

Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework

Developed by the AES Professional Learning Committee on behalf of the AES

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Introduction

The Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) works to raise the quality and awareness of evaluation and its role in public policy, and community and organisational change projects. The AES also serves the needs of its members by providing ethical guidelines and an active professional learning program.

In the 2010 AES strategic ten year plan and the 2013 three year business plan, professional learning was recognised as a strategic priority.

The Professional Learning Committee (PLC) is one of ten committees reporting to the AES Board. Over a number of years, the PLC has considered establishing a competency framework to guide the professional development of members and other interested professionals. During 2012 the PLC supported AES staff to put together a comprehensive and targeted professional learning program. This work highlighted the need and potential value of an evaluators' competency framework.

This framework draws on the competency frameworks of a number of evaluation organisations, in particular, the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association, the European Evaluation Society, the Canadian Evaluation Society and the International Development Evaluation Association. Their work and contribution to this framework is acknowledged.

Purpose

The purpose of the *Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework* ('the Framework') is to guide and support members and other interested parties to enhance their evaluation knowledge and expertise. This purpose contributes to the AES objective of improving the quality of evaluation practice in Australasia. The PLC will develop a learning guide to help members plan their learning, and the AES will offer a range of ongoing professional learning activities, programs and conferences based on the Framework.

The challenge

The following issues were considered in developing this Framework.

Rigour

There is a substantial body of literature describing the competencies involved in conducting systematic and professional evaluation. Included are competency frameworks developed by other evaluation societies and organisations. The AES Framework started with an analysis of this literature, which was subsequently cross-checked by members of the PLC to identify any possible gaps.

Succinct and accessible

A competency framework is of little value unless it is understood and used. The aim was to keep the Framework readable and easy to understand. In addition, the PLC plans to develop an accompanying learning guide to help users apply this information in planning their learning.

How to 'slice and dice'

Decisions needed to be made on what the broad groups of competencies or domains should be and how the various evaluator competencies best fitted within these groups. The PLC adopted the current structure after trying different ways to group the competencies.

Language

Words and phrases can have different meanings for different people. Professions are well-known for developing language or jargon that has meaning within their speciality but is often poorly understood by those outside. In developing this Framework the PLC aimed to use clear language and minimal jargon.

Focus

The PLC agreed that the Framework should not limit itself only to those competencies that are unique to evaluation and define the profession, but should also include more general competencies (e.g. relating to interpersonal skills and project management) that are essential to evaluation practice.

How to provide guidance to evaluators with a wide range of experience, knowledge and skills

The PLC built the Framework with this basic property in mind. However, at this point, they deemed it too early in the work to attempt to define competencies at different levels of expertise and experience as part of the Framework. They do envisage that at a future date the Framework may include defined levels of expertise and allow for evaluators to more effectively self-assess their competence in the various areas.

It is envisaged that the learning guide planned by the AES will help users at different levels make best use of this Framework.

Values and culture

Evaluators recognise that understanding culture and values associated with any evaluation is vital. It could be argued that this is an important contribution that evaluation makes. As a result, the PLC placed emphasis on how best to ensure the competencies covered these areas well.

Fit with the AES Ethics Guidelines

The *AES Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations* is a complementary document providing guidance on how to undertake evaluations in an ethical manner.

How this Competency Framework was developed

There are a number of national and international evaluation organisations that have produced evaluator competency frameworks¹. The PLC examined these to determine their suitability for AES members. As each had useful features, it was decided to draw on these frameworks, together with consultation within AES to produce an *AES Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework*. This allowed desirable features to be drawn from both the reference frameworks and AES expertise, resulting in a Competency Framework best suited to the needs of the AES membership.

It is envisaged that over the next year or two enhancements to the Framework will emerge as it is used. The PLC proposes to use this period as the final validation check. It will then review and where necessary refine the Framework.

About the AES Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework

Evaluation is a transdiscipline (Scriven, 1991); similar to statistics, it is essential across sectors to ensure pursuit of excellence. Although needed across all sectors, evaluation does have a separate skill set from other disciplines.

A competent evaluator brings together a variety of knowledge and skills within an overarching frame of an evaluative attitude and professional practice, for conducting evaluation activities. This Framework (Figure 1) outlines the various domains of those competencies and how they relate to each other.

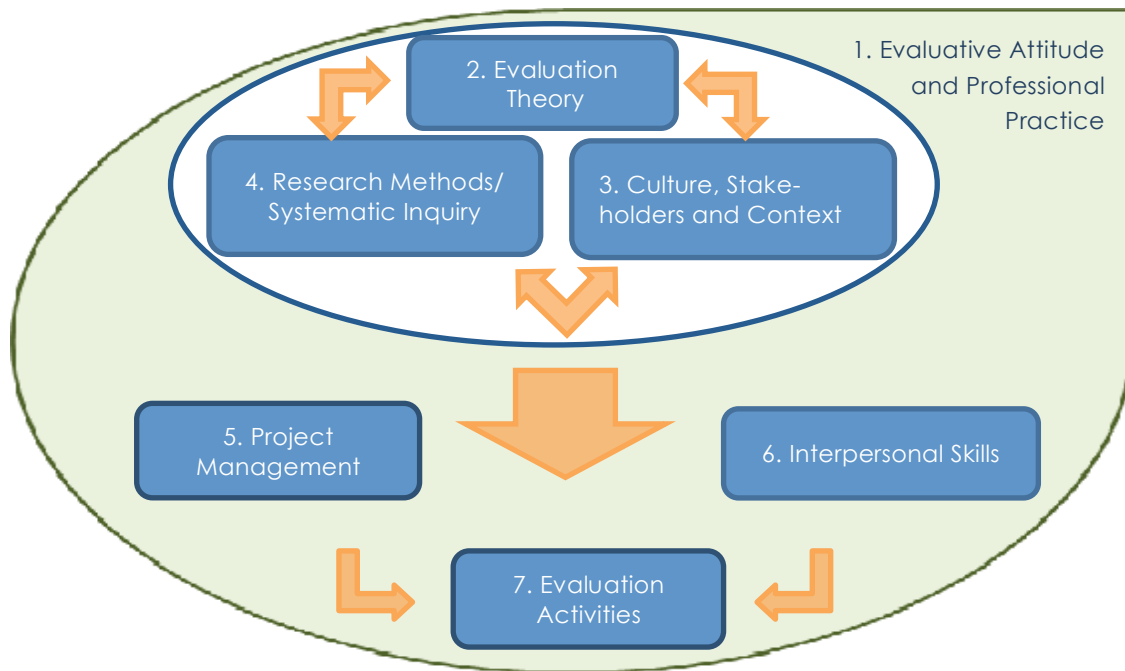


Figure 1 *Inter-relationship of the Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework domains*

Thus the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework comprises seven domains of competence:

1. Evaluative Attitude and Professional Practice
2. Evaluation Theory
3. Culture, Stakeholders and Context
4. Research Methods and Systematic Inquiry
5. Project Management
6. Interpersonal Skills
7. Evaluation Activities

Domain 1

Evaluative Attitude and Professional Practice

These competencies focus on the self-reflection and on-going professional development which are critical in the broad and complex role of evaluators. This set of knowledge, skills and attitudes influence all the other competency groups.

Domain 2

Evaluation Theory (Theoretical Foundations, Evaluative Knowledge, Theory and Reasoning)

These competencies focus on the theoretical foundations of evaluation which are distinct from other forms of inquiry.

Domain 3

Culture, Stakeholders and Context

The evaluator is surrounded by, and works within, a multiplicity of value perspectives, including cultural, social and political. These value perspectives are embedded within the evaluand², the context within which an evaluand exists, and in the perspectives of evaluation commissioners and stakeholders. The evaluator must be cognisant of, and responsive to, such value perspectives.

Domain 4

Research Methods and Systematic Inquiry

Within the scope of an evaluation, knowledge and skills in research methods and systematic inquiry are essential for collecting valid and reliable data on which evaluative judgements can be based. This competency covers the knowledge and skills evaluators need to conduct systematic inquiry in an evaluation.

Domain 5

Project Management

These competencies focus on the project management skills evaluators need to effectively negotiate, scope, manage and complete an evaluation.

Domain 6

Interpersonal Skills

These competencies focus on the interpersonal skills evaluators need to communicate effectively with clients, consumers and other stakeholders in an evaluation.

Domain 7

Evaluation Activities

The competency groups above culminate in this set of competencies which focus on the tasks an evaluator will carry out in the course of an evaluation.

Using this Framework for Professional Learning

These evaluator competencies are designed for everybody who wants to enhance their effectiveness as an evaluator or commissioner of evaluations. This includes people working in diverse roles such as academics, trainers, consultants and in-house evaluators, people who need to do evaluation as part of their broader role, commissioners of evaluation and people who want to better understand what an evaluator does.

No-one is expected to have all of these competencies

People bring different strengths, knowledge, skills and experience to their work as evaluators. The competencies provide a tool for understanding and managing strengths and gaps in a constructive way.

Table 1: How you can use the competencies

Audience	Use
Individuals	<p>Reflecting on your strengths, gaps and attitudes.</p> <p>Analysing which domains and competencies are most critical to your work and compare where your strengths and competency gaps lie.</p> <p>Choosing what professional development activities are likely to best meet your needs.</p> <p>Considering competency development as part of your career planning.</p>
Teams	<p>Reflecting on the strengths and gaps that the team comprises.</p> <p>Identifying strong and weak areas of competence so that evaluation work can be managed to best utilise strengths and compensate for gaps.</p> <p>In setting up a team, using the competencies to inform the choice of team members where flexibility exists.</p> <p>Planning team development.</p>

Commissioners of Evaluations	<p>Understanding the competencies that are needed by potential providers of evaluation services.</p> <p>Helping to diagnose how or why something is not working when problems arise.</p> <p>Understanding the complex nature of quality evaluation work.</p>
Employers	<p>Understanding what competencies to look for when recruiting, developing and performance coaching evaluators.</p> <p>Recognising the complex skills required and understanding that, as in other professional areas, everyone will have strengths and gaps.</p>
Evaluation Educators	<p>Guidance about what areas of foundation and ongoing professional learning evaluators are likely to need.</p> <p>Helping evaluators identify and address competency gaps.</p> <p>Helping aspiring evaluators to understand the nature of work as an evaluator and the competencies required.</p>

The AES is committed to providing quality professional learning activities for members and the broader evaluation community. This competency framework was built in part to inform and guide what professional learning the AES should offer that will be of most value to members and the broader evaluation community. A copy of the competencies can also be found on the AES web site <www.aes.asn.au> where further learning materials and program information can be accessed.

The Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework

1. Evaluative Attitude and Professional Practice

These competencies focus on developing personal and team evaluative attitude and on-going professional development. These are critical in the broad and complex role of evaluators. This set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes influence all the other competencies

Competent evaluators:

- maintain integrity in their practice
 - demonstrate flexibility
 - know and uphold professional evaluation ethics and relevant practice standards³
 - demonstrate self-awareness (acknowledge competencies and competency gaps)
 - demonstrate professional credibility, discretion and confidentiality throughout evaluation processes
 - practice within own competence
 - practice meta-evaluation, seek ways to incorporate accountability into their work
- build their professional practice
 - seek opportunities to build their competence as evaluators
 - understand and seek to build self-efficacy
 - are reflective about their practice, including seeking formative feedback from clients, stakeholders and colleagues
 - engage with professional evaluation communities
- build the discipline of evaluation
 - offer formative feedback to their team and colleagues
 - share ideas, skills and knowledge to build the evaluation discipline
- respect the values of others
- understand that even in groups that look or sound the same as the evaluation team, there will be cultural aspects that are different from the evaluators' own
- are sensitive to, respectful of, and compliant with cultural protocols and practices

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are self-aware <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ acknowledge and are transparent about their influence on the evaluation process, including value positions and cultural perspectives
<p>2. Theoretical Foundations (Evaluative Knowledge, Theory, and Reasoning)</p> <p><i>These competencies focus on the theoretical foundations of evaluation which are distinct from other forms of enquiry. ⁴</i></p>	<p>Competent evaluators understand and appropriately use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the language of evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ the terms in this section and the competencies overall • the purpose of evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ making judgments of merit, worth, and/or significance • the logic of evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ identifying criteria of merit ◦ setting performance standards (thresholds) ◦ choosing measures, and synthesising evaluative judgments • evaluative actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ grading, rating, scoring, ranking, apportioning, comparing, attributing ◦ possible side effects and side impacts • synthesis methodologies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ bring together facts and values for reaching evaluative judgements • evaluation standards and ethics, the AES Code of Ethical Conduct • ethical and moral reasoning • evaluation theories, concepts, forms and definitions • cost analysis/value for money • literature on evaluation issues, history and trends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ from the discipline in which we work

3. Attention to Culture, Stakeholders, and Context

The evaluator is surrounded by, and works within, a multiplicity of value perspectives, including cultural, social and political. These value perspectives are embedded within the evaluand⁵, the context within which an evaluand exists, and in the perspectives of evaluation commissioners and stakeholders.

The evaluator must be cognisant of, and responsive to, such value perspectives.

Competent evaluators:

Culture

- Identify and incorporate appropriate cultural protocols for interacting with the community, including incorporating cultural expertise on the evaluation team
- apply standards in a way that is sensitive to cultural context(s)
- use culturally-appropriate methods for consultation, engagement, evaluation processes, and reporting
- seek dispensation for any departure of evaluation process from cultural norms (e.g. unable to communicate directly with cultural leaders, inability to follow cultural timeframes or procedures)
- understand and articulate the potential and limitations of the evaluation within the cultural context(s)

Stakeholders

- Identify stakeholders
 - upstream: evaluation clients, donors, program managers
 - downstream: participants' families and communities
- Negotiate with stakeholders to:
 - identify intended and potential evaluation users
 - determine what constitutes credible and valid evidence
 - raise awareness of ethical practice

Context

- ascertain the political, policy, community and organisational milieu for the evaluation
- understand how evaluation relates to the other functions within the context
- maintain awareness of the political implications of evaluation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek to understand the motivations and intentions of the evaluation client • identify barriers and enablers that will influence the evaluation effort • Identify relationships among stakeholder groups, and power relationships in particular • articulate how those power relationships may influence specific evaluation processes or outcomes • Identify intended and potential evaluation uses • weave contextual understanding into analysis, synthesis, evaluative interpretation, and reporting
<p>4. Research Methods and Systematic Inquiry</p> <p><i>Within the scope of an evaluation, knowledge and skills in research methods and systematic inquiry are essential for collecting valid and reliable data on which evaluative judgments can be based. This competency covers the knowledge and skills evaluators need to conduct systematic inquiry in an evaluation effort.</i></p>	<p>Competent evaluators understand and appropriately</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare a research design that provides a coherent link to the objectives of the evaluation • identify appropriate evaluative criteria and measures likely to generate valid findings • design appropriate sampling methods to maximise learning and avoid bias • employ valid quantitative methods with rigor, and where possible to statistical confidence levels • apply the most appropriate qualitative methods for the evaluation context to deepen learning and understanding • understand the range of methods available and the most appropriate mix of methods for the evaluation <p>Competent evaluators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct literature review that is relevant and generates the required background for the evaluation • review the logic, coherence and relevance of the evaluand design and approach • identify available data sources, including the scope and validity of each source

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systematically gather data and other forms of contextual evidence • use software, internet and other technological tools to facilitate effective data collection and analysis and most efficient use of resources • assess reliability and validity of data through use of data checks, control and comparison trials, triangulation of results and cross analyses • systematically integrate evidence from multiple sources, identifying causal linkages, generating valid findings and noting data gaps, and limitations • interpret data by synthesis and interrogation of findings in relation to short term results and emerging outcomes • undertake impact assessments based on the specific program/project logic and context; verify actual and perceived impacts and likelihood of results and outcomes being sustained
<p>5. Evaluation Project Management</p> <p><i>These competencies focus on the project management skills evaluators need to effectively negotiate, scope, manage, and complete an evaluation.</i></p>	<p>When managing an evaluation project, evaluators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • translate evaluation knowledge and theories into a workable plan for conducting the evaluation • scope an evaluation plan and negotiate a contract where relevant • Define work parameters, plans and agreements • attend to issues of evaluation feasibility • demonstrate the capacity to innovate • Identify and manage required resources (human, expertise, financial and physical) • select and effectively utilise evaluation tools that are appropriate and fit for purpose • coordinate and manage cost, time, quality, stakeholder and client/sponsor management • coordinate and supervise evaluation team members • understand team dynamics and actively use this

	<p>knowledge to contribute to achieving the goals of the evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employ sound facilitation and process management skills • identify and mitigate problems/issues in constructive and useful ways • report on progress and results
<p>6. Interpersonal Skills</p> <p><i>These competencies focus on the interpersonal skills evaluators need to communicate effectively with clients, consumers and other stakeholders in an evaluation.</i></p>	<p>Evaluators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen for and respects others' points of view • display empathy • have the capacity to build relationships with a range of people • maintain an objective perspective • use written communication skills and technologies in evaluation practice • use verbal communication skills to engage with all evaluation stakeholders • use non-verbal communication skills where relevant and appropriate • attend to issues of diversity and culture throughout all communication planning and processes • listen to build confidence and effective representation amongst evaluation participants • negotiate to balance stakeholder views and acceptance of evaluation findings • collaborate and partner with stakeholders to engage them in evaluation processes • use facilitation skills (group work), interpersonal skills (individual and teams) and conflict resolution skills to elicit robust qualitative input to evaluation data

7. Evaluation Activities

The competency groups above culminate in this set of competencies, which focus on the tasks an evaluator will carry out in the course of an evaluation effort.

Competent evaluators:

- select an evaluation team (including advisors) to cover the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the work, including culturally-knowledgeable members
- effectively engage identified and diverse stakeholders
- delineate evaluation questions
- define evaluation purpose
- describe program
- attend to intended and potential uses of evaluation
- design feasible, acceptable and engaging evaluation approaches
- conduct data collection activities
- utilise existing data
- refine lines of enquiry
- integrate data from multiple sources
- synthesise credible and valid evaluative conclusions
- report on evaluation findings interpersonally and in culturally sensitive ways
- report findings in formats that are useful for client and key stakeholders
- seek feedback from clients

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Appendix A:

About the AES Professional Learning Committee

The current Professional Learning Committee (PLC) of the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) was formed in June 2012. The PLC was established by the AES Board to provide the AES with leadership and guidance on professional learning matters including programs and other activities offered by the AES. PLC members comprise some people who were on previous AES PLCs and others who are new to the Committee. They were chosen from member expressions of interest, include people from several states and New Zealand and are all volunteers. The AES Executive Officer works closely with the PLC.

The PLC conducts its work primarily using tele-conferences. However, members felt that a lot could be achieved if a face-to-face meeting could be arranged. The workshop where this Framework was begun was the result of PLC members deciding to see what would be possible with no budget.

Most importantly the aims of the workshop were all achieved including drafting the first cut of the *AES Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework*. After this positive start, much work followed to refine and develop the Framework outlined in this document.

Members of the Professional Learning Committee

Dianne Hardy	Principal, Evaluation and Strategy Services Australia, VIC (Chairperson)
Prof Rick Cummings	Educational Development Unit, Murdoch University, WA
Margaret McDonald	Consultant, MacDonald Wells Consulting , ACT
Jo Durham	Student at the Centre for Health, Curtin University, QLD
Delyth Lloyd	Research Fellow/Project Manager, Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, VIC
Amy Gullickson	Senior Lecturer, Centre for Program Evaluation, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, VIC
Dorothy Lucks	Executive Director, SDF Global, WA
Eve Barboza	Director and Facilitator, Wholistic Learning, NSW
Heather Nunns	Consultant, Analytic Matters, NZ
Catherine Hurley	Research Officer, SA Community Health Research Unit, SA
Maria Eliadis	Executive Officer, Australasian Evaluation Society
Pek Toh	Professional Learning Coordinator, Australasian Evaluation Society

Endnotes

¹ Reference evaluator competency frameworks were from The Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA), The Canadian Evaluation Society, International Development Evaluation Association (IDEA) and the European Evaluation Society.

² 'Evaluand' is a word used by evaluators to generically denote the 'object' that is the focus for evaluation.

³ For the AES this refers to the AES Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations. Refer to the AES website for more information: <www.aes.asn.au>

⁴ 'And if you do not know much about evaluation theory, you are not an evaluator. You may be a great methodologist, a wonderful philosopher, or a very effective program manager. But you are not an evaluator. To be an evaluator, you need to know that knowledge base that makes the field unique. That unique knowledge base is evaluation theory ...' (Shadish, William, *American Journal of Evaluation*, 19 (1) 1998, pp. 5-6)

⁵ 'Evaluand' is a word used by evaluators to generically denote the 'object' that is the focus for evaluation.