29% participated more than 4 of the past AES conferences.

<b>Table 1e: Conference participation (N=256)</b>	
<b>Role of respondent in conference</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
Participant Only	133 (51.95%)
Presenter	81 (31.64%)
Sponsor	5 (1.95%)
Session chair	21 (8.20%)
Exhibitor	26 (10.16%)
Conference Grant recipient	9 (3.52%)
Organizer/Volunteer	27 (10.55%)
<b>Attendance for aes25</b>	
Average no of days attended by delegates	3.53 ± 0.77
Participants who attended pre-conference workshops	91 (35.55%)
<b>Source of funding for aes25</b>	
Employer funded	211 (71.28%)
Self-funded or a mix of funding	69 (22.97%)
Conference support grant/Sponsorships	16 (5.41%)
<b>Conference attended before aes25</b>	
1st conference	104 (40.62%)
2-3 conferences	79 (30.86%)
4+ conferences	73 (28.51%)

### **AES membership**

66% of the respondents are existing members of AES, with 46% as individual members and 20% as organisational members. The proportion of members is higher in aes25 (77%) when compared to aes24 (71%). Lastly, The number of non-members is considering joining have decreased from 18% in aes24 to 11% in aes25.

<b>Table 1f: AES membership (N=256)</b>	
<b>Membership of AES</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
<b>Individual Membership</b>	119 (46.48%)
<b>Organisational membership</b>	50 (19.53%)
<b>No, Considering</b>	25 (9.77%)
<b>No, but was previously a member</b>	6 (2.34%)
<b>No, and not considering</b>	12 (4.69%)
<b>Others</b>	5 (1.95%)
<b>Prefer to not disclose</b>	39 (15.23%)

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

A total of 15 interviews was conducted during the conference. The distribution of interviewees was purposefully chosen to allow the interviews to capture the experienced of new and experienced delegates.

<b>Table 1g: Characteristics of interviewee (N=15)</b>	
<b>Average no of years in evaluation</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
1 to 4 years of experience	4 (26%)
5 to 10 years of experience	1 (7%)
10+ years of experience	10 (67%)
<b>Competency in Evaluation</b>	
Beginner	3 (20%)
Intermediate	6 (40%)
Advanced	5 (33%)
Expert	1 (7%)
<b>No of conference attended previously</b>	
First time	9 (60%)
Returning attendees (2 or more conferences)	6 (40%)
<b>Reclassification for analysis</b>	
First-time new delegates	6 (40%)
First-time experienced delegates	3 (20%)
Returning experienced delegates	6 (40%)

## KEQ1: WAS THE CONFERENCE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE FOR THE DELEGATES?

### LEARNING - DID THE CONFERENCE PROVIDED CONTENT THAT HELPED DELEGATES LEARN?

#### RQ1: PARTICIPATION PATTERNS OF THE DELEGATES IN THE CONFERENCE?

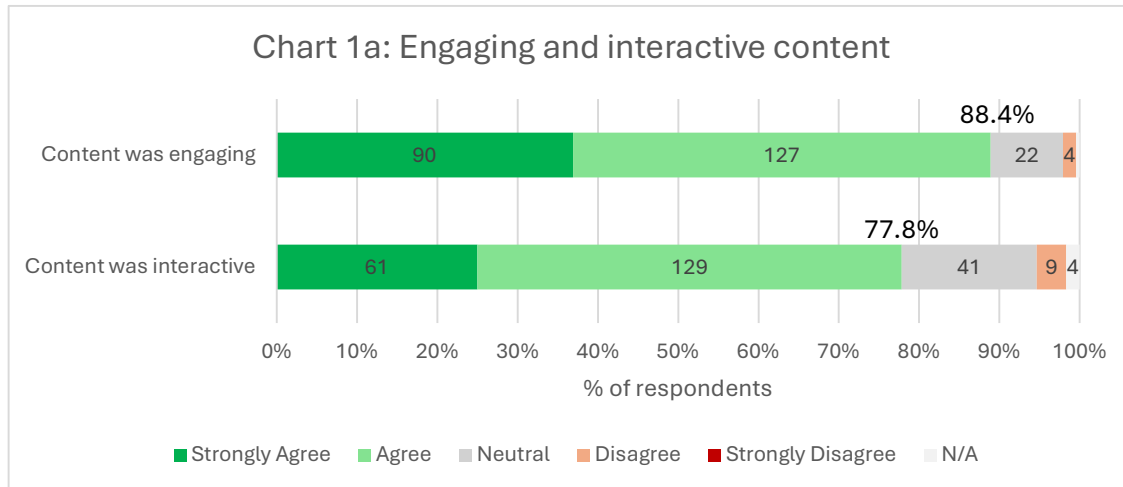
On average, delegates have experienced five different formats during the conference and 93% of the delegates have experienced at least one of the interactive formats (i.e. Ignite, Exploration, Skills Building or Big Room). This was critical for the success of the conference as the diversity of format is one of the key features to support the provision of engaging and interactive content. Notably, a third of the respondents have experienced the new format, exploration.

<b>Formats</b>	<b>N=244</b>
Keynote Presentation	231 (94.7%)
Short Paper	207 (84.8%)
Long paper	168 (68.9%)
Panel	200 (82.0%)
Ignite	152 (62.3%)
Exploration	79 (32.4%)
Skills building	1133 (46.3%)
Big room	120 (49.2%)

#### RQ2: TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE CONTENT ENGAGING AND INTERACTIVE?

			<b>Evidence</b>
Evaluative conclusion	Content was <b>engaging</b>	<b>Level 3 - Good</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>88%</b> indicated content was engaging.</li> <li>• Good facilitations</li> <li>• Inclusion of smaller discussion groups</li> </ul>
	Content was <b>interactive</b>	<b>Level 2 - Moderate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>78%</b> indicated content was interactive, below our criteria for excellence of 80%.</li> <li>• Lack opportunities to interact during the sessions</li> </ul>

88% of the respondents found that the content was engaging and 78% found the content was interactive. These sentiments were echoed during the interviews, where delegates have shared that they have learned greatly from the discussions during the concurrent sessions. This was greatly supported by the presence of good facilitations and smaller discussion groups, where it provides both speakers and delegates the safety to share their experience and interact with one another.



The content might be perceived to be less interactive as not all sessions were not designed to be interactive, such as the interactive nature of content may be limited to the delegates' selection. The lack of good markers or classification made it difficult for participants to navigate. Delegates also share other factors that may have limited the interactivity of content, such as insufficient time and space for discussions, format limitations and experience of speakers.

*“If you do get safety (as a participant), such as Samantha Abbato, as an example, she's very engaging, and so everyone felt safe to engage in her, the program that she delivered to, the one hour talk that she delivered. For others, yeah, there's less interaction you can say. Almost to the point of practically zero interaction.”*

– Interviewee 5 (First-time New)

*“I think plenary sessions should have the opportunity for interaction. Relying entirely on the chat function in the app is disengaging. In person discussion is much more engaging. it's not hard - just need a few microphones”*

– Open-ended feedback

*“The content was very one-sided in most situations. Those lessons learnt are invariably the same no matter what the presentation is about, and they get quite boring to engage with.”*

– Open-ended feedback

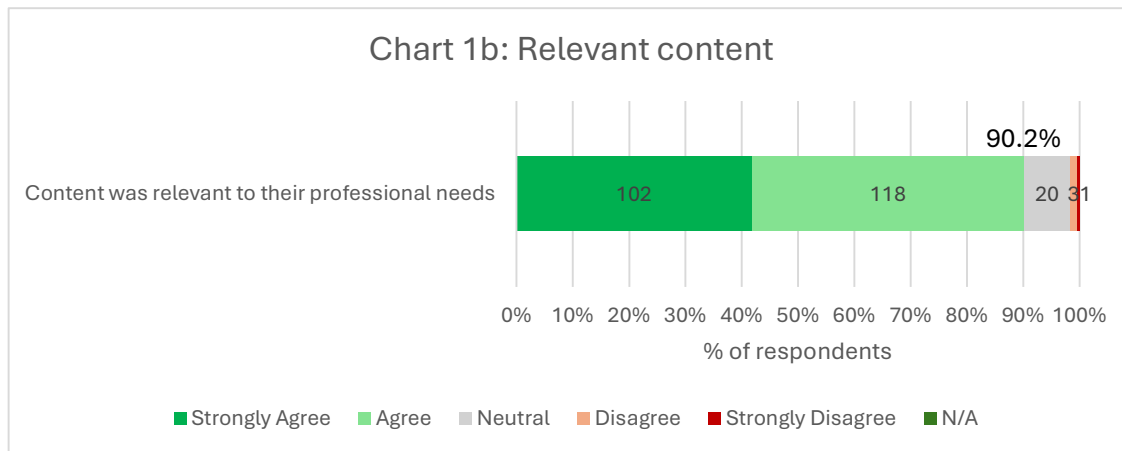
*“The IT limitations of the venue meant that content had to be presented via PowerPoint alone which does not align with a lot of the ways of working post-COVID (e.g. having embedded polls / collaborative online materials).”*

– Open-ended feedback

### RQ3: TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE CONTENT WAS **RELEVANT TO DELEGATES' PROFESSIONAL NEEDS?**

Table 2c: Evaluative conclusion for relevant content			Evidence
Evaluative conclusion	Content was <b>relevant to their professional needs</b>	<b>Level 3 - Good</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>90%</b> indicated content was relevant to their professional needs</li> <li>• Delegates faced difficulty to find the content that was relevant to them</li> <li>• Some delegates still received meaningful takeaways even from sessions that were not directly aligned with delegates' interest.</li> </ul>

90% of the respondents found the content to be relevant to their professional needs. Respondents shared that the presented content has helped to help them assess their own understanding and competency in evaluation, and it has helped them gain a greater appreciation of evaluation practice.



*“My favourite session of the conference was Matt Healy's on systems thinking and wicked problems. That was an exciting method I'd never used before but could see a lot of applicability to my work?”*

– Open-ended feedback

*“Helped me build my conceptualisation of the evaluation field, the experience and domains that evaluators may possess, different position points within the field, and the new challenges we're experiencing now and in the future.”*

– Open-ended feedback

The interviews also revealed that delegates “shopped” around concurrent sessions to find the content that were relevant for them (i.e. attending part of the sessions and leaving for another between presentation within each concurrent session) This was due to the way how sessions were chained together, where delegates might prefer a single presentation in one session has interest to visit another presentation in a different session. Delegates were hesitant as they were unsure whether this was the intended

way to navigate the conference content, but it served their desire to gather content relevant to their professional development. On the other hand, some delegates who stayed in sessions that was not in their plan found themselves still learning and taking away insights that were relevant to them.

*I actually went to two sessions, and I walked out, which was also very embarrassing. I find it very disrespectful to just walk out in front of somebody who's presenting...I just, it was like this 30 minutes and then I was like, should I go for the 30 minutes, or should I go for the one that is a half hour and another for one hour?*

*– Interviewee 2 (First-time experienced)*

*“Generally, I would choose not to go to any of those things because I don't work in those areas... But I have finished up in a few sessions that did that were in those areas that were actually much more interesting than I was expecting them to be... But there were some good ideas.*

*– Interviewee 4 (Returning experienced)*

However, it was also salient that several delegates faced difficulties in navigating the conference where there was a lack of a system to help them identify which session was relevant to them. Delegates have suggested that it would be helpful if each session could share their key sharing points as well as its suitability to the different levels of competency in evaluation.

*It was indistinguishable the session type, the theme was never clarified.*

*– Open-ended feedback*

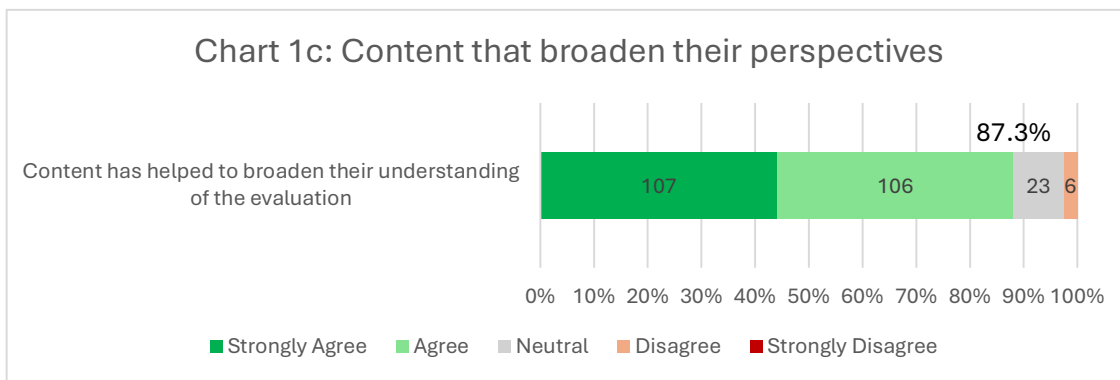
*Hard to find presentations that were at the right point of my personal evaluation experience. Some too entry-level, some too sophisticated.*

*– Open-ended feedback*

**RQ4: TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE CONTENT THAT HELPFUL IN BROADEN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF EVALUATION?**

Table 2c: Evaluative conclusion for content that helped to broaden delegate’s perspective			Evidence
Evaluative conclusion	Content helped to broaden their understanding of evaluation	<b>Level 3 - Good</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>87% indicated content helped to broaden their perspectives</li> <li>Newer delegates used the content to assess their own competencies, identify knowledge gaps and seek for content to address those gaps.</li> <li>Experienced delegates seek for deeper content that challenges deeper questions of evaluation as well as alternatives to their existing practice.</li> </ul>

87% of the respondents indicated the presented content has helped to broaden their understanding of evaluation.



Delegates also shared that the content have helped them explore new topics as well as garner their interest to explore these topics further. These topics include inclusive and context-sensitive methodologies, exposure to diverse approaches and methodologies and a greater understanding of the evaluation profession. Delegates also shared that they were encouraged by the prominence of First Nation evaluation and evaluators in aes25 and were interested to learn from the First Nation community. Another notable theme that emerged, aligned with the conference’s intent, was the presentations on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its role and impact on in evaluation.

*Great discussions about AI and the future of evaluation; evaluation methods and theories; deep dives into certain aspects of evaluation (i.e. evaluative reasoning)*

*– Open-ended feedback*

*It challenged me to continue to think about how I (as an evaluator) can practically support program areas to co-navigate with First Nations stakeholders from the very beginning, rather than arriving with a pre-set plan.*

*– Open-ended feedback*

The interviews also revealed significant differences between new and experienced delegates. Newer delegates indicated that the content has helped assess their own competency, identifying their knowledge gaps. This allowed them to seek additional content during the conference that address those gaps, which allowed them to broaden their understanding of evaluation.

*I got to kind of test my foundations... and then it was quite a nice check in with myself of like, "okay, you know, how prepped and primed am I for the conference?" And actually surprisingly I know a lot more than I think I do. And so that was nice because that gave me confidence to go into other sessions on more specific topics*

*– Interviewee 1 (First-time New)*

*"I gained a generic understanding of different tools that I used of the sessions... like evaluation methods, some standards of evaluation methods, and it was kind of like a starting point for me to go on like a learning journey. on, like, here, how evaluations are done"*

*– Interviewee 15 (First-time New)*

While for experienced evaluators, they seek for content that were similar to their existing practice while differing in context or approach. They were also seeking for content that explore broader ideas of evaluations, allowing them to challenge their understanding of evaluation. Some examples shared include content that challenges the nature of existing evaluation practice, international perspectives of evaluation and non-evaluation content that can be expand one's approach in evaluation.

*"They were presenting the exact same methodology that I do in my workplace. But they put it in a game context, and my mind was really blown, and I was like, how amazing...it was just so encouraging to be in the space, in the room. I felt validated that my approach was correct got another level of what if I could take what I'm doing to this next level"*

*– Interviewee 9 (First-time Experienced)*

*"...either international or just people who really challenge us or really push us or introduce really new or critical perspectives on either techniques or approaches or our field as a whole much deeper reflection and how the growth of the sector."*

*– Interviewee 14 (Returning Experienced)*

## SERVING DELEGATE’S INTENT TO LEARN: **LEVEL 2 - MODERATE**

The conference succeeded in serving the delegates’ intent to learn at the conference, where it has delivered excellent content that were relevant, engaging and content that broaden the delegates’ perspective of evaluation. However, the provision of interactive content remained at the levels that is similar to previous conferences, resulting in a level 2, moderate rating.

		<b>% of delegates agreed</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
Evaluative conclusion for: Serving delegates’ intent to learn	Content was relevant	90.2%	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
	Content was engaging	88.4%	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
	Content was interactive	77.8%	<b>Level 2 – Moderate</b>
	Content helped to broaden perspectives	87.3%	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>

## ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK: REPRESENTATION OF PRESENTATIONS

In addition to the function of the content, some delegates have shared that there was a greater representation of consultancy and private sector at the conference over presentations of the non-profit and community sector. This representation made some delegates question the direction of conference, worrying if the conference is becoming too commercialised and less useful to their practice

*“It also had a lot of consultants. It would be great to have more of a mix of not for profits as well”*

*– Open-ended feedback*

*“It may reflect the evaluation sector but I thought the conference was too dominated by consultants and their consultancy firms. As a practitioner in a not for profit, I found this a bit of a values, power and cultural mis-match throughout the conference.”*

*– Open-ended feedback*

*“Maybe I chose the wrong sessions, but I didn't really learn a lot of new methods or skills. A lot of sponsors gave very generic presentations. ”*

*– Open-ended feedback*

*“Working in the social services NFP sector, I'm disappointed there weren't more sessions relevant to our context. Consultants do critical work, but several sessions demonstrated they may lack the contextual understanding within the social services sector, by virtue of how little time they have to engage with services sufficiently. Sessions that were co-led by a partner in the sector were great.”*

*– Open-ended feedback*

**SOCIAL – DID THE CONFERENCE HELP DELEGATES TO SOCIALIZE/NETWORK WITH OTHER DELEGATES?**

**RQ5. PARTICIPATION PATTERNS IN SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

83% of the delegates have participated at least one of the social programs. The most attended social program was the Gala Dinner, where 64% of the delegates attended, followed by the Welcome Reception, where 43% of the delegates attended. Other social programs have engaged about 10% to 20% of the delegates. 17% of the delegates did not attend any social programs, with most citing reasons tied to fatigue from attending the conference and needing to attend to their work and social obligations. A point of concern are the confusions with social programming cited by the some delegates :

*Confusion about whether the main social events were included in the ticket price and not being able to afford to come if they were not.*

*- open-ended feedback  
(Reasons for not attending any social events)*

*Mix of timing and scheduling. We also missed that the Gala was included/subsidised as part of the 3-day ticket*

*- open-ended feedback  
(Reasons for not attending any social events)*

*the social event details were not well communicated by my agency.*

*- open-ended feedback  
(Reasons for not attending any social events)*

When asked at which point of the conference did the delegates made new connections, 74% of delegates who participated in the Gala dinner made new connections, 67% who participated in the welcome reception made new connections, and 61% who participated in newcomers’ breakfast. Other notable points where delegates made new connected were the breaks between sessions (77%), during the concurrent sessions (48%) and at the exhibit stores (41%). Only 1% of the delegates did not make any new connections during the conference.

Via the interviews, several delegates have opted out of the social programs due to fatigue from the conference. They cited the need to decompress and to reflect on the content. There was also presence of conflicting plans, where some delegates have organized their own social gatherings.

Delegates also shared that the cost remains a barrier to participate in the social program, citing that it was too costly to participate. Notably, several delegates have opted out of the Gala dinner, as they thought they had to pay additional to attend. This confusion might be mainly with new participants, where they might not be familiar with the social programs of the AES conferences

When asked about the gala dinner:

“we have already, like, a dinner inviting posting by one of our colleagues the clarity of that the dinner is actually free for participants...because many from my office did not understand that it's free. That's why we already met this plan on Thursdays”

- Interviewee 6 (First-time new evaluator)

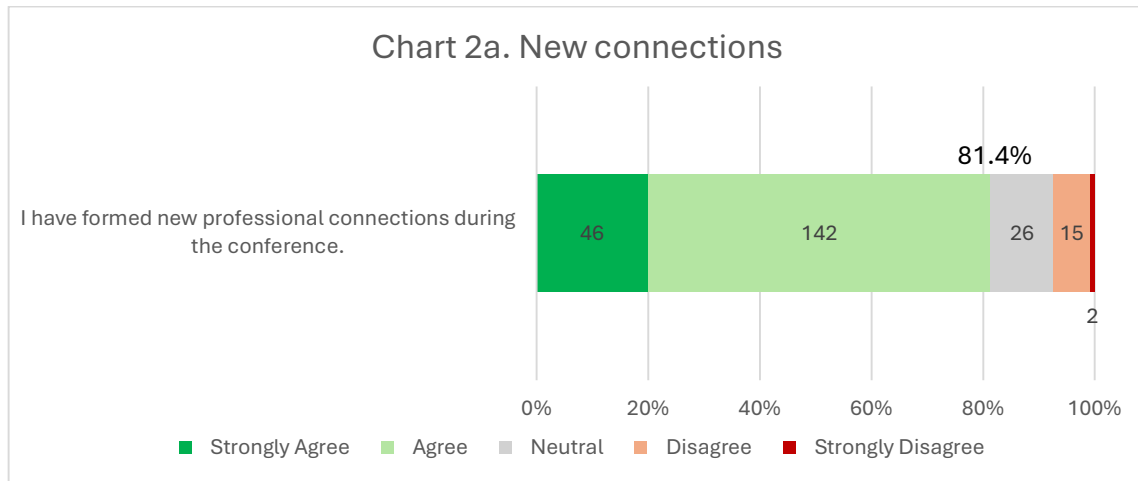
We missed the (gala) dinner last night, so we didn't go to that, but that was because we were trying to strengthen our own community of practice

- Interviewee 12  
(First-time new evaluator)

<b>Table 3a. Participation patterns for social programs</b>		
<b>Social programs</b>	<b>n (%) of delegates attended</b>	<b>N (%) of delegates who made new connections at the social programs</b>
Welcome to Canberra Drinks	32 (12.50%)	26 (81.25%)
Welcome Reception	109 (42.58%)	73 (66.97%)
Newcomers' Breakfast	36 (14.06%)	22 (61.11%)
First Night Supper	31 (12.11%)	16 (51.61%)
AES2025 AGM	26 (10.16%)	6 (23.08%)
Gala awards dinner	165 (64.45%)	122 (73.94%)
Recharge breakfast	47 (18.36%)	22 (46.81%)
Delegates who did not attend any social program	43 (16.80%)	-
<b>Other points where delegates made social connections</b>		
Breaks (Morning tea, Lunch, Afternoon tea)		197 (76.95%)
Concurrent sessions		122 (47.66%)
Exhibitor booths		104 (40.62%)
Pre-conference workshops		83 (32.42%)
Keynote sessions		42 (16.41%)
First Nations creation space		24 (9.38%)
Special interest group meetings		21 (8.20%)
<b>Delegates who did not make any connections during conference</b>		3 (1.17%)

## RQ6. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE DELEGATES MADE NEW PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS AT THE CONFERENCE?

81% of the delegates managed to form new professional connections at the conferences. The formation of connections was greatly facilitated by the diversity of delegates that were present at the conference, varying from industries, nationalities and roles within the evaluation ecosystem. Delegates also shared that they felt the community has been welcoming, where everyone was open to share their experiences with one another.



Some delegates also shared that it was in their intention to not form any connections, where some were more focus on learning, and other were more focused on reconnecting with their extensive social networks.

*“The reality is I now know enough people that, you know, I don't, I don't come to the conference to make new friends. Inevitably, you know, you meet a few people in incidentally at every conference...”*

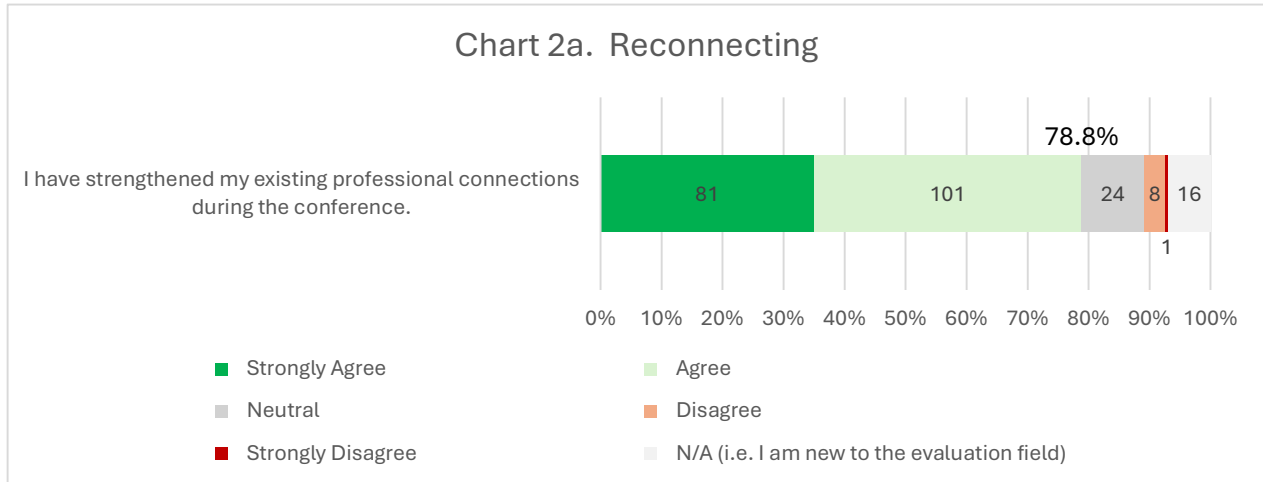
*- Interviewee 4  
(Returning experienced evaluator)*

*“I really feel like it was a conscious vision to not not socialized because of like lack of energy and I just like if I try to socialize with someone, it's just good energy.”*

*- Interviewee 15  
(First-time new evaluator)*

**RQ7. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE DELEGATES STRENGTHEN THEIR EXISTING PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS AT THE CONFERENCE?**

79% have shared that they strengthen their existing professional connections during the conference. This was mainly with the returning experienced delegates, where they shared that their main interest was to reconnect with their existing connections. They also shared that their own social circle is large enough, and they have only had sufficient capacity to reconnect with existing connections.



**SERVING DELEGATE’S INTENT TO SOCIALISE AND NETWORK: LEVEL 3 – GOOD**

<b>Table 3b: Evaluative conclusion on conference serving delegates intent to socialise and network</b>				
	<b>% of delegates agreed</b>		<b>Evaluative Conclusion:</b> Serving delegates’ intent to socialize	
Conference have helped delegates to form new professional connections	81.4%	→	90% of the delegates formed new connections OR reconnected with their own network	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
Conference have helped delegates strengthen their existing professional connections	78.8%			

90% of the delegates have either made new connections or reconnect with their existing professional works. Furthermore, we found that 83% of the delegates have attended at least one social program. This suggests that the existing social programming was doing an excellent in serving the delegates’ intent to socialise.

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## FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS TO SOCIAL INTENT

The social aspects of the conference were facilitated by several factors: Firstly, delegates shared that there was the conference have ample opportunities for delegates to socialise and network, which helped delegates form new connections and strengthen existing connections.

*"I'm really pleased with the amount of opportunities to socialise, network, and meet new people. More of this in the presentations would be welcome too"*

- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements of conference)

*"The social component of aes25 was very well done. There were plenty of opportunities for people to connect, which was fantastic"*

- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements of conference)

The exhibition space has also facilitated the social activities in aes25. Delegates shared that the space allowed them to share and meet people at each booth. The exhibition space also acted as a point of congregation between sessions, where delegates return to after each session, which providing more opportunities to interact and socialise.

*"The booths were much more welcoming this year with games/ activities and spaces to hang out. I was able to make several new connections whilst engaging in these spaces."*

- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements of conference)

*"It was fantastic to host an exhibition booth - great way to share what we do and to meet new and existing connections."*

- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements of conference)

Conversely, there were some spatial and time limitations that limited for delegates' ability to socialise. These include the lack of conducive space for conversations and discussions during breaks. Delegates also shared that the time between concurrent sessions were too short for delegates to connect with delegates between sessions.

*"More places to sit and chat with fellow participants during breaks would've been good. Standing around eating isn't an easy way to interact with others."*

- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements of conference)

*"There isn't enough time between concurrent sessions to really nurture a relationship with someone you have just met at your table."*

- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements of conference)

Some delegates also found it difficult to identify and connect with delegates with similar experience and interest. They suggested that future social events could have some degree of structured activities facilitate connection between delegates or ways to help them find other like-minded delegates.

*“I’m not great at networking or starting cold conversations with people. The conference felt quite “cliquey” ie lots of the presenters and exhibitors all knew each other. It would have been great to have more scaffolding for networking eg a meet up for independent/small org consultants; people in govt; etc.”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements)*

*“There might be some sort of ‘real world’ connections brokering we could do at the conference, could be something like people can sign up to a coffee roulette or some other sort of speed dating..matching skills or interest and sending out info to groups that might be interested in meeting with each other”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements)*

Lastly, delegates provided several pieces of feedback regarding the venues selected for key social events. In particular, delegates felt that the significance and features of the venues were not adequately communicated or showcased to them. Additionally, the Gala Dinner venue held negative cultural significance for First Nations peoples, which caused discomfort among some members of the community and may have affected their willingness to attend. These considerations should inform venue selection for future conferences.

*“I didn’t get to see the exhibition at the portrait gallery at the Welcome drinks event. It would’ve been useful if someone circulated when the gallery was opened/closed...”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements)*

*“The dinner at Parliament house was odd and disappointing in that there was no reference to the very special and significant building we were in... It was a terrible shame not to point out key features to visitors, including the amazing tapestry in the great hall, and the significance of the features in the lobby.”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements)*

*“As a First Nations People, I found it extremely offensive to chose the Great Hall, Parliament House as a location to celebrate the gala Dinner. This is the building of our Peoples oppression and to have this as a place of celebration felt belittling to myself and the other First Nations attendees and recipients of the Grant, but we felt compelled to appear happy like we always have to, not something I hope is repeated again”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Comments on the social elements)*

## COMFORT – DID THE CONFERENCE PROVIDE A COMFORTABLE EXPERIENCE?

In general, delegates were highly satisfied with most elements of the conferences with the ratings were the cut-off of 7 out of 10. This sentiment was echoed by the delegates, where they shared that the conference was well organized.

*“Conference organisation was generally great. It's working best when you don't notice it, and that was definitely the goal this year. Everyone (staff and convenors) seemed calm and unflustered, which is a great.”*

- Open-ended Feedback

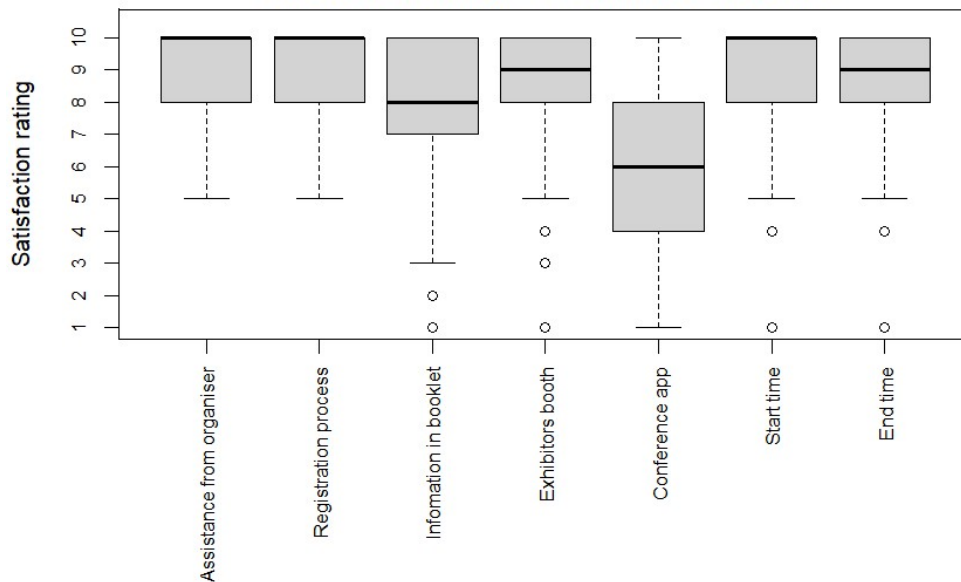
*“It was well organized with sessions running coherently and it was great to have amazing keynote speakers that shared about their experiences and the reality of what being an evaluator has been for them. Overall, it was the best conference I've ever attended.”*

- Open-ended Feedback

**Table 4a. Delegate’s satisfaction with various elements of the conference**

Elements of the conferences	No. of participants (N=256)	Average satisfaction rating	% of participants satisfied with element (8-10)
Assistance from conference organiser	211	9.09 ± 1.23	89.1%
Registration process	228	9.11 ± 1.28	89.5%
Information in conference booklet	241	7.93 ± 2.08	64.3%
Exhibitor booths	205	8.54 ± 1.56	81.0%
Conference application	248	5.78 ± 2.71	31.0%
Start time of each day	249	9.08 ± 1.28	90.0%
End time of each day	249	8.71 ± 1.58	82.7%

**Satisfaction ratings of conference elements**



When comparing the scores to aes24, we found a few notable differences:

### **Significant improvement in the exhibitor booths**

There was a significant improvement in the satisfaction rating of the exhibitors' booths in aes25. The satisfaction rating improved from 7.68 to 8.54.

Via the interviews, delegates shared that the exhibitor booths served an excellent point of congregation, allowing delegates to connect with others. It is also notable the exhibitor booths of aes25 benefited greatly from its venue, where the presence of a large open space allowed for an extensive exhibition space.



### **Conference application & Conference booklet**

The satisfaction with the conference application fell significantly from 8.14 to 5.78 in aes25. This was mainly due to the introduction of the new application for aes25, with the hopes of introducing a better experience for the delegates. However, the application was poorly received as users faced several issues with the applications, such as unintuitive interface, poorly optimized usage patterns, constant updates in the applications. Delegates have also shared several recommendations and improvements as indicated in the Appendix 5.

The poor implementation of the application has also made it difficult for delegates to navigate the conference, leading to greater frustration and seeking for alternate source of information. This has also likely led to the decrease in satisfaction with information in the conference booklet, where its rating fell from 8.63 to 7.93. This was expected as the booklet is supposed to serve as a companion to the application, where it is supposed to provide complementary information to the application.

### **Other notable features**

There were a few other features that affected the delegates' experiences:

- **Pacing of the program:** Several delegates commented that the pacing of the program was intense, where the delegates are often disengaged or absent by the end of the day (i.e. 3pm to 4:30pm). While they commend the organisers effort to pack so much content into the conference, delegates felt that it would be beneficial for the conference to end on an earlier timing. On a similar note, delegates also commended the improvement of start time of each data to 9am, which is also reflected in improvement of satisfaction rating of start time from 8.16 to 9.08.

- **Food:** Some delegates were dissatisfied with the food options where the catering was not suitable for the delegates with dietary restrictions (i.e. vegetarians).

*“On the dietary table there were meat products. Why would you have meat of any kind on the dietary table? There were also various dairy products, not to mention nuts, seafood, etc...the vegan/vegetarian options wasdire - one of the days I was reduced to solely eating green beans for lunch.*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(General feedback of the conference)*

*“There needs to be monitoring of the special dietary foods. One diabetic colleague had a bit of bread and meagre slice of ham - that was all there was left and early in the lunch break.”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(General feedback of the conference)*

PROVIDING A COMFORTABLE EXPERIENCE: **LEVEL 2 - MODERATE**

<b>Table 4b: Evaluative conclusion on providing a comfortable experience</b>			
<b>Elements of the conferences</b>	<b>Average satisfaction rating</b>	<b>Evaluative conclusion: Providing a comfortable experience</b>	<b>Revised evaluative conclusion:</b>
Assistance from organiser	9.09	<b>Level 1 – Poor:</b> <i>Providing an experience that is less comfortable than aes24</i>	→ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application was newly implemented for aes25</li> <li>• AES acknowledges and will be taking corrective actions for future conferences</li> </ul>
Registration process	9.11		
Information in booklet	7.93		
Exhibitor booths	8.54		
Conference application	5.78		
Start time of each day	9.08		
End time of each day	8.71		
			<b>Level 2 – Moderate</b>

The conference has generally succeeded in providing a comfortable experience for the delegates, where six of the seven elements have a satisfaction rating higher than the cut-off of 7. The cut-off was chosen as most of the organisational elements remained the same to previous conferences, thus, the expected experiences of the delegate should remain the same.

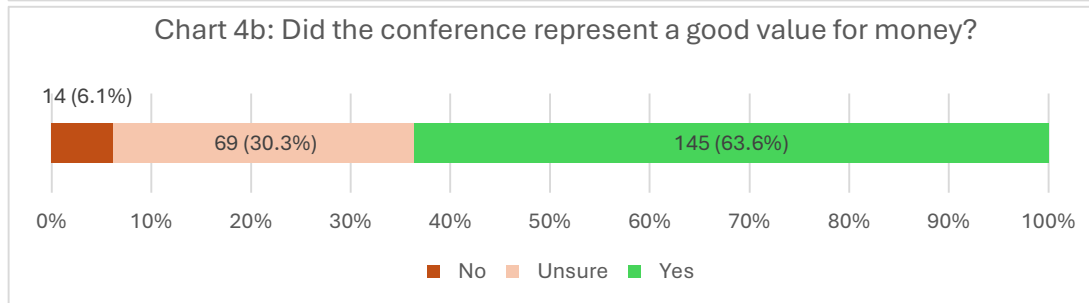
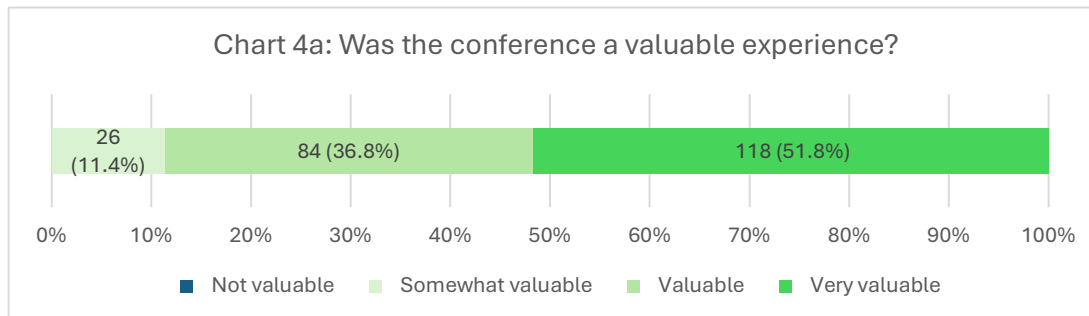
However, the satisfaction of conference application was poor, where it was rated 5.78, below the cut off of 7. This suggests that conference application in aes25 have provided a worse experience for the delegates when compared to aes24. This would have resulted in a “Level 1- Poor” rating in the conferences’ ability to provide a comfortable experience for the delegates.

However, as the conference application was newly implemented and the troubles with implementation was expected. AES has also acknowledged that the application was poorly implemented and is taking steps to review the applications for the future conference. As such, the updated rating for comfort was revised to “Level 2 – Moderate”.

## KEQ2: WAS THE CONFERENCE A GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY FOR THE DELEGATES?

RQ8. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE DELEGATES FIND THE CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE TO BE WORTH THE MONEY?

Table 4c: Did the conference provide a good value for money for the delegates?		
Considerations	Evidence	Evaluative conclusion:
Was the conference a valuable experience?	89% of the delegates found the conference was a valuable experience	Level 2 – Moderate  Value of money of the conference have maintained at similar levels to previous conferences
Did the conference represent a good value for money?	64% of the delegates felt that aes25 represented a good value for money	



We found that 89% of the delegates found the conference to be valuable or very valuable. Next, 64% of the delegates found the conference to be a good value for money. These findings were comparable to aes24, suggesting the value of the conference have remained comparable to previous conferences.

*“I get a huge amount of valuable knowledge and build connections in the 3 days that can not get anywhere else, and at a reasonable price.”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Why was the conference was a valuable experience)*

*“Connecting with and learning from evaluators external to my own organisation is not something I have the opportunity to do. The passion, dedication and breadth of knowledge of the presenters I saw was inspiring..”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Why was the conference was a valuable experience)*

*“aes25 offered high-quality presentations, practical learning, and valuable networking opportunities with experts across the region. The insights and connections gained will directly strengthen my MEL practice and contribute to my professional growth.”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Why was the conference was a valuable experience)*

*“The conference offers a fantastic variety of session formats, topics and social activities that mean you can tailor the experience to meet your individual professional interests and needs.*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Why was the conference was a valuable experience)*

In exploring delegates who have indicated the conference did not represent value for them, a few themes emerged:

### **1. Total cost incurred to delegates**

Beyond the cost of the conference, delegates shared that the overall cost of the conference, inclusive of accommodation, travel and loss of income, had made the conference less valuable for them. This is especially so for evaluators who are self-employed and from smaller organisations. Delegates suggested for AES to adopt a tiered fee structures to manage to the total cost for delegates.

*“The conference fees are extraordinarily high. For a self-employed person attendance at the conference this means I was paying not only for the conference fees but forgoing income to attend. Combined the total adds up to a month's income in a low earning month.”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Why was the conference was not a valuable experience)*

*“It is very expensive once you add ticket price, accommodation, travel, and cost of missing work, etc. It feels like it shuts out smaller organisations, students, or others who might be starting out. This perpetuates the conference being for people who already know each other and have been before.”*

*- Open-ended feedback  
(Why was the conference was not a valuable experience)*

## 2. Misaligned with the content shared

Delegates also shared that the content of the conference was misaligned from their expectations, where the content failed to help achieve their intended learning. These could be considered as potential expansions in content in future conferences

*“I was somewhat underwhelmed by the content - lacked critical discussion of methods and processes that could advance evaluation practice - many presentations seemed more ideologically committed than rigorous”*

*- Open-ended feedback*

*(Why was the conference was a valuable experience)*

*“I didn't get much from the AES conference that was relevant for us in the social services sector.”*

*- Open-ended feedback*

*(Why was the conference was a valuable experience)*

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### RQ9. ARE THERE SUBGROUPS OF DELEGATES THAT FOUND THAT THE CONFERENCES TO BE LESS VALUABLE THAN OTHER DELEGATES?

There were a few notable groups of delegates who found the conferences that found the conference to be less value for money. These include:

- Delegates who self-funded their conference participation (57%) were slightly more likely to find the conference to be not of value of money than delegates whose conference was funded by employers (34%).
- Delegates who attended the pre-conference workshops (75%) were more likely to find conference to be more value for money than delegates did not attend the pre-conference workshop (57%)
- First-time delegates (42%) were also more likely to find the conference to be not of value for money than returning delegates (32%).

The full subgroup comparison can be found in the [Appendix 4](#). The comparison serves as basis for further consideration and investigation in future research or evaluation.

## KEQ3: DID THE CONFERENCE PROVIDE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH NEW AND EXPERIENCED DELEGATES?

We wanted to also explore if the conference has provided a similar experience for both new and experienced delegates. Via the interviews, I have reclassified the new delegates into two subgroups of delegates, namely, the first-time new delegates and first-time experienced delegates, as both have unique features of their conference experience. The breakdown can be found in table below:

**Table 5a: Breakdown of delegates who participated in the interviews**

Type of delegates	Updated types	No of interviewees	Estimated proportion in the conference
New delegates	First-time new delegates	6	10%
	First-time experienced delegates	3	30%
Experienced delegates	Returning experienced delegates	6	60%

### FIRST-TIME NEW DELEGATES

Among the first-time new delegates, the content has helped them assess their own competencies in and their understanding of evaluation. Delegates reflected the conference provided opportunities to help them explore novel topics (i.e. AI, theory-driven approaches), and it has encouraged them to seek out other session with similar topics. They also shared the content was interactive and engaging. Many first-time new delegates shared that they were overloaded with information and required time to process what they learnt. In view of the wide range of topics, many also shared that the conference primer at the start of the conference was really helpful and provided useful tips that helped them navigate the sea of content.

*“I think all of the themes and all of the presentations where they all connected and it linked from the professional side all the way down to culture, participation, and even just the opportunity to meet with people. Like, there was so much space for us and time for us to sit and meet and share. I really appreciate that part of it and it's really helped me in my business and really helped me as an evaluator”*

*– Interviewee 7 (First-time new)  
Positive Learning experience*

*“It's been really, really good. I've really enjoyed the sessions today. I've really enjoyed the diversity of perspectives. And, yeah, it's been it's been a solid learning opportunity.”*

*– Interviewee 1 (First-time new)  
Good opportunities to learn*

In terms of their social experience, the first-time new delegates shared that they felt safe and welcomed throughout the conference. They also shared that delegates were open to connect and were curious about each other’s work. They were also felt greatly supported by the diversity of social programs, providing them with ample opportunities to socialise as well as meeting a variety of delegates across different programs

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## FIRST-TIME EXPERIENCED DELEGATES

For the first-time experienced delegates, most leaned has indicated that learning was their key intent of attending the conference. The delegates shared that they came to the conference to broaden their understanding of evaluation and wanting to explore how other delegates approach similar problems in evaluation work. However, these delegates struggled to find content that aligns to their interest as there was a lack of good information on the sessions. They had resorted to hopping around different sessions to find the content they seek. These delegates also desired for greater depth in presented content. Similar to the new delegates, they also desired for space and time to process what they learn and integrate what they learned to their existing knowledge.

*“The intent is learning, you know, just learn as much as I can”*

*– Interviewee 2  
(First-time experienced)  
Learning as intent*

*“My primary goal of being here was to have the opportunity to get some professional development...hearing about new methodologies that have been used, new concepts, and the challenges of navigating new concepts. and just having that moment to reflect on my own practice was really important”*

*– Interviewee 9 (First-time experienced)  
Learning as intent*

To this group of delegates, the conference application was raised a major pain point in their experiences. These delegates shared that they were dependent on the conference application to identify the sessions that fit their specific needs. However, the application was unreliable, and it has significantly affected their ability to find the content that serves their learning intent

In terms of social elements of the conference, like the first-time new delegates, they did find the social environment as welcoming and do feel that they are part of a larger community. Specifically, to the first-time experienced delegates, they were interested to meet delegates with similar competencies. However, they found it difficult to connect with these delegates, and there was a lack of social programs that supported their search for such delegates to connect with.

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## RETURNING EXPERIENCED DELEGATES

Returning experienced delegates also desired for more depth in the content. However, their definition of depth seems to differ from the depth that first-time experienced delegates seek. Returning experienced delegates desired for content that:

- challenges the nature and premise of evaluation or the underlying assumptions of evaluation practice
- considers non-evaluation approaches that can expand the practice of evaluation (i.e. economists, performance appraisal)
- includes international perspective of evaluation beyond Australia

They often also have their own ways of navigating the conference and found their way around the conference without the support of the conference application. They also reflected that there was a good representation of the First Nation's community and their evaluation work at the conference.

Next, the social element appears to be of greater importance to the returning experienced delegates. They shared that the AES conference has become a place of familiarity, where they return to reconnect with existing connections, over making new connections. Interestingly, some of the experienced delegates also shared concerns about the new delegates' experience, citing that the conference might have grown too big and intimidating for the newer delegates. This suggests also a degree of disconnection, where returning delegates have become less aware of the experiences of newer delegates.

*"Overall, it is always worth coming even just connecting and reconnecting and hear where people's at..."*

*– Interviewee 14  
(Returning Experienced)  
Reconnection as intent*

*"The reality is I now know enough people that, you know, I don't, I don't come to the conference to make new friends. Inevitably, you know, you meet a few people in incidentally at every conference...So I don't need lots of contact and lots of contact, actually, it is quite tiring. So, yeah, more than adequately meets my needs*

*– Interviewee 4 (Returning Experienced)  
Reconnection as intent*

*"...I'm always thinking about: Do the new members of the profession feel welcome? And it's hard to know what the answer to that is if you're not closely connected into that and also similarly with indigenous evaluators and things. So does it feel like a place that's for them?"*

*– Interviewee 11 (Returning Experienced)  
Worries about newer delegate's experiences*

## INTEGRATING INTERVIEWS WITH THE POST-CONFERENCE SURVEY

		Types of delegates		
	Overall	First timer new delegates	First timer experienced delegates	Returning experienced delegates
Learning	L2 - Moderate	L2 - Moderate	L3 - Good	L2 - Moderate
Social	L3 - Good	L3 - Good	L2 - Moderate	L2 - Good
Comfort	L2 - Moderate (adjusted)	L1 - Poor	L1 - Poor	L1 - Poor

When considering findings from the post-conference survey, we found, that across the different delegates, they do have relatively comparable experience. These results also align with aes24 results, where it has provided comparable experience for both new and experienced delegates.

However, the findings from the interviews unveiled several differences that were missing from the survey results:

- The desire for content does differ across the different delegates and the concept of depth is nuanced:
  - o First-time new delegates generally did receive content that serve their intent: **Assess their own understanding** of evaluation, gain a **greater appreciation** of evaluation and identify **areas for further exploration**.
  - o First-time experienced delegates seek for content that can be used to **strengthen their existing practice** as well as **alternate approaches** to the problems they face at work.
  - o Returning experienced delegates desired content that **challenges their current understanding of evaluation** and are keen to explore content that **challenges the boundaries of evaluation practice**.
- The intent to socialise also differ from these three groups
  - o First timer new delegates were generally interested to **meet the larger evaluation community**, and does not have directed intent to meet a particular group of evaluators
  - o First timer experienced delegates are interested to meet **peers with similar competencies or experiences** within the evaluation community
  - o Returning experienced delegates were more interested to **reconnect with their own connections** that were formed in past conferences
  - o Interestingly, returning experienced evaluators also shared a concern about how first-time delegates are experiencing the conference, worrying that the conference have become too intimidating for newer attendees.

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DID THE CONFERENCE PROVIDE A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE TO BOTH NEW AND EXPERIENCED DELEGATES? : **LEVEL 3 - GOOD**

Together, the findings from the interviews and the post-conference do suggest that the conference succeeded in providing a valuable experience to all three groups of delegates. Although each group have attended the conference with differing motivations and intent, aes25 was broadly successfully in fulfilling the learning and social goals of the delegates equally.

Nevertheless, while the overall experience was comparable, the findings do reveal key differences in what each type of delegates sought from the conference. These distinctions can aid conference planning, where future organiser can use these insights to more deliberately tailor content, formats and activities that better meets the needs of different delegate groups.

## CONCLUSION

The evaluation used an analytical approach, where it aimed to arrive at an evaluative conclusion for each criterion. The table below a summary of the evaluative conclusions for each component of the conference:

<b>Table 6: A collation of evaluative conclusions of the aes25</b>				
<b>Overarching Evaluation Qn</b>	<b>Key evaluation Qn</b>	<b>Criteria of Merit &amp; Supportive EQ</b>		<b>Evaluative conclusion</b>
<b>Was the conference a valuable experience for the range of delegates?</b>	<b>KEQ1: Was the conference a valuable experience for the delegates?</b>	<b>COM1.1: Learning</b>	Content is relevant	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
			Content is engaging	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
			Content is interactive	<b>Level 2 - Moderate</b>
			Content helped to broaden delegates' perspective	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
		<b>COM1.2: Social</b>	Delegates were able to make new connections	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>
			Delegates were able to reconnect with existing connections	
		<b>COM1.3: Comfort</b>	Conference provided a comfortable experience	<b>Level 2 – Moderate [Adjusted]</b>
	<b>KEQ2: Was the conference a good value for money for the delegates?</b>	<b>COM 2: Cost</b>	Delegates found the conference to be representing value for money	<b>Level 2 - Moderate</b>
	<b>KEQ3: Was the conference a valuable experience for different groups of delegates?</b>	<b>COM 3: Attending to Diversity</b>	The conference had provided a comparable experience between first-time new, first-time experienced and returning evaluators	<b>Level 3 – Good</b>

## LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

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### SAMPLE BIAS

#### Post conference survey

As the post-conference survey is remotely and self-administered, the sample may be affected by self-selection bias, where the survey disproportionately includes delegates who are more willing to share their opinions about the conference. However, when compared to the registration data, we do find the sample to be generally comparable to the delegates who have registered for the conference. The only groups that is unrepresented were the delegates from the commonwealth government, delegates who oversee programs that are being evaluated and delegates who are supporting evaluation projects.

#### Interviews

The delegates who participated in the interviews were selected using convenient sampling. In addition, the thematic saturation was not achieved. This suggests the interviews have not captured fully the breadth of the delegates experiences, resulting in findings may not be fully representative of wider delegates' experiences. This was due to the resource constraints and limited access to delegates. Consequently, the themes identified by the interview should be interpreted as exploratory in nature, with findings triangulated and supported by results from the post-conference survey to strengthen the overall robustness of the evaluation.

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## EVALUATION DESIGN

### 1. Evaluation values biased towards conference organisers

Firstly, as the evaluation has taken a utilisation-focused evaluation approach, it is important to note that the evaluation is focused on maximizing the usefulness of the findings for conference organisers. Thus, it **may not have sufficiently considered other components of the conference contributes significantly to the overall value of the conference**. This includes factors, but is not limited to, hedonic value of the conference experience, preference of conference location, selection and quality of presentation and diversity of attendees.

### 2. Lack of critical exploration of First Nation evaluators' experience

Secondly, the evaluation **did not directly examine conference experiences of the emerging Indigenous evaluators**, despite this being a critical consideration for all AES conferences. This is due to two key reasons. First, as an external evaluator from Singapore, I lack contextual understanding to appropriately engage with, understand, or

represent the lived experiences of this community. Secondly, given the short evaluation timeframe, there is insufficient time for me to develop the depth of contextual knowledge required to conduct a respectful effective evaluation of their experience in the conference. As such, this aspect was intentionally scoped out of the evaluation.

### **3. Underdeveloped concept - “Value for Money”**

Lastly, **the evaluation acknowledges that the exploration whether the conference represents value for money is insufficiently developed**. Findings revealed that delegates assess value not only in terms of registration fees, but in relation to total costs, including travel, accommodation and the opportunity cost of time. Furthermore, delegates are constantly comparing the conference experience with past iterations of the AES conference and other professional development opportunities. Also, the evaluation did not consider the cost incurred on AES as an organization, which is also critical for the longevity and success of the organisations. Collectively, these factors shape how delegate perceived the conferences’ value for money, but they were only explored opportunistically in this evaluation. This suggests future evaluations can benefit greatly from a more robust conceptualisation and definition in the concept of “Value for Money”, one that is meaningful for both participants and organisers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SERVING DELEGATES' INTENT TO LEARN

The key dimension that prevented the conference from receiving a higher rating was the dimension where less than 80% of the delegates considered the content to be interactive. It is noted that it is not due to the lack of interactive content, as some delegates did reflect that the content has been interactive for them.

Instead, the findings suggest that the content was perceived to be non-interactive because it was limited by format and setting of each session as well as the difficulty in identifying interactive content. As such, the recommendations are as such:

#### **1. Ensuring that session formats and physical settings support interactivity**

Firstly, the evaluation found that the format and setting have made it difficult for sessions to be interactive. As such, presenters should try to allocate sufficient time and space for delegates to discuss their thoughts about the presented content. Presenters should also be supported or guided to incorporate facilitation techniques in their presentations to encourage interactions between delegates.

#### **2. Better classifications to help delegates identify the content that fits their learning intent**

Delegates also reflected that better classification could help delegates find the sessions that are in greater alignment to their learning interest. As such, it is recommended for future conference to clarify the degree of interactivity that is present within sessions, as the current classification with the formats can make it difficult for delegates, especially the newer attendees, to identify which presentations are interactive and which are not. Furthermore, delegates have also shared that some of them preferred interactive content, while some preferred passive content. As such, helping delegates identify which content is interactive can help delegates find the content that better suits their learning style. This can also help sessions to include delegates who are keener in interactive content, which can further contribute to the interactivity of the presentations.

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## SERVING DELEGATES' INTENT TO SOCIALISE

The evaluation has concluded that the conference has done well in helping delegates make new connections and reconnect with their existing connections. As such, it is recommended for future conferences to continue adopting the approach taken by the aes25 committee. Specifically, future conference organisers should aim to provide a variety of different social programs, providing delegates a variety of settings and allowing them to choose the ones suit them best.

A recommendation that could further improve the social component of the conference is **the incorporation of structured introduction during social programs to encourage delegates to form new connections**. This could be during newcomer breakfast or programs like welcome drinks, where it might be intimidating and difficult for first-time attendees. This is mainly supporting delegates who faced difficulties in finding delegates with similar experiences and in joining well-established social groups during the conference.

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## PROVIDING A COMFORTABLE EXPERIENCE

The conference has provided a comfortable experience for the delegates with the notable exception of the conference application. As the application was poorly received by the attendees, AES is currently reviewing the application and is considering reverting to the previous application as it has provided a better experience for the delegates.

Nevertheless, this issue highlighted the critical role that the conference application plays shaping in the delegates' overall conference experience. As such, it is **recommended that future conference committees consider the provision of alternative information sources when implementing significant changes to the conference application**. This would ensure the continuity of information for delegates, especially in the scenarios where the newly implemented application failed to perform as intended.

Alternative approach could include the provision of more detailed information booklets or installation of a large notice boards that indicates all the session for the day. This measure would help ensure delegates are still effectively navigate the conference effectively and maintain a comfortable experience, even as conference committee innovate and improve various elements of the conference.

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## PROVIDING A COMPARABLE EXPERIENCE FOR DIFFERENT EVALUATORS: FIRST-TIME NEW, FIRST-TIME EXPERIENCED AND RETURNING EXPERIENCED EVALUATORS

While aes25 delivered a comparable experience for all three groups of delegates, it is recommended for future conference organisers **to more explicitly consider which group of delegates do they intend to be their primary audience**. This is important as the findings demonstrated that different groups attend the conference with significantly different intentions and expectations. When a conference attempts to serve all three groups equally with limited resources, the resources may be greatly stretched. The resulting conference may deliver an experience that partially addresses the objectives of each group but does not fully satisfying any single group in a substantive way.

A higher-order strategic question that can be useful for AES to consider is: **“What role does the AES conference play within the evaluation community?”** The findings indicate that while the conference has succeeded in fulfilling the intent of some delegates and failed to fulfil the expectations of others. However, it remains unclear if these expectations are appropriately placed on the conference, or whether future iterations of AES should deliberately adopt more ambitious or alternatively, more focused on objectives in respondents to differing intents.

Furthermore, some of expectations could fundamentally in tension with one another. For example, a good conference experience for new evaluators might focus more introducing the wide variety of evaluation approaches and concepts while a good conference catered to experienced delegates might emphasise more critical discussions on the underlying premises of evaluation. With limited number of presentations slots and funds, an AES conference may not be able to provide a good experience to all attendees.

Accordingly, clearer articulation of the intended purpose and strategic position of each AES conference could enable organisers to more intentionally design content, formats, and social programs for the delegates. This clarity would better support both the organisation and evaluation of the conference, which in turn helps to fulfil the central mission of AES: serving the evolving needs of the evaluation community.

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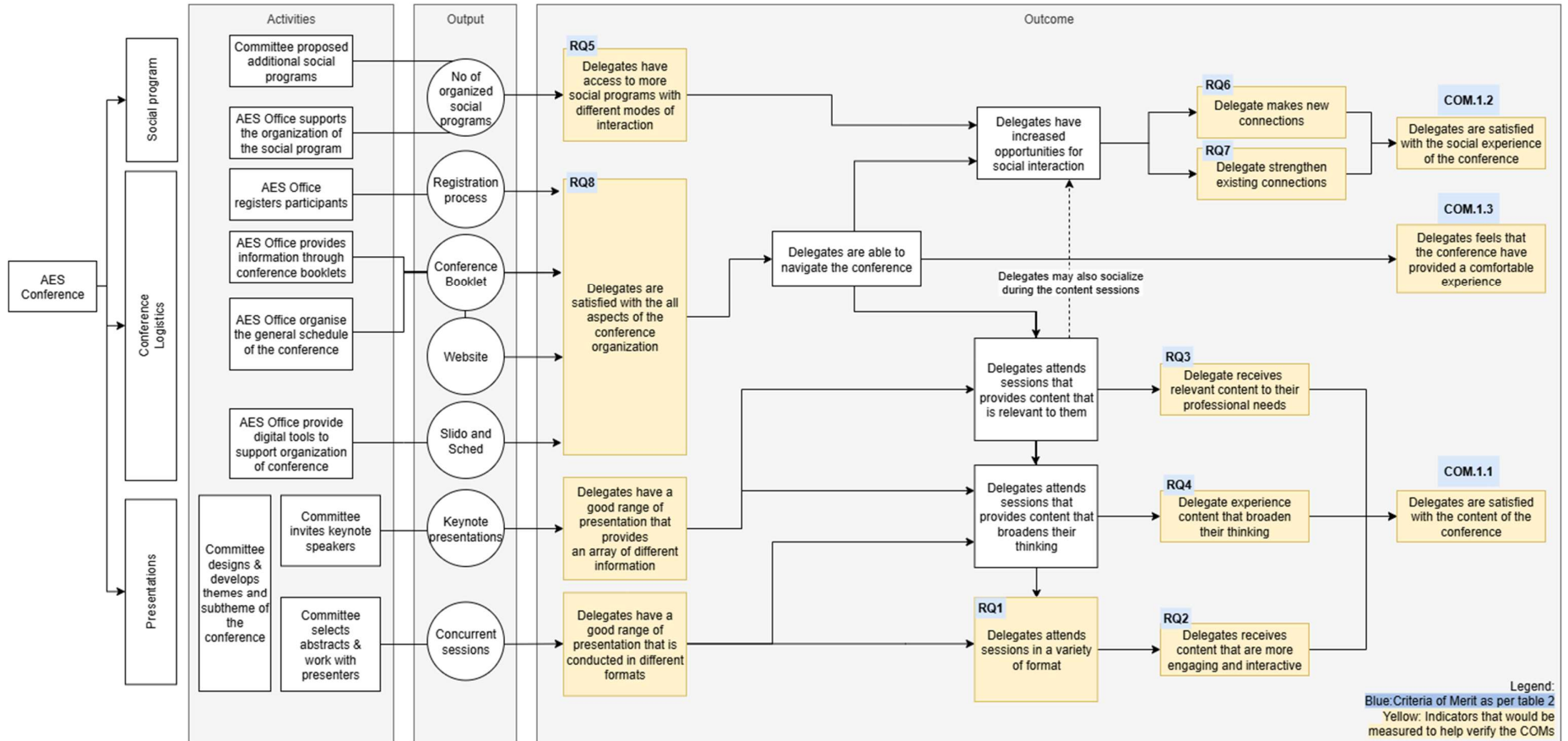
## APPENDIX 1A: PROPOSED EVALUATION PLAN

**Table 7: Proposed Evaluation plan for aes25**

Overarching Evaluation Qn	Key evaluation Qn	Criteria of Merit & Supportive EQ	Research questions	Data source
Was the conference a valuable experience for the range of delegates?	KEQ1: Was the conference a valuable experience for the delegates?	<b>COM1.1: Learning</b> Did the conference provided content that helped the delegates learn something is meaningful to them?	RQ1. What were the <b>participation patterns</b> of the delegates in conference patterns?	Operational data
			RQ2. To what extent did the delegates receive the <b>content that are engaging and interactive</b> ?	Post-conference survey; Interviews
			RQ3. To what extent did the delegates find the content to be <b>relevant to their professional needs</b> ?	Post-conference survey; Interviews
			RQ4. To what extent did the delegate find the content that <b>broadens their thinking</b> ?	Post-conference survey; Interviews
		<b>COM1.2: Social</b> Did the conference help delegates to socialize/ network with other delegates?	RQ5. What were the <b>participation patterns</b> among the delegates in social programs?	Operational data; Post-conference survey
			RQ6. To what extent did the delegates <b>make new professional connections</b> during the conference?	Post-conference survey; Interviews
			RQ7. To what extent did the delegates <b>strengthen their existing professional connections</b> during the conference?	Post-conference survey; Interviews
		<b>COM1.3: Comfort</b> Did the conference provide the delegate with a comfortable experience?	RQ8. How satisfied were delegates with the <b>organization of the conference</b> ?	Post-conference survey
		KEQ2: Was the conference a good value for money for the delegates?	<b>COM 2: Cost</b> Was the price of the conference justified with their experience of the conference?	RQ9. To what extent did the delegate find their conference experience to be <b>worth the money</b> ?
	RQ10. Are there subgroup of the delegates that found the conference experience to be less worth the money than <b>other delegates</b> ?			Post-conference survey
	KEQ3: Was the conference a valuable experience for different groups of delegates?	<b>COM 3: Attending to Diversity</b> Did the conference provide a valuable experience to the new evaluators/experienced evaluation?	RQ11. Have the conference provided a valuable experience to the <b>new evaluators</b> ?	Interviews
			RQ12. Have the conference provided a valuable experience to the <b>experienced evaluators</b> ?	Interviews
			RQ13. How does the new and experienced evaluators differ in their experiences of the conference?	Interviews; Post-conference survey

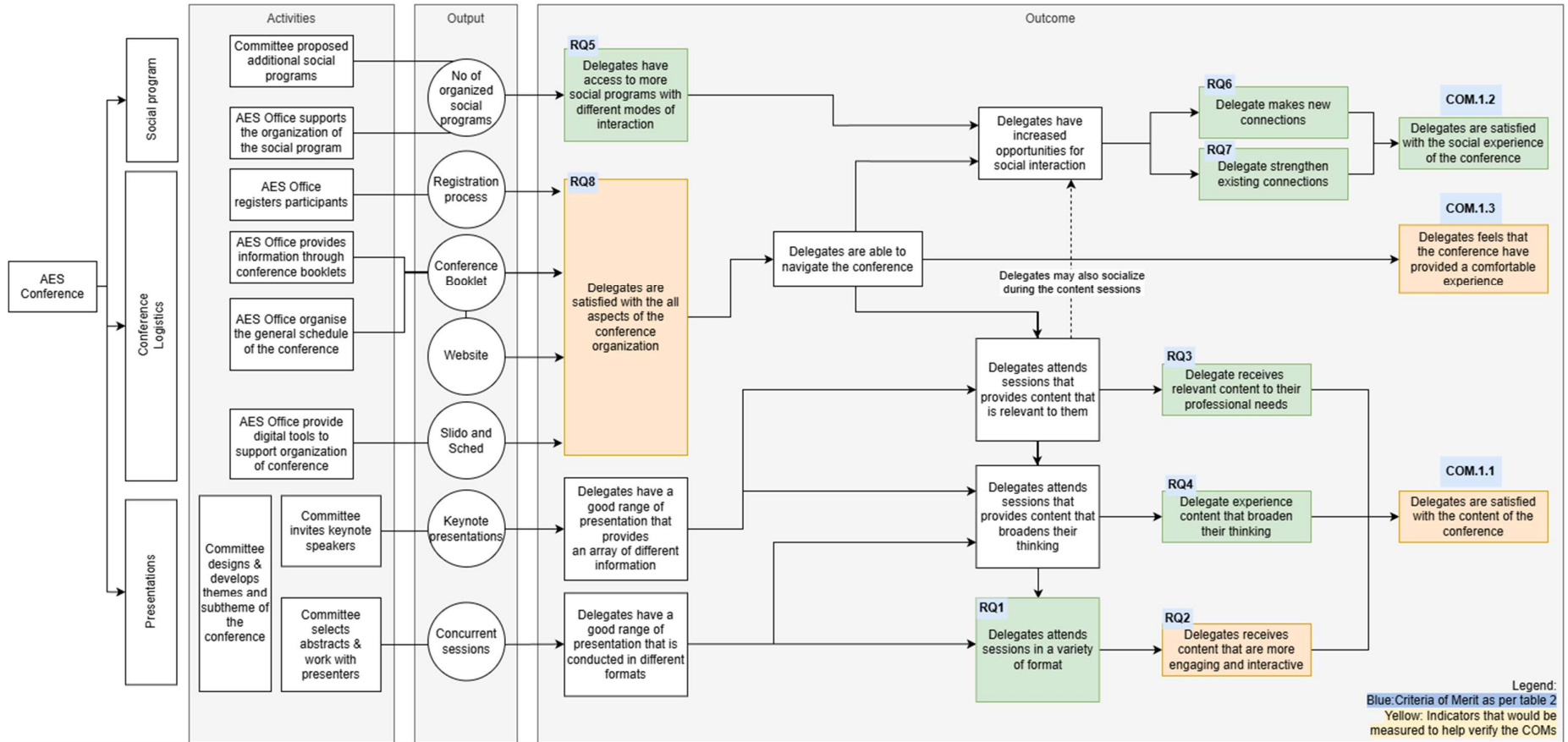
# APPENDIX 1B: LOGIC MODEL USED TO GUIDE AES25 EVALUATION

AES Conference



With results:

AES Conference



## APPENDIX 2: METHODOLOGY

A utilization-focused evaluation framework (Patton, 2012) will be used to guide the design and conduct of the evaluation. The framework is chosen to draw greater attention to the intended use of the evaluation findings by its intended users and the underlying context at each step of the evaluation. The goal of the evaluation is to determine the value of the conference experience for the delegates and to gather information to support the continued improvement of the conference.

To support the goal of the evaluation, I have proposed three key evaluation questions that I hope to answer:

- KEQ1. Was the conference a valuable experience for the delegates?
- KEQ2. Was the conference a good value for money for the delegates?
- KEQ3. Was the conference a valuable experience for different groups of delegates?

For this evaluation, a greater focus will be placed on the KEQ1 as it provides an overall understanding of the value of the conference to the delegates. KEQ2 and KEQ3 serve as an extension of that understanding. KEQ2 considers if the value of the conference to the delegates is aligned with the cost of the conference, and KEQ3 considers if the value of the conference differs between different groups of delegates.

For KEQ1, the evaluation will consider three criteria of merit of the conference: Learning, Social and Comfort. The first two criteria of merit were chosen as Learning and Social as these are the main priorities of participants in previous conferences (AES, 2024). These goals are also commonly reflected in other conference evaluations (Neves, Lavis, & Ranson, 2012). Comfort was added as a third criterion, as it is critical for delegates to have a comfortable experience before they can benefit from the conference. The related research questions to the evaluation question can be found in Appendix 1.

For KEQ2, the evaluation explores the utilitarian value of the conference, where it considers the relationship between price and the experienced value of the conference (Chen & Hu, 2010; Choi, 2013). It is found that positive utilitarian value of the conference is positively associated with the satisfaction of the delegates and encourages continuous participation in the conference (i.e. intention to return and willingness to recommend) (Choi, 2013; Hashemi, Marzuki, Mohammed, & Kiumarsi, 2020). This will be via the post-conference surveys, where delegates will be asked if their conference is “value-for-money”. Subgroup analysis will be conducted to identify potential differences in the value of the conference among delegates.

For KEQ3, the evaluation will take on a mixed method approach to understand if the conference has provided them a valuable experience from the perspective of the new evaluators and the experienced evaluators<sup>1</sup>.

Using semi-structured interviews, the evaluation aims to explore:

1. If the conference has delivered conference's intended value of "learning" and "social" to the delegates
2. The presence of the facilitators and barriers of the delivery of these values in the conference
3. If these intended values of the conference are aligned with the intended goals of delegates.

In addition, subgroup analysis of the post-conference survey will be done between these two groups of delegates to identify similarities and differences in their conference experience. A convergent approach (Moseholm & Feters, 2017) will be used to triangulate the qualitative and quantitative data to develop our understanding of their experiences.

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## DATA COLLECTION

This evaluation will be using the following data sources:

1. Post-conference survey
2. Semi-structured interview
3. Registration data & Administrative data

The **post-conference survey** will consist of a combination of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions are used to allow the survey to gather the necessary feedback that addresses our evaluation questions. Open-ended questions are used to complement responses gathered by closed-ended questions and used to explore responses that may not be well-covered by the provided options. All delegates will be invited via e-mail at the end of the conference, and they will be given two weeks to complete the survey after the conference. The post-conference survey is chosen as the primary mode of data collection as it allows the evaluation to include all delegates and gather their direct feedback on the conference.

To supplement the findings from the post-conference survey, the evaluation will also gather data via **semi-structured interviews** with delegates during the conference. The goal is to use the semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences at the conference, focusing on two specific groups of delegates, namely the new delegates

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<sup>1</sup> New evaluators are delegates who have identified themselves to have no expertise in evaluation or Novice or Beginner of level of expertise in evaluation and Experienced evaluators are delegates who have identified themselves to have intermediate or higher level of expertise in evaluation. Definition to be confirmed with aes25 committee

and the experienced delegates. Also, the interviews will explore how they might or might not have attained the intended value of the conferences, exploring the facilitators and barriers to their experiences. Interviews will be conducted during the conference and at the availability of the delegates.

**Registration data** and **program booklet** will be used to describe the characteristics of the delegates of the conference. This information will allow the conference organizers to have a descriptive understanding of the delegates who have attended the program. The information will also be used to establish the representativeness of the sample, allowing the findings of the evaluation to establish its validity in describing the overall experience of the delegates

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## SYNTHESIS

The evaluation will use an analytical approach, where the evaluation will arrive at an evaluative conclusion for each criterion. This is done because of two reasons:

1. Firstly, by providing an evaluative conclusion for each criterion, the findings can inform the users and provide actionable recommendations. This idea is further demonstrated in [Appendix 2](#).
2. Secondly, a holistic evaluation is not possible in view of the short timeline. As the evaluator has limited time with its stakeholders, it may not be possible for the evaluator to develop a satisfactory evaluative logic that allows the evaluation to arrive at a singular evaluation conclusion of the conference.

The proposed evaluative logic for the respective criteria of merit can be found in Table 8.

<b>Table 8: Proposed evaluative logic</b>			
	The evidence needed to allow the evaluation arrive at the conclusion:		
Evaluative conclusion	Level 1 - Poor	Level 2 - Moderate	Level 3 - Good
Interpretation	<i>Performance of aes2025 is poorer than aes2024 and will require immediate attention</i>	<i>Performance of aes2025 is equivalent to aes2024</i>	<i>aes2025 has performed better than aes2024 and team could review what went well in aes2025</i>
COM 1.1: Learning	<p><span style="background-color: red; color: white;">&lt;50%</span> of delegates found the content of the conference to be <u>either</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging <u>OR</u></li> <li>- Interactive <u>OR</u></li> <li>- Relevant to their professional needs <u>OR</u></li> <li>- Helpful in broaden their thinking</li> </ul>	<p><span style="background-color: yellow;">51-80%</span> of delegates found the content of the conference to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging <u>AND</u></li> <li>- Interactive <u>AND</u></li> <li>- Relevant to their professional needs <u>AND</u></li> <li>- Helpful in broaden their thinking</li> </ul>	<p><span style="background-color: lightgreen;">&gt;80%</span> of delegates found the content of the conference to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging <u>AND</u></li> <li>- Interactive <u>AND</u></li> <li>- Relevant to their professional needs <u>AND</u></li> <li>- Helpful in broaden their thinking</li> </ul>

COM 1.2: Social	<30% of the delegates have attended one or more social programs <sub>2</sub> AND <50% <sub>2</sub> of the delegates have either: - Made new connections OR - Strengthen their existing connections	31-50% of the delegates have attended one or more social program OR 50-70% of the delegates have either: - Made new connections OR - Strengthen their existing connections	>50% of the delegates have attended one or more social program AND >70% of the delegates have either: - Made new connections OR - Strengthen their existing connections
COM 1.3: Comfort	The weighted average satisfaction rating of ANY aspects <sup>3</sup> of AES conference is below 7 (range from 0 to 10)	The weighted average satisfaction rating of ALL aspects of AES conference are above 7 (range from 0 to 10)	
COM 2: Cost	<50% <sup>4</sup> of the delegates found that the conference represent value for money	50-70% of the delegates found that the conference represent value for money	>70% of the delegates found that the conference represent value for money
COM 3: Attending to diversity	Evidence suggests that new <sup>5</sup> AND experienced <sup>6</sup> evaluators did not gain or gain benefits that differs from the intended value proposition of conference.	Evidence shows that new OR experienced evaluators that have gain benefits aligns with the value proposition of the conference.	Evidence suggests that both new and experienced evaluators have gain benefits aligns with the value proposition of the conference and is facilitated/supported by conference features to achieve those goals.

**Note:**

1. This evaluation conclusion only considers delegates who have participated for all 3 days of the conference.
2. Among delegates who responded in aes24 post conference survey, 72% of the delegates have attended at one social program and 2% of the delegates have NOT made a professional connection.
3. Satisfaction scale is a range from 0 to 10 and aspects of the organisation consist of: assistance from conference organisers, registration process, information in the conference booklet, conference digital application 'Sched', conference interactive app 'Slido', Start time, Finish times.
4. In #aes2024, 66% of the delegates found that the conference was a representative of value for money
5. New evaluators – delegates who have identified themselves to have no expertise in evaluation or Novice or Beginner of level of expertise in evaluation.
6. Experienced evaluators – delegates who have identified themselves to have intermediate or higher level of expertise in evaluation.

## APPENDIX 2B: DEFINING A “VALUABLE EXPERIENCE”

A key development of this evaluation was defining and developing the concept of a “valuable experience” for delegates at the conference. The evaluation had used three sources to develop a preliminary definition of a valuable experience for aes25 conference, and it can serve as a starting point for future evaluation or research in conference experiences.

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### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & PAST FINDINGS

During the scoping process, it was evident across stakeholders that there were two key areas of focus: delegates’ intent to learn and delegates intent to form connections with other delegates. This is through the initial conversations, where the implementation of new formats, both in content and social programs, was orientated towards improving and maximising the opportunities for delegates to learn and form social connections.

The aes24 report (AES, 2024) found that the most delegates have attended AES conference for knowledge acquisition (85%) and connecting with others who are involved in evaluation (70%). This was also echoed in the evaluations of aes23 and aes22. The consistency in delegates’ interest to learn and connect in AES conference suggests that, when defining a “valuable experience”, it is important to account for the conference’s ability to support delegate’s acquisition of knowledge and their ability to connect with other delegates.

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### RAPID LITERATURE REVIEW ON CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE

As the mandate of the evaluation involved an investigation of the value of the conference to its delegates, it is critical to also consider the current conceptual frameworks that describes the conference experience and its outcomes. In preparation for the evaluation, a rapid literature review was conducted to develop a general understanding of the conference experiences and outcomes in a limited timeframe.

With the intent to understand the delegates’ conference experience, the evaluation was informed by the framework developed by Stefansdottir (2020) that maps out a general experience of a conference delegate, as seen in Figure 2.

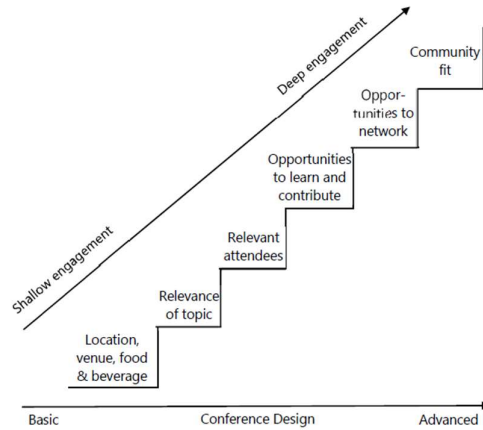


Figure 2 : Framework of Conference experience (Stefansdottir, 2020)

The framework provides a holistic understanding of the experiences of the delegates. The model suggests that deeper designs, such as the conference’s ability to provide opportunities to network and a good community, can help to create a more meaningful experience for the delegates. The framework helped the evaluation to identify and consider the features that are significant to the delegates’ experience.

In terms of conference outcomes, several studies have argued for a range of different values that can be delivered by large-scale events like conferences and networking events (Choi, 2013; Mitchell, Schlegelmilch, & Mone, 2016). These values can be classified into three key types:

- Utilitarian value: the direct benefits from the conference, such as the gain in knowledge, self-improvement, and tangible benefits.
- Hedonic value: the emotional gains such as the pleasure, enjoyment, or inspiration that one may feel during the conference.
- Social value: the opportunities where delegates get to interact with peers, build new connections, and reconnect with their peers.

These values have been shown to be associated with one’s satisfaction with conference experience (Choi, 2013), with some values, such as hedonic and social values, being more closely associated with delegates’ intention to continue joining future events (Lee & Min, 2013). The rapid review of literature assisted in framing the evaluation, ensuring that the proposed criteria align with the existing understanding of the value of conferences to its delegates.

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## RESULTING CONCEPT: “A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE”

Combining the insights gained from stakeholder engagement, past findings and rapid literature review, the evaluation chose to use the following framework to define valuable experience:



## APPENDIX 3: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

### DEMOGRAPHICS

	Sample (N= 256)	Registration data (N=619)
<b>Age group</b>		
18 to 24 years old	3 (1.17%)	11 (1.78%)
25 to 34 years old	44 (17.19%)	118 (19.09%)
35 to 44 years old	65 (25.39%)	180 (29.13%)
45 to 54 years old	59 (23.05%)	137 (22.17%)
55 to 64 years old	30 (11.72%)	58 (9.39%)
65 years old and above	9 (3.52%)	25 (4.05%)
Prefer to not disclose	46 (17.97%)	89 (14.40%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Woman	168 (65.62%)	
Man	45 (17.58%)	
Non-Binary	2 (0.78%)	
Prefer to not disclose	41 (16.02%)	
<b>City</b>		
Australian Capital Territory	28 (10.94%)	
New South Wales	48 (18.75%)	
Northern Territory	0 (0.00%)	
Queensland	24 (9.38%)	
South Australia	9 (3.52%)	
Victoria	65 (25.39%)	
Tasmania	2 (0.78%)	
Western Australia	6 (2.34%)	
New Zealand	6 (2.34%)	
Others	16 (6.25%)	
Prefer to not disclose	47 (18.36%)	
<b>Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Māori, Pacific Island and/or other Indigenous origin?</b>		
Yes	25 (9.77%)	
No	190 (74.22%)	
Prefer to not disclose	41 (16.02%)	

## INVOLVEMENT IN EVALUATION

	<b>Sample (N= 256)</b>	<b>Registration data (N=619)</b> <i>*Yellow indicates disproportionate representation in sample</i>
<b>Competency in evaluation</b>		
No experience	4 (1.56%)	
Beginner	27 (10.55%)	
Intermediate	83 (32.42%)	
Advanced	82 (32.03%)	
Expert	23 (8.98%)	
Prefer to not disclose	37 (14.45%)	
<b>Sector in which delegates are working in</b>		
Aboriginal community-controlled organisation	6 (2.34%)	13 (2.10%)
Commonwealth government	48 (18.75%)	153 (24.76%)
Community or not-for-profit sector	50 (19.53%)	95 (15.37%)
Local government	3 (1.17%)	7 (1.13%)
Private sector/ consultancy	60 (23.44%)	136 (22.01%)
State or territorial government	22 (8.59%)	50 (8.09%)
University (academic, student and non-academic staff)	14 (5.47%)	46 (7.44%)
Retired/Not in workforce	2 (0.78%)	1 (0.16%)
Others	9 (3.52%)	18 (2.91%)
Prefer to not disclose	42 (16.41%)	99 (16.02%)
<b>Industry in which delegates conducted evaluation in</b>		
Arts and Recreation	17 (6.64%)	
Community and Social Services	113 (44.14%)	
Economic development, tourism and infrastructure	11 (4.30%)	
Education and training	83 (32.42%)	
Environment and climate change	36 (14.06%)	
Health and Disability	81 (31.64%)	
Information media and telecommunications	4 (1.56%)	
International development	40 (15.62%)	
Public administration and Safety	45 (17.58%)	
Others	0 (0.00%)	
Prefer to not disclose	14 (5.47%)	
<b>Role played by delegate in evaluation</b>		
A decision-maker who uses evaluation findings	34 (13.28%)	100 (16.18%)
Oversee evaluation projects	109 (42.58%)	281 (45.47%)
Plan or commission evaluation work	77 (30.08%)	191 (30.91%)
Researcher in evaluation practice	141 (55.08%)	348 (56.31%)
Oversee program(s) that are evaluated	31 (12.11%)	122 (19.74%)
Providing training in evaluation	95 (37.11%)	192 (31.07%)

Supporting evaluation projects	101 (39.45%)	306 (49.51%)
None, No current involvement with evaluation	3 (1.17%)	NA
Others	5 (1.95%)	19 (3.07%)
Prefer to not disclose	10 (3.91%)	102 (16.50%)

## PARTICIPATION IN CONFERENCE & AES MEMBERSHIP

Participation	Sample (N= 256)
Participant Only	133 (51.95%)
Presenter	81 (31.64%)
Conference Grant recipient	5 (1.95%)
Exhibitor	21 (8.20%)
Sponsor	26 (10.16%)
Organizer/Volunteer	9 (3.52%)
Session chair	27 (10.55%)
<b>Attendance</b>	
Average no of days attended by delegates	3.53 ± 0.77
<b>Attendance per day</b>	
Pre-conference day 1	57 (22.27%)
Pre-conference day 2	78 (30.47%)
Conference day 1	256 (100.00%)
Conference day 2	256 (100.00%)
Conference day 3	256 (100.00%)
<b>Source of funding</b>	
Employer funded	189 (73.83%)
Self-funded	37 (14.45%)
Mix of employer and self-funded	17 (6.64%)
Conference support grant/Sponsorships	12 (4.69%)
Others	1 (0.39%)
<b>Membership of AES</b>	
Individual membership	119 (46.48%)
Organisational membership	50 (19.53%)
No, considering	25 (9.77%)
No, but a member previously	6 (2.34%)
No, and not considering	12 (4.69%)
Others	5 (1.95%)
Prefer to not disclose	39 (15.23%)

## APPENDIX 4: SUBGROUP COMPARISON OF VALUE FOR MONEY

	Delegates who found the conference to be <b>NOT value for money</b> (i.e. unsure/no) (n=83)	Delegates who found the conference to be <b>value for money</b> (n=145)
<b>Demographics</b>		
<b>Age group</b>		
18 to 24 years old	1 (1.20%)	2 (1.38%)
25 to 34 years old	14 (16.87%)	30 (20.69%)
35 to 44 years old	21 (25.30%)	44 (30.34%)
45 to 54 years old	25 (30.12%)	34 (23.45%)
55 to 64 years old	11 (13.25%)	19 (13.10%)
65 years old and above	4 (4.82%)	5 (3.45%)
Prefer to not disclose	7 (8.43%)	11 (7.59%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Woman	64 (77.11%)	104 (71.72%)
Man	11 (13.25%)	34 (23.45%)
Non-Binary	2 (2.41%)	0 (0.00%)
Prefer to not disclose	6 (7.23%)	7 (4.83%)
<b>City</b>		
Australian Capital Territory	10 (12.05%)	18 (12.41%)
New South Wales	20 (24.10%)	28 (19.31%)
Northern Territory	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Queensland	8 (9.64%)	16 (11.03%)
South Australia	4 (4.82%)	5 (3.45%)
Victoria	26 (31.33%)	39 (26.90%)
Tasmania	0 (0.00%)	2 (1.38%)
Western Australia	2 (2.41%)	4 (2.76%)
New Zealand	2 (2.41%)	4 (2.76%)
Others	3 (3.61%)	13 (8.97%)
Prefer to not disclose	7 (8.43%)	12 (8.28%)
<b>Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Māori, Pacific Island and/or other indigenous origin?</b>		
Yes	7 (8.43%)	18 (12.41%)
No	68 (81.93%)	122 (84.14%)
Prefer to not disclose	8 (9.64%)	5 (3.45%)

	Delegates who found the conference to be <b>NOT value for money</b> (i.e. unsure/no) (n=83)	Delegates who found the conference to be <b>value for money</b> (n=145)
<b>Involvement in evaluation</b>		
<b>Competency</b>		
No experience	2 (2.41%)	2 (1.38%)
Beginner	10 (12.05%)	17 (11.72%)
Intermediate	28 (33.73%)	55 (37.93%)
Advanced	29 (34.94%)	53 (36.55%)
Expert	9 (10.84%)	14 (9.66%)
Prefer to not disclose	5 (6.02%)	4 (2.76%)
<b>Sector of work</b>		
Aboriginal community-controlled organisation	4 (4.82%)	2 (1.38%)
Commonwealth government	14 (16.87%)	34 (23.45%)
Community or not-for-profit sector	21 (25.30%)	29 (20.00%)
Local government	0 (0.00%)	3 (2.07%)
Private sector/ consultancy	23 (27.71%)	37 (25.52%)
State or territorial government	8 (9.64%)	14 (9.66%)
University (academic, student and non-academic staff)	5 (6.02%)	9 (6.21%)
Retired/Not in workforce	0 (0.00%)	2 (1.38%)
Others	0 (0.00%)	9 (6.21%)
Prefer to not disclose	8 (9.64%)	6 (4.14%)
<b>Industry</b>		
Arts and Recreation	5 (6.02%)	12 (8.28%)
Community and Social Services	39 (46.99%)	74 (51.03%)
Economic development, tourism and infrastructure	4 (4.82%)	7 (4.83%)
Education and training	30 (36.14%)	53 (36.55%)
Environment and climate change	12 (14.46%)	24 (16.55%)
Health and Disability	25 (30.12%)	56 (38.62%)
Information media and telecommunications	1 (1.20%)	3 (2.07%)
International development	19 (22.89%)	21 (14.48%)
Public administration and Safety	13 (15.66%)	32 (22.07%)
Others	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Prefer to not disclose	9 (10.84%)	5 (3.45%)
<b>Role played by delegate</b>		
A decision-maker who uses eval findings	13 (15.66%)	21 (14.48%)
Oversee evaluation projects	39 (46.99%)	70 (48.28%)
Plan or commission evaluation work	24 (28.92%)	53 (36.55%)
Researcher in evaluation practice	55 (66.27%)	86 (59.31%)
Oversee program(s) that are evaluated	10 (12.05%)	21 (14.48%)
Providing training in evaluation	28 (33.73%)	67 (46.21%)
Supporting evaluation projects	32 (38.55%)	69 (47.59%)

No current involvement w/ evaluation	0 (0.00%)	3 (2.07%)
Others	4 (4.82%)	1 (0.69%)
Prefer to not disclose	5 (6.02%)	5 (3.45%)

	Delegates who found the conference to be <b>NOT value for money</b> (i.e. unsure/no) (n=83)	Delegates who found the conference to be <b>value for money</b> (n=145)
<b>Participation in conference &amp; AES membership</b>		
<b>Membership of AES</b>		
Individual Membership	45 (54.22%)	74 (51.03%)
Organisational membership	14 (16.87%)	36 (24.83%)
No, Considering	6 (7.23%)	19 (13.10%)
No, but a member previously	2 (2.41%)	4 (2.76%)
No, and not considering	6 (7.23%)	6 (4.14%)
Others	4 (4.82%)	1 (0.69%)
Prefer to not disclose	2 (2.41%)	1 (0.69%)
<b>Conference attended</b>		
1st conference	39 (46.99%)	52 (35.86%)
2-3 conferences	23 (27.71%)	46 (31.72%)
4-5 conferences	8 (9.64%)	25 (17.24%)
6 and more conferences	13 (15.66%)	22 (15.17%)
<b>Source of funding</b>		
Employer funded	57 (68.67%)	112 (77.24%)
Self-funded	19 (22.89%)	14 (9.66%)
Mix of employer and self-funded	3 (3.61%)	13 (8.97%)
Conference support grant/Sponsorships	4 (4.82%)	5 (3.45%)
Others	0 (0.00%)	1 (0.69%)
<b>Participation</b>		
Participant Only	46 (55.42%)	73 (50.34%)
Presenter	30 (36.14%)	46 (31.72%)
Conference Grant recipient	1 (1.20%)	1 (0.69%)
Exhibitor	7 (8.43%)	11 (7.59%)
Sponsor	7 (8.43%)	16 (11.03%)
Organizer/Volunteer	2 (2.41%)	7 (4.83%)
Session chair	3 (3.61%)	23 (15.86%)
<b>Attendance</b>		
Average No. of days attended	3.34 ± 0.65	3.65 ± 0.81
Delegates who attended pre-conference workshop(s)	20 (24%)	63 (43%)
Delegates who did not attend the workshop	63 (76%)	82 (57%)

## APPENDIX 5: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONFERENCE APP

**Table 8 : Recommended improvement and useful features indicated by delegates**

**Yellow – Improvement/Pain-points & Green are positive features**

The app was good and I am sure lots of UX was done. I am on Android and it asked for permission to access files every time I opened it. I would have liked option of organising delegate list by either first or last name or organisation. I felt like some changes to how the agenda was presented may have made it easier to use - I hasten to add here that I thought the app overall was well done.

AES conference app should have given the option in questions to be anonymous. This was an issue for people to feel free to open questions without the pressure of been identified.

I found I was switching between the booklet and app to see the session type and then the actual abstracts for the sessions. This wasn't ideal. I liked that you could connect with people in the app.

The conference app had too many functionalities that I and many others didn't use and ended up being cluttered and. It was too chaotic and so it was hard to find the basic information. It would have benefitted from being simpler.

The app should be tested on more devices. It frequently didn't work on my phone (crashed, reloaded, or couldn't access poll functions). The available screen size was miniscule due to the sponsor logo down the bottom, along with header / footer content, making it extremely difficult to use. Only used it to access detailed session description, otherwise did not use. Feel like other tools (e.g. Slido) work better and perhaps would make for a better investment for next year, rather than a custom app.

The layout of information in the App meant that you couldn't compare general descriptions of sessions - you had to open each session individually to look at the details and then scroll through the various sessions again to look at the next one in that same time slot.

The app could be more helpful. one way it could be improved is if the most important information was at the top and in bold. To me, the session Title (plus a very brief description in 1or2 sentences) was the most important information to help me make a selection and to later find that selection again in the app. For example - WED: concurrent 1 is meaningless to me. And the names of the presenters are not helpful when I do not know them. I need the name of the session to make a choice or to find a session already chosen.

The app, the online program, and the printed program, were all together very unhelpful. Inaccessible. Unclear. Information scattered differently across all three platforms. Having sessions listed as "Wednesday concurrent session 10" rather than by the session name was absurdly annoying. Surveys per session rather than per presentation was also pointless.

The app needs some improvements in terms of ability to access information about each session (e.g. session theme, presentation titles and presenter names should all be visible on the same screen).

The Conference App could be improved. Having the session titles visible (instead of the Concurrent Session Number and the first two presenter names), as well as the ability to jump quickly to a certain day or time, rather than needing to scroll down through everything all the time, would be helpful I think.

It is very important to be able to easily access session abstracts, as this tells me what each session is about, allowing me to decide what is relevant and of interest. At this conference, accessible abstracts were difficult, it required many clicks through the app, or going to the online website. The app was abysmal, poor functionality, poor user experience, and embarrassingly basic coding errors that meant incorrect bios for people, but I assume you know this.

T I didn't find the App easy to use so didn't use it. If you want proactive use, it would be best to not just mention it ever so briefly at the beginning as this information is easily missed. Maybe the team doing registration could talk through how to use the App if time permits. Otherwise, get a facilitator to go around and show people how to use the App.

<p>App was hard to navigate, e.g. toggle between summary or title of session and time/room. These should all be in one view or intuitive. Needed the sessions on a calendar format in the app not just website so we can navigate our preferred sessions by time. Also, couldn't 'star' by presentation; instead it was by time blocks/room with multiple presentations. I'd prefer a more targeted selection option to better organise my day.</p>
<p>The app was a good feature, probably could have had more communication and instruction about how to make the most of it</p>
<p>The app could have been improved by having the title of the session in the preview so you didn't have to select each session to know what it was about - as a result my group utilised the booklet more than the app. Additionally in the app, there was something funky going on with notifications so you could add a contact and they do not get a notification.</p>
<p>The app refreshed itself quite regularly. This is entirely fine - good attention to detail. However, the user experience would have been better if (following refresh) it returned to the section of the agenda reflecting that time of day. There was always so much unnecessary scrolling to get back to the right date and time in my personal schedule.</p>
<p>Some of the speaker information in the booklet was not accurate (not referring to the speakers who could no longer attend). The app functions did not work on many phones with smaller screens - maybe did not enable scrolling?</p>
<p>The App was a bit clunky, freezing occasionally, requiring several disruptive updates, and the program of presentations was difficult to see key information in a usable manner - title of talks, blurbs, speaker info.</p>
<p>The App in previous years I have found to be really user friendly and informative. This year however, it was frustrating. Specifically the frustrations I had were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The 'Personal' tab was essentially useless as it appeared to provide no benefit than to show Stared content, but did mean having no access to Polls or Q&amp;A options.</li> <li>- The sessions were numbered but didn't even display chronologically so caused a constant search up or down for sessions</li> <li>- The 'starring' option seemed to never work without pressing it over and over</li> <li>- The grouped sessions sometimes provided no detail of the sessions or timings. This made it hard to know which sessions to choose if there were multiple in the same session block – e.g. 11am - 12:30 with multiple presenters listed, but no information on 10min sessions, 30 minute sessions, 1 hour etc....</li> <li>- The app reset to start of day every time I opened it - irrespective of how long it had been</li> <li>- Surveys for sessions did not include a way to select the session that you were providing feedback on. While you could add to comments, it was frustrating if you wanted to provide feedback for more than one of the presenters in the session.</li> <li>- The contacts option to interact with other attendees was not really discovered until the last day.</li> <li>- The app required updating almost every time I opened it, which was frustrating.</li> </ul> <p>I did like the following, although I only discovered them on the last day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The ability to take notes in the app and send them to myself</li> <li>- the ability to connect with other attendees I met through the app</li> </ul>
<p>App was pretty difficult to use - lots of clicking about to get to the thing you wanted and not easy to look up session times different ways (e.g. if you were looking for a presenter by name, or a presentation title, or by the organisation the presenter worked for). Being unable to navigate some of the key functions like question asking from the personal agenda was very frustrating. But I got by and didn't go pick up a paper handbook, so it was usable enough - just spend more time on it finding things than I'd ideally like to.</p>

This year's app was terrible - couldn't upload my bio or see other people's, it was really hard to navigate it or view the program and specific session details, we didn't receive instructions on how to use the app until a couple of days before the conference began (and no info on how to upload bio which is key for networking and utilising the app function of messaging people). And while it was great to see inclusion of post-session surveys, the app wouldn't let you give feedback on individual sessions, so your feedback was being applied to an entire concurrent session which typically involved 3 different presentations, some of which you may not have even attended!

The conference app was great, however it didn't show any notification when people were trying to connect to each other through the app.

The conference app had potential but didn't quite deliver. Information about the sessions was spread across at least three different views. When you selected a session (second view) the speaker names were not listed and there was no high-level description of what it was about (bar the session title). You had click into the full abstracts to access more information. It felt disjointed and time consuming. The app was also unstable - it wanted to refresh constantly and some of the features such as voting on participants' questions didn't work. The lack of session specific information in the survey section e.g. sessions were described generically made it difficult to easily locate surveys to complete based on the sessions I attended. The 'start survey' at the bottom of session view (where key information about each session is provided) was not immediately obvious.