

Aotearoa/New Zealand Starting National Evaluation Conferences

Pam Oliver, Maggie Jakob-Hoff, and Chris Mullins

Aotearoa/New Zealand had its first national evaluation conference in September 2004. Organised by the Auckland Evaluation Group, the meeting was held at the [Tauhara Centre](#), near Lake Taupo (central North Island). This was chosen partly because it is a central location for North Island evaluators to get to, and partly because of the nature of the conference centre itself—a retreat and spiritual centre located in a quiet setting with native bush and overlooking the lake.

The conference theme in 2004 was “*Radical directions, gnarly questions and half-baked ideas*” and the programme included a keynote workshop, several other facilitated workshops and discussion groups, and a number of more informal discussion groups using an Open Space Technology process. Twenty-five people attended the conference and spent two and a half days engaged in discussions which participants found inspiring and highly worthwhile.

Entitled “*Really useful stuff*”: *A new role for evaluators in building evaluative capacity in New Zealand*, the keynote workshop was presented by Bill Ryan, Associate Professor and Director of Programmes in Victoria University’s School of Government in Wellington. It was followed by an engaging discussion which focused on participants’ endeavours to date at building evaluation culture into their everyday evaluation practice, including examples of both successful attempts and frustrations, and suggestions about what evaluators would like to be able to do, in an ideal evaluation environment.

In addition to the programmed workshops—ranging from “looking at ways of educating our clients around evaluation tendering”, and “aspects of ethical decision-making in evaluation”, to “building reflective practice through evaluation”—the Open Space events also resulted in some focused discussion on topics of key importance to the development of the profession, such as “who evaluates the evaluators?”

A second conference is scheduled for June 29th-July 1st, 2005 at the Tauhara Centre and is being organized jointly by members of the Auckland and Wellington evaluation groups. More information will be available in the next few weeks.