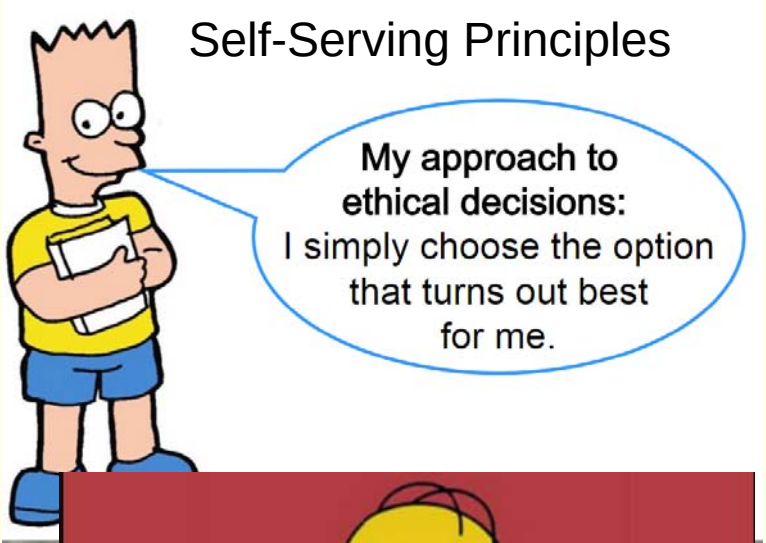
Dilemmas in Evaluation Practice of an Ethical Kind

Anne Markiewicz

ANNE MARKIEWICZ AND ASSOCIATES

Ethical Literacy for Evaluation

Self-Serving Principles



Plagued by Ethical Dilemmas

Practice Guided by Principles

Ethical Evaluator

Basis for Australasian Evaluation Society Ethics

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Guidelines

NZ Social Policy Evaluation and Research (SPEaR) Committee Good Practice Guidelines involving Pacific People

NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research

AES
Revised July 2013

- Guidelines
- Code of Ethics
- Policy on Application of Code of Ethics

Te Ara Tika (Guidelines for Conducting Evaluation for Maori research)

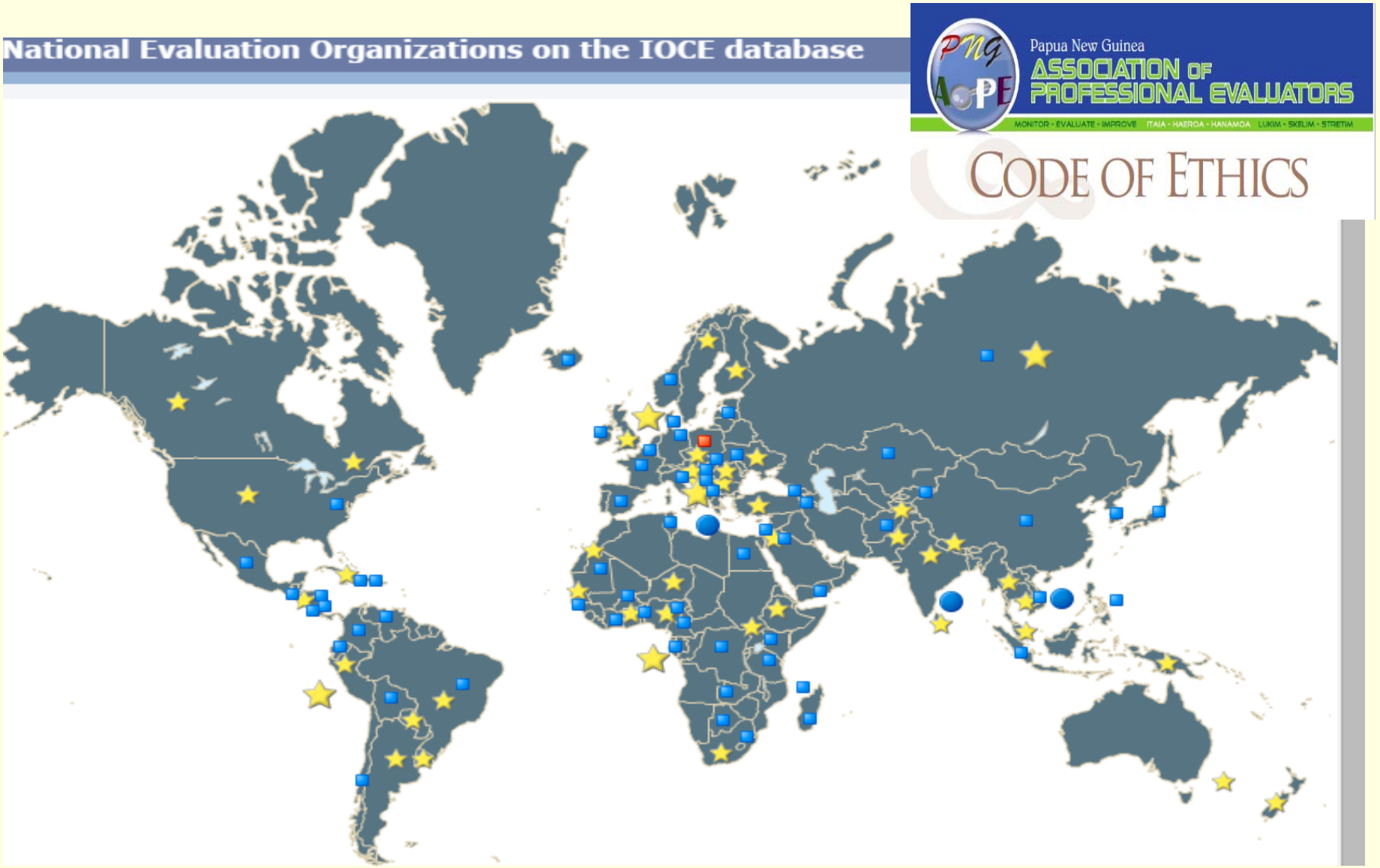
Canadian Evaluation Society Guidelines for Ethical Conduct

Canadian Evaluation Society
Société canadienne d'évaluation

American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for Evaluators

AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION

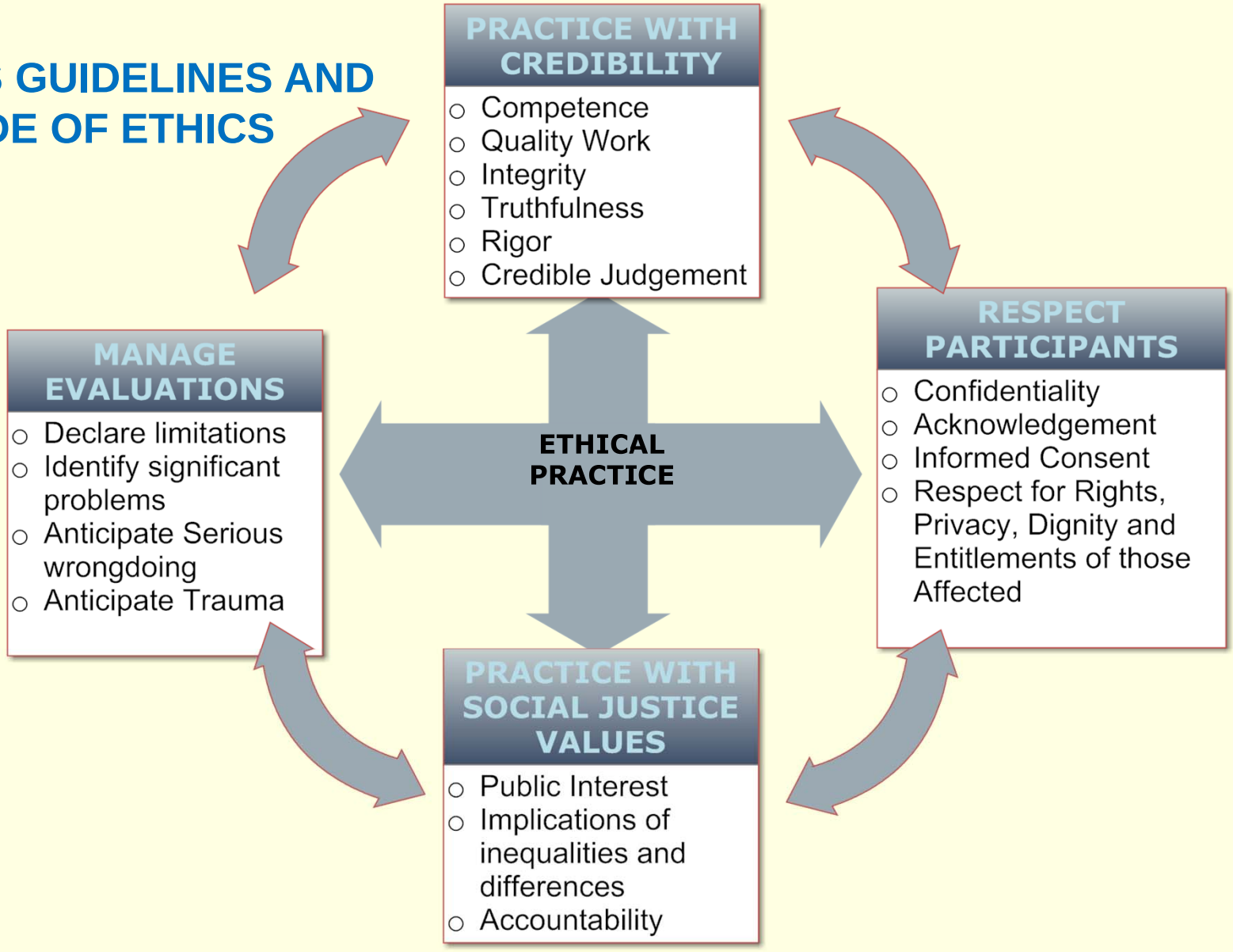
Evaluation Codes of Ethics other Contexts



AES Ethical Principles: Conducting Evaluation

- Respect: Evaluation designed, conducted, reported respecting rights, privacy, dignity, entitlements of those affected by & contributing to the evaluation
- Reciprocity: Participants reap some benefit: Principle of ‘Benefit Sharing’
- Credibility: Judgements based on sound & complete information: important for evaluations with capacity to change total quantum and/or distribution of program benefits or costs to stakeholders

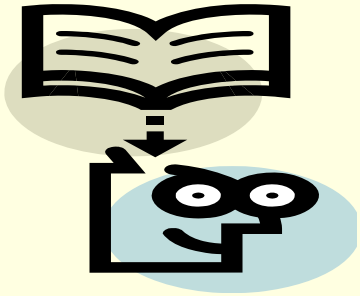
AES GUIDELINES AND CODE OF ETHICS



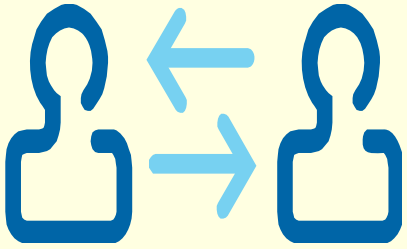
Four “R’s” What they Mean for Evaluators

Respect

Relevance



Responsibility



Reciprocity

Respect: Principles

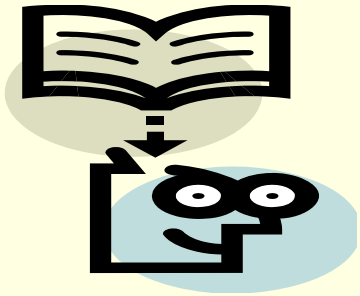
- Create non-judgemental, empathic environment
- Interpersonal, engagement & interpretive skills
- Understand/reflect influence of history, culture, context & narratives
- Capture and portray beneficiary voices
- Recognise diversity and different experiences
- Select appropriate evaluation designs, approaches & methods for context

Respect: Challenges

- Reflecting diversity and difference within scope of evaluation design, time frame & budget
- Truncated familiarisation time
- Scope for in-depth, customised consultations
- Broad brush approach encompasses most common or general features
- Challenge representing extent of differences between communities & within a community
- Other???

Respect: Case Example ‘Reflecting Diversity’

- Program implemented in a range of different communities: urban, regional, rural, remote
- Budget and time frame for evaluation has not allowed for full range of consultations with restricted sampling
- One community formally complained their perspective not reflected in evaluation report and their views differ from others consulted
- Commissioner asks evaluator to justify why this community was not included in data collection
- How do you respond?



Relevance: Principles

- Negotiating focus of evaluation with those using and/or affected by the evaluation
- Positioning evaluations to guide good practice
- Informing learning for program improvement
- Informing program design and implementation
- Positioning evaluations to inform and influence policy and strategy development
- Evaluation capacity building

Relevance: Challenges

- Building relationships with commissioners to produce useful evaluations
- Accessing/consulting with affected stakeholders
- Limited influence or control over application or use of findings/recommendations to guide learning or improve programs
- Limited appetite for evaluation capacity building
- Other?

Relevance: Case Example ‘Ensuring Influence’

- Robust evaluation of flagship program
- Positive response to usefulness of findings with applicability to other programs
- After final report it is announced program will not continue due to funding cutbacks
- Evaluation report therefore not released
- Months later similar program model commenced
- New program lobbying for evaluation report to be released so they can use it/learn from it
- How do you respond to this request?

Responsibility: Principles

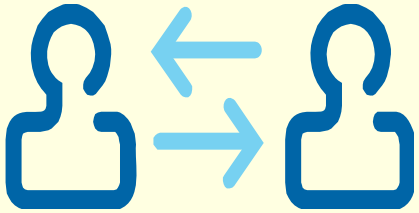
- Participants fully informed
- Informed consent & confidentiality
- Careful consideration of implications of questions and data collection methods used
- Processes for dealing with disclosures
- Transparency of methods and use of findings
- Commitment to doing ‘no harm’
- Some projects approved by Ethics Committee
- Others will not have been through such scrutiny

Responsibility: Challenges

- Limited capacity/constraints in ensuring participants fully informed due to comprehension, language barriers etc.
- Limited capacity to change/customise data collection questions/methods used
- No processes for dealing with disclosures
- No access to formal ethics processes
- Ethics processes more geared to research
- Use of formal ethics processes substantially delay evaluation time lines
- Other??

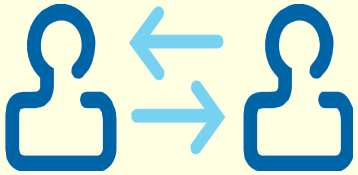
Responsibility: Case Example ‘Dealing with Disclosures’

- Evaluation of service offering support to women experiencing family violence
- During interviews with clients evaluator becomes aware one worker is encouraging women to remain in very violent situations
- After exploring this issue with the CEO no action taken with comment that this staff member has their ‘heart in the right place’
- Where do you go with this disclosure?



Reciprocity: Principles

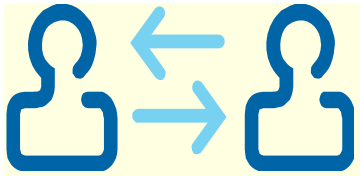
- Recognition for contribution made: appreciation fees, gifts or donations, meeting expenses
- Results advance people’s interests and are of benefit to them
- Dissemination of results to those most affected
- Evaluation able to inform improved policy and practice wherever possible & achievable



Reciprocity: Challenges

- No budget for client appreciation fees, gifts or donations or for meeting expenses
- Dissemination of results difficult for evaluator to control or achieve, particularly to end-users
- Evaluator not able to ensure evaluation use for improved policy and practice

- Other???



Reciprocity: Case Example ‘Ensuring Benefits and Learnings are Shared’

- Evaluation of a healthy eating program in a community with high rates of chronic disease
- Commissioner asked if community will receive results to improve awareness and preventative health practices
- Commissioner responds evaluation primarily for accountability to funder and no dissemination plan intended
- How do you respond?

Practice with Credibility

- Evaluator Competencies: quality, integrity, truthfulness, rigor, credible judgements
- *The success of the current boom in the use of evaluative information will remain largely dependent on its credibility….. Perceptions that evaluative information misrepresents reality (intentionally or not) are likely to render it useless—other than as a tactical weapon in political and bureaucratic skirmishes. There is some evidence suggesting the risk of a credibility crisis regarding much evaluative information'* (Schwartz and Mayne 2005).

- How do you respond?