



# 2022 AES Group Mentoring Program Evaluation Report

Australian Evaluation Society | March 2023



**2022 AES group mentoring program evaluation report**

© Australian Evaluation Society 2023

---

**For inquiries please contact:**

Australian Evaluation Society Limited  
PO Box 476, Carlton South VIC 3053, Australia  
Email: [aes@aes.asn.au](mailto:aes@aes.asn.au)  
[www.aes.asn.au](http://www.aes.asn.au)

# Contents

2022 AES Group Mentoring Program Evaluation Report.....	i
Executive summary.....	1
About the 2022 AES Group Mentoring Program.....	2
Approach for evaluating the 2022 program.....	2
<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Overall assessments of the mentoring program.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Mechanisms supporting mentoring program effectiveness .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Active participation in the groups .....	5
Facilitation practices .....	7
Group dynamics .....	7
Mentee attitude and expectations.....	7
<b>How the mentoring program contributes to professional practice and development .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>For whom the mentoring program was most or least successful .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Program sustainability .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Recommendations for the mentoring program in future.....	12
Appendix I: summary of the 2022 evaluation approach.....	14

## Executive summary

The 2022 Australian Evaluation Society (AES) mentoring program ran for six months. It consisted of five groups with six members each, supported by a project officer and a volunteer working group. Two groups focused on general professional development and three on specific evaluation topics of interest to members. The program was evaluated on the basis of three online surveys and two focus groups, as well as regular discussions with mentors and associate mentors.

The mentoring program was generally found to be successful and worth repeating in future years. Participants reported that they benefitted overall from participation, particularly if they were actively involved in their groups. No mentees expressed dissatisfaction with the program, although some constructive suggestions were given.

The 2022 program showed that program success was enabled by active participation among mentees, good facilitation practices, positive group dynamics, and clear expectations from both mentors and mentees. Participants did not generally identify specific goals but worked toward broad objectives such as greater engagement within their professional communities. Some groups were intended for general professional development, while others focused on specific evaluation topics. No clear patterns in participant responses were found suggesting that some groups of people benefitted more than any other group.

The working group recommends that the mentoring program continue to operate under the structure used in 2022, with:

- a mix of general professional development and specific topic groups
- a mentor and associate mentor in each group
- recruitment of AES Fellows and other experienced practitioners as mentors or associate mentors
- a community of practice for mentors and associate mentors, with regular meetings to share their experiences
- peer support networks for mentees, including opportunities for interaction at each year's conference.

The working group recommends the following changes to the program:

- moving to an 18-month cycle in future, allowing six months for set-up and recruitment and one year for the groups to operate
- encouraging less experienced and/or more isolated practitioners to participate in general professional development groups, while more experienced practitioners are encouraged to select groups focused on specific topics of evaluation practice
- encouraging each group to identify and pursue its own ways of promoting active participation by all members.

## About the 2022 AES Group Mentoring Program

The Australian Evaluation Society (AES) offered its members a group mentoring program in 2022, which had been pilot tested in 2021. This has been an online mentoring program, in which seasoned evaluators guide a small group of emerging and mid-term evaluators through their professional journey. Participants benefit from the expertise and leadership of the mentors and from the mentee peer support, where mentees with diverse experiences can learn from each other in pursuit of a common learning goal and can develop their support network in the evaluation field.

The mentoring program is intended to contribute to ongoing professional development. The need for such development is stressed in the AES competency framework and is one of the Society's overall objectives. The AES expects competent evaluators to:

- maintain integrity in their practice; and
- build their professional practice, including by seeking opportunities to build their competence as evaluators, being reflective about their practice and engaging with professional evaluation communities; and
- build the discipline of evaluation, including sharing their ideas, skills, and knowledge.

Mentoring groups are led by a volunteer mentor and an associate mentor, who work as a team to support the learning and development of a group of up to six mentees once per month. A group may focus broadly on professional development or more specifically on a selected area of evaluation practice. Each group follows a flexible program, depending on the mentor's focus and on the needs and goals of mentees. Mentors, associate mentors, and mentees in each group are expected to negotiate mutually agreeable objectives and activities.

In 2022, the program included two types of groups, distinguished by their areas of focus. Two of the groups had a general focus on professional development, while the other three focused on specific topics. These topics included evaluation capacity development, dealing with complexity, and value for money analysis. Mentees identified the group they wanted to join (with two preferences allowed), and mentors selected mentees to be part of their groups based on their applications. Overall, 30 mentees were supported by 9 mentors and associate mentors in 5 groups.

## Approach for evaluating the 2022 program

The 2022 program evaluation follows on from that of the 2021 pilot program, following a similar logic. In 2021, key evaluation questions focused on whether the program works and what effects it had. In 2022, questions focused on what makes the program work and for whom it works. All participants were informed when they joined the program that they would be expected to participate in the evaluation when requested, through surveys, interviews, and/or focus group discussions.

The evaluation focused on four key questions:

1. What are the mechanisms that make the mentoring program effective for participants?
2. To what extent does participation in the mentoring program contribute to the ways mentees approach their practice and their ongoing professional development?
3. For whom was the program most and least impactful and effective?
4. How sustainable is the program in its current form?

Evaluation data was collected through the following methods.

- Online participant surveys were carried out in three waves, at the end of months 2, 4, and 6.
- Consultation was carried out with mentors and associate mentors through regular online meetings.
- Two focus groups were held with participants, drawing from participants who reported the highest and lowest levels of satisfaction with program success in their survey responses.

After each round of data collection, initial analysis was undertaken and the working group participated in an iterative sense-making session. At the conclusion of all data collection, the findings were synthesised into this report.

The AES 2022 Mentoring Program Evaluation Plan is available at Appendix I and contains additional detail regarding the evaluation approach and methods.

## Findings

### Overall assessments of the mentoring program

Both the survey respondents and focus group participants provided positive assessments of their experiences in the mentoring program.

For an overall assessment of the program, participants were asked at the end of the six months how successful it had been in helping them meet their overall objectives. Of 20 responses in the month 6 survey, two said it had been “a little” successful, eight described it as “somewhat” successful, and nine as “very successful,” while one respondent was unsure.

Figure 1



Participants gave a range of reasons for their assessments, featured in Box 1. Some negative comments were included in the survey as well, featured in Box 2.

**Box 1 – overall positive comments offered by some mentees**

*“The mentoring program has provided a wonderful collegial space, facilitated with wisdom and humanity by Alan, and with enthusiastic participation by a group who have worked well together. It has been such a special experience to have a place to get together with others who are passionate about evaluation, to exchange ideas, and to share the joys and challenges of our evaluation practice.”*

*“I definitely learnt a lot from the group and have been able to bring in new perspectives to evaluation in my workplace.”*

*“I’ve made some strong connections to other evaluators, I’ve learnt a lot from my mentor, I’ve got new ideas about the topic area we’ve been focused on, I feel more connected to the evaluation community.”*

*“The program has expanded my professional network in the evaluation community and built my confidence in my knowledge and practice which were two of my main objectives in participating in this program.”*

## Box 2 – overall negative comments offered by some mentees

*“I think my initial understanding of the objectives and intended outcomes was different to what was achieved in that I thought the mentoring would be more directed at enhancing each mentees skills however, in a group situation this is perhaps not as possible. I sort of expected that the mentor would gain some appreciation of our 'baseline' skills and knowledge so that each mentee could then appreciate their development/improvement over the course of the program. But perhaps this personal expectation was unrealistic. I am also not a 'diary' person so using the Mentee journal was not useful for me as it does not really seem relevant to the format of the sessions we had.”*

*“The frequency was a bit too spread out, so the sessions felt quite disparate. Perhaps some progression across sessions would be good too.”*

*“I would have preferred one on one mentoring as my mentoring goals were quite specific. I also felt that the group style mentoring meant that we tried to cover quite a large range of topics to meet everyone's needs - but that meant we didn't get into much depth on any one topic.”*

All focus group participants expressed overall satisfaction with the program. Participants in one focus group had interesting reflections of why the program may have been less successful for them than they had anticipated, although they noted that they saw value in it. One participant stated that *“I don't want that to sound like I didn't get any value out of it. [...] I'm actually quite glad that I did it.”* No focus group participants expressed overall dissatisfaction with the program.

Participants in one group offered strong encouragement to the organising group: *“Please continue offering it I think it's such a rich experience. It's just been such a great program to be part of. And so I just think, so great for the AES to put this on, I don't know many professional associations that offer group mentoring programs, and I just think it's absolutely fabulous. And it's been a great experience.”*

One focus group participant expressed doubts about whether the program can fulfil a mentoring role: *“And I also question [...] this experience of having large groups doing group mentoring, because mentoring is about the individual and their need.”* This mentee responded in the survey that they experienced “some change” across all dimensions and found the program “somewhat valuable” and “somewhat worthwhile” but offered no further comment in the survey. This idea was not explored by other focus group participants.

## Mechanisms supporting mentoring program effectiveness

The evaluation was grounded in an expectation that there would be identifiable mechanisms supporting the program's success. Potential mechanisms included active participation by mentees, good facilitation practices, positive group dynamics, and clear expectations from both mentors and mentees. Both the surveys and focus group discussions supported this link between participation and perceived success.

Focus group participants who had higher levels of enthusiasm and engagement reported better results from the program than those with lower levels of engagement. Participants said that enthusiasm and willingness to take an active part in a group were important for achieving better results. One focus group participant flagged the importance of a supportive workplace in being able to actively participate in the program.

### Active participation in the groups

Focus group discussions touched on the issues of how much time was available for participation in the groups and how much people chose to actively participate. It was noted that if a group meets monthly for six months, with the first meeting dedicated to introductions and the last to wrapping up the group, that



left four meetings at most for members to make progress in their discussions. Some mentees proposed that a longer program would be more beneficial.

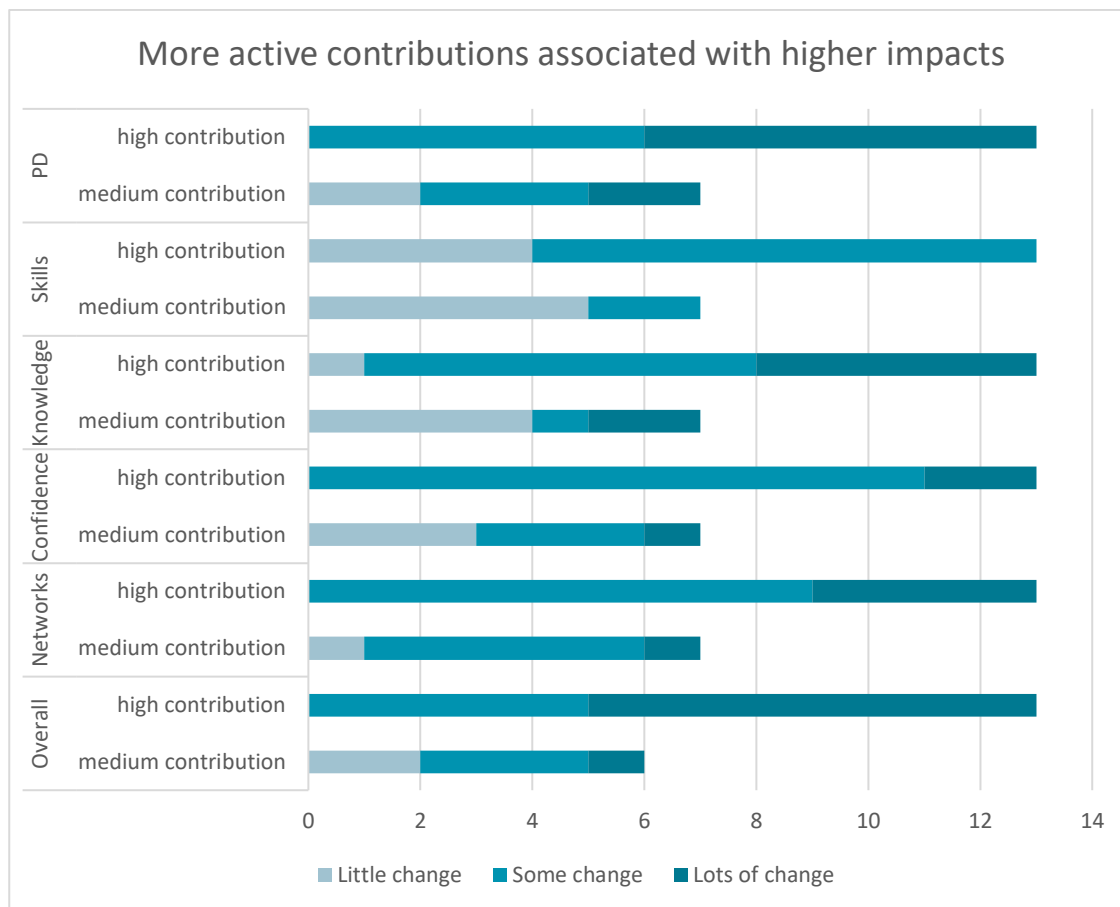
A link was made in the focus groups between participation in this program and in the annual conference. It was suggested that taking part in the program gave some people greater confidence to attend the conference as well as a group of people to interact with at the conference. One of the survey respondents said that the conference timing fit well with the mentoring program, since it came after people had time to establish relationships with other group members.

It was noted that some people are professionally isolated in their own organisations, and that participation in this program provided one way out of that isolation. Mentees selected for the focus group that reported the highest levels of program success discussed their feelings of professional isolation and how the program helped overcome this. Mentees in the focus group in which participants reported the lowest program impacts noted that they did not feel professional isolation.

Survey responses made the link between active participation and program success. The following analysis is focused on responses to the month 6 survey in the expectation that respondents benefited from sufficient time to reflect on the degree to which they actively participated and the degree to which they saw changes in outcomes of interest. Twenty responses were received to the survey at the end of the program. Thirteen respondents said they contributed to the groups at a high level, while seven said they made a medium contribution (none rated their participation as low). More active participants assessed the program as having higher impacts across most outcomes, as shown below. One person said they were not sure how successful the program had been overall (not shown in the following graph).

Responses varied widely to the question of how much time they spent each month on the program, and some respondents did not give an estimate. Most of those who did gave an estimate ranging between 3 and 10 hours per month, while three people gave estimates ranging from 16 to 25 hours (although the higher estimates could have been for the whole program, and not for each month). Responses show differences across the various types of impacts, with the lowest impacts on changes in skills.

Figure 2



### Facilitation practices

Many mentees flagged the facilitation methods used by their mentors as important to their experience of the program. These methods include different approaches to scheduling sessions, which was considered important by several mentees. We have not compared facilitation methods, but mentors were encouraged to try a range of options through their community of practice in order to enhance active participation by group members.

Mentees expressed different preferences for more- or less-structured approaches, and mentors varied in their responses. In future recruitment for the groups it may be useful for mentors to state how they plan to structure the sessions, for applicants to consider when they apply for particular groups.

### Group dynamics

The group aspect of the program was described as a key motivator for many mentees, but several people noted that it takes time to establish a good group dynamic. Focus group participants described a good group dynamic as important to the success of the program, and explained the ways that a range of facilitation practices implemented by the mentors had supported that. 2022 participants did not discuss group composition, which had been identified as a key factor in the 2021 evaluation.

### Mentee attitude and expectations

Enthusiasm for the program may have been a mechanism that supported success for some mentees. In the focus groups, mentees described enthusiasm from other group members as a positive attribute.

Mentee attitude is a key factor. Mentees explained that their own actions and attitudes – such as meeting their commitments and making time – was a key element of success.

## How the mentoring program contributes to professional practice and development

The evaluation looked at the extent to which participants assessed the program as contributing to their professional development and to factors such as confidence, skills, and knowledge that contribute to professional practice.

When asked about professional development, respondents to the month 4 and 6 surveys generally said that it had contributed, and that they found changes in professional development valuable. A number of mentees who said the program delivered only “some” contribution to their professional development nevertheless stated that these contributions were “very valuable”.

*Table 1: Level of contribution to mentees’ professional development, and extent to which mentees valued these contributions, by month*

Question	Month	Responses		
How much has your participation in the mentoring program contributed to your professional development?		Little contribution to my professional development	Some contribution to my professional development	Significant contribution to my professional development
	4	12.5%	62.5%	25.0%
	6	10.0%	45.0%	45.0%
How valuable are these changes for you?		Not very valuable	Somewhat valuable	Very valuable
	4	8.3%	37.5%	54.2%
	6	10.0%	30.0%	60.0%

Focus group participants noted that the opportunity to implement new ideas and change practice is dependent on those opportunities arising – it is possible that the gains made by mentees may be more significant for them into the future as these opportunities arise.

Focus group participants generally said that the program had supported their professional development, especially when they also attended the annual conference. Several noted that growth in their networks was a benefit of the program, one saying that “for me, it was a lot about the network.” Another noted that “connecting and networking with others is also really lovely.”

Participants talked about developing a sense of belonging: “it’s that sense of belonging you know, you do actually feel like that. You’re developing this network, and even though it’s virtual most of the time, that’s okay. You know, that’s okay. It’s that sense of belonging that you feel like you’re part of.” Participants also noted that setting aside time for professional development was valuable “For me, it’s made me purposely take time out to focus on my professional development. I think having the regular scheduled time means that I’m making time for it when sometimes it’s always something that drops to the bottom of the priority list, I think when you’re managing other things, so it’s that accountability element that make sure you’re prioritizing your own learning.”

Focus group participants in the more-successful group discussed the ways that the program had expanded their network and helped them with professional isolation, and described being more confident to seek out

peers and ask questions. Focus group participants in the less-successful group speculated that this would be a benefit for those who did experience isolation, but that they themselves did not need this. Growth in networks and reduction in professional isolation seems to be an important way that the program contributes to mentees' professional practice.

Growth for some mentees was multi-directional: *"I felt like the information that I had about evaluation was broadened as well as deepened."*

The survey also asked respondents to assess how much the program contributed to factors that support professional practice, such as knowledge, skills, and confidence. The survey asked whether the program contributed to low levels of change ("a little"), medium levels ("some"), or high levels of change ("a lot"). The responses were generally positive and showed some improvement between month 4 and month 6. (See Figure 3, below.)

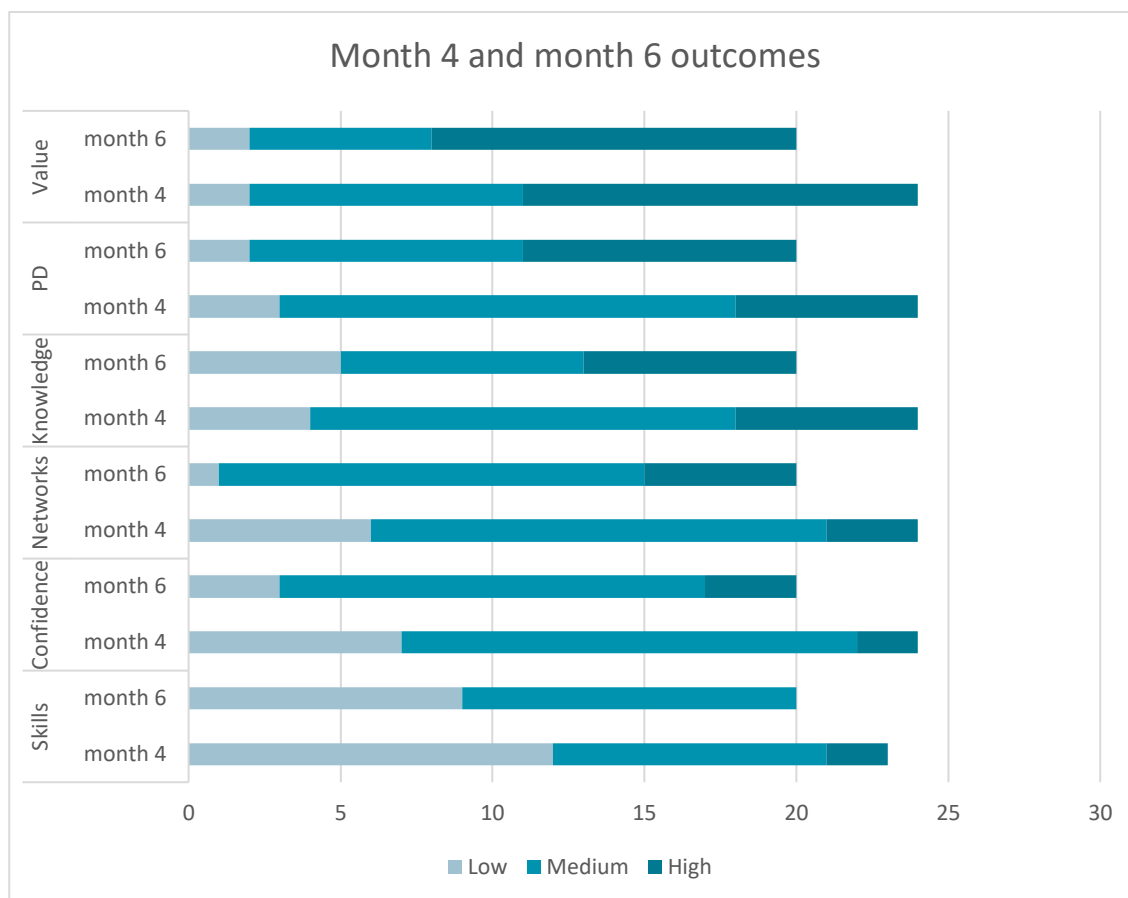
Statements from survey respondents included the following:

*"The mentoring programme gave me clarity, increased knowledge and confident in doing evaluation. This is what I need in my evaluation professional development journey."*

*"I think next to my study, I feel that this is has been one of the better professional development opportunities that I've experienced. Hearing about the experiences of other professionals, and unpacking ideas together I think has allowed me to continue to engage with concepts which I'd studied as part of my course. I also feel more engaged and connected to the network of evaluators in the AES."*

On the other hand, some respondents noted that other activities such as graduate education or on-the-job training provide greater contributions to their professional development, or that mentoring provides a good start on professional development but that they need more than mentoring. This suggests that for some participants the mentoring program can lead to other forms of professional development.

Figure 3



A benefit of the program is almost “humanising” experienced evaluators. Several mentees described how hearing their mentor explain things that went wrong or admit to a knowledge gap helped them to feel that they didn’t need to have all the answers themselves. They seemed to think that to be an experienced senior evaluator, you DO need to have all the answers. It may be that for many mentees, this is the first ongoing opportunity they’ve had to engage with a very experienced evaluator, and realising they’re human and have gaps and make mistakes seems to help mentees to see evaluation as a viable career path for themselves, as people who don’t always have all the answers. This helps to establish realistic understandings of what a career as an evaluator can look like.

### For whom the mentoring program was most or least successful

The evaluation did not identify characteristics associated with higher or lower levels of success, such as length of experience or geographic distribution. As noted above, participants who reported higher levels of engagement with their mentoring groups reported higher levels of satisfaction with professional development and other outcomes. This holds true for participants in the general professional development groups and the more targeted, technical areas.

Table 2: self-rated overall success by self-rated level of contribution and group type

Overall success	A little successful	Somewhat successful	Very successful
general group, high contribution	0	1	4
general group, medium contribution	1	1	1
technical group, high contribution	0	1	4
technical group, medium contribution	0	2	0

The two types of groups attracted mentees from varying levels of experience and self-assessed expertise. The reported outcomes such as improvement in networks did appear to vary with levels of experience or other factors. It was noted that the groups focusing on specific topics reported greater impacts on their levels of knowledge, and slightly more impact on professional development.

Figure 4

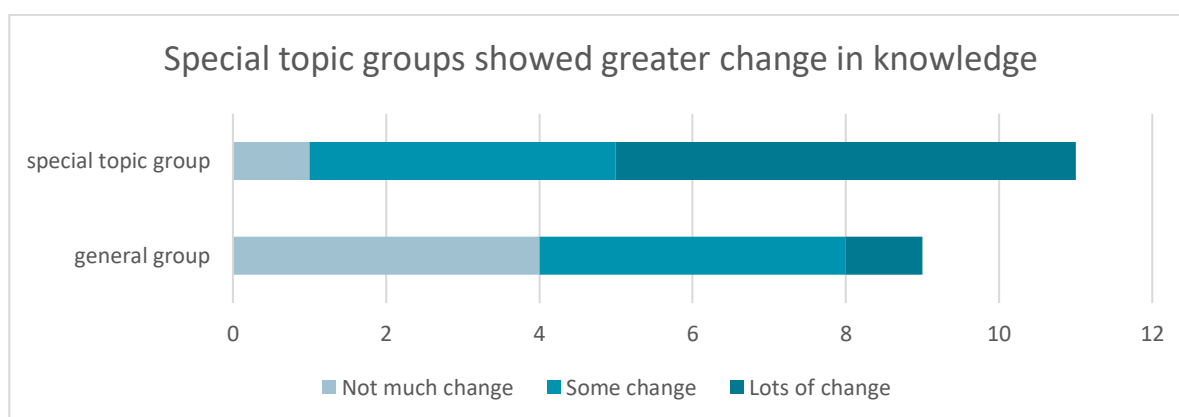
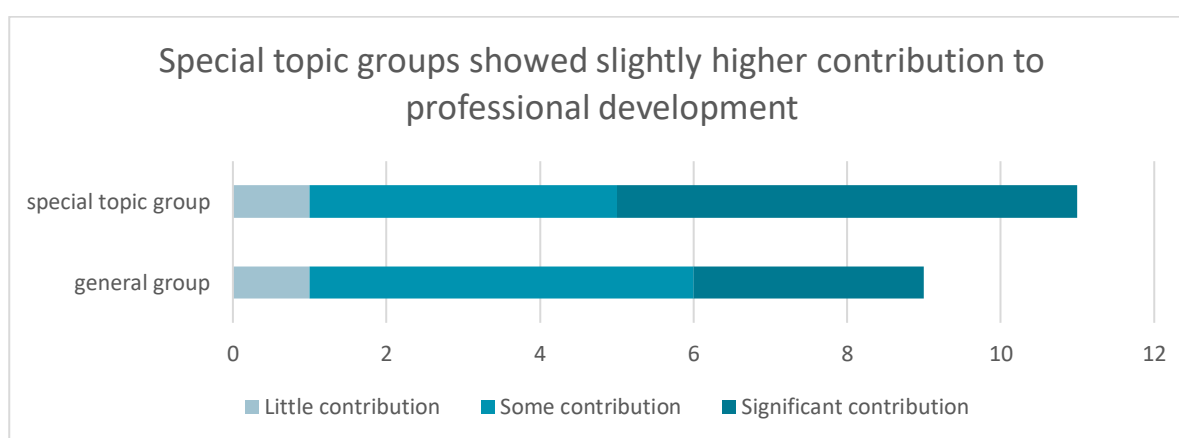


Figure 5



Focus group discussions suggested that mentees with the right attitude were more successful. Mentees identified this attitude as self-directed, open, willing to share, willing to learn, and eager to connect with

others. Program advertising materials could be modified to emphasise this to help attract the right group and to set the expectations around what is needed to be successful.

It was suggested that mentees need to be at the “right” stage of their career, but this is hard to define. Two mentees who applied unsuccessfully in 2021 but who were accepted in 2022 said that they realise now they weren’t ready in 2021. Other mentees seemed to consider themselves too experienced to fully benefit from the program.

## Program sustainability

The 2022 mentoring program demonstrated that a group mentoring approach is feasible, with ongoing support from the AES and some of its members. Funding for a project officer allowed the Society to support mentors as well as the working group that coordinated the program. The number of experienced practitioners willing to act as mentors or associate mentors, either on general or specific topic groups, determines how many groups can be offered.

A key component of sustainability is that the program is perceived as valuable by its target audience. Several focus group participants offered strong encouragement to the organising group: *“Please continue offering it I think it’s such a rich experience.”* And *“It’s just been such a great program to be part of. And so I just think, so great for the AES to put this on, I don’t know many professional associations that offer group mentoring programs, and I just think it’s absolutely fabulous. And it’s been a great experience.”*

It is possible that the program may contribute to the overall sustainability of the AES. In the focus groups, several mentees said they were more confident to participate in other AES opportunities such as workshops and the conference. One described using the program to establish ECB initiatives in her workplace, building evaluation capability outside of the program. One described feeling more sure of her career as an evaluator.

The program relies on the work of a volunteer working group and volunteer mentors, and so consideration must be given to sustaining their involvement. The mentor community of practice seems to have been well-received by mentors in supporting their role. The working group has developed a range of practices that supports them to do the required work. The working group recommend not evaluating the program next year, in part to reduce the workload, and to conduct another evaluation in a few years’ time.

## Recommendations for the mentoring program in future

The working group recommends that the AES continue to offer a group mentoring program, retaining its key features such as:

- a mix of general professional development and specific topic groups
- a mentor and associate mentor in each group
- recruitment of AES Fellows and other experienced practitioners as mentors or associate mentors
- a community of practice for mentors and associate mentors, with regular meetings to share their experiences
- peer support networks for mentees, including opportunities for interaction at each year’s conference.

The working group recommends changes for future years in the following areas:

- I. increased program length

2. recruitment into either general or special topic groups, depending on levels of experience and access to strong professional networks
3. need to encourage consistent participation levels within the groups.

Participants in the 2022 program generally agreed that six months was too short for groups to form, agree on objectives and on their working styles, and give all participants the opportunity to pursue their own objectives. The working group recommends that from 2023 the program shift to an 18-month cycle, allowing six months to recruit participants and set up the groups, followed by 12 months for groups to operate. During the year, mentors and associate mentors should continue to meet regularly online as a community of practice, as they did during 2022. At appropriate points during the 12 months, each group should review its member's objectives and make any appropriate adjustments to their meeting and communication approaches.

The working group recommends that the AES encourage less experienced or more isolated practitioners to apply for the general professional development groups, while more experienced people who want to build up knowledge and skills in particular areas should be encouraged to apply for the special topic groups. The more general groups tend to emphasise network building and professional development, while the special topic groups allow participants to explore new areas of expertise.

Finally, the group recommends that each group explore different ways to encourage consistent participation by all members. This should include one or more pulse surveys providing quick feedback to mentors and associate mentors, allowing them to adjust their approaches if and when appropriate. It may also include encouraging mentees to keep journals during the 12 months to encourage ongoing reflection and engagement.



## Appendix 1: summary of the 2022 evaluation approach

The 2022 group mentoring program was evaluated to support ongoing refinement of the program and to identify possible changes to its design. It is expected to be of interest to the AES Board as well as members, particularly those members who may choose to take part as mentors, associate mentors, or mentees in future years. It drew the experience of the 2021 pilot program in the scope and approach for the 2022 evaluation.

The 2022 program evaluation focused on the following key evaluation questions.

1: What are the mechanisms that make the mentoring program effective for participants?

- To what extent did mentees' and mentors' active participation and contribution to their group influence the development of professional networks, confidence, knowledge and skills?
  - How does interaction between mentors and mentees contribute to professional development?
  - How does interaction between mentees contribute to professional development?
  - What elements of the group dynamic are important for professional development?
- Which elements of the mentoring model had the most effect on the quality of the experience for mentees and mentors?
  - Associate mentor / mentor pairing and dynamic
  - Matching of mentees and mentors
  - Online tools that supported program engagement
  - Program facilitation practices to support engagement
  - Other?

2: To what extent does participation in the mentoring program contribute to the ways mentees approach their practice and their ongoing professional development?

- How much did participants value what they gained from the program?

3: For whom was the program most and least impactful and effective?

- What are the participant characteristics associated with most and least impactful outcomes?

4: How sustainable is the program in its current form?

- Time invested by mentors?
- Time invested by committee?
- Time by Project Officer?
- Time for mentees?
- Facilitating factors for successful operation of the program?

Four criteria of merit were established for the evaluation in consultation with the AES Pathways Committee.

Criteria	Definition
Effective <i>How does it work?</i>	The online group mentoring model supports mentees, mentors and associate mentors to develop networks, confidence and knowledge as evaluators and mentors. Participants are actively engaged and interacting with the mentor and mentees in the mentoring program.
Impactful <i>How much does it work?</i>	The mentoring program results in positive changes for mentees and mentors. Participants value what they gained from participation with the program.
Relevant <i>For whom does it work best?</i>	The online group mentoring model is effective and impactful (per the above definitions) for a sufficient number of participants.
Sustainable <i>Can we keep doing it?</i>	The human, infrastructure and financial investments required by the model are able to be met by the AES into the future on an ongoing basis.

Data was collected for the evaluation through two primary methods: online surveys of all mentees at the end of months 2, 4, and 6, and focus groups of mentees conducted after the six-month program was completed. Survey results were discussed with mentors during their monthly community of practice meetings to inform their discussions and to get their input to survey analysis.

The survey asked for both general reflections on respondent participation and reactions, as well as assessments of how well the program met specific objectives such as professional network building or increases in evaluation knowledge. Examples included:

- an overall assessment of success
- how much respondents contributed to their groups
- the extent to which respondents' professional networks changed
- changes in confidence, knowledge, or skills
- contributions to professional development
- overall assessment of program success.

Program participants were invited to participate in one of two focus groups on the basis of their survey responses. One group consisted of people who had assessed the program's success most highly, and the other group involved respondents who had been less positive about its overall success (but were not necessarily negative in their assessments).

Ethical considerations were addressed with three elements:

- informed consent
- the use of de-identified data for survey analyses, in which pseudonyms were substituted for names and other personal characteristics, allowing for the assessment of changes over time in responses without attributing responses to known individuals.
- secure handling of data.

Particular respondents to the last survey were identified for the purpose of selecting those who would be invited to participate in the focus groups, and for no other reason.

---

**Australian Evaluation Society Limited**

PO Box 476, Carlton South VIC 3053, Australia

Email: [aes@aes.asn.au](mailto:aes@aes.asn.au)

[www.aes.asn.au](http://www.aes.asn.au)

