

Evaluation in Australasia: An Overview of Recent Developments

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Evaluation activities continue to develop throughout Australasia as evidenced by the Australasia Evaluation Society (AES) expanding its circle of influence and reaching out to its neighbors in Vietnam and China. Government officials and private sector personnel from these Asian neighbors visited Australia in October 2006 in an effort to learn more about evaluation in Australia.

The delegation of eight senior government officials from Vietnam were interested in learning how evaluation is approached by Australians. According to AES Fellow Chris Milne, "One of their interests was whether the AES could offer a model of a practitioners' network or professional society for Vietnam. They were particularly interested in our Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluation and our Code." The visit was part of the Vietnam Australia Monitoring and Evaluation Strengthening Project that is working to pilot a national system covering 600 projects with an annual budget of US\$3 billion.

Visitors from China's Private Enterprise Association also made their way to Australia to get an understanding of the Australian evaluation system. The Private Enterprise Association is an organization for private businesses in China, and is responsible for evaluating the trustworthiness of private businesses as well as the products and services marketed by these businesses. According to John Owen, AES Fellow and host to the Chinese visitors, "The Private Enterprise Association recruit[s] evaluators, and establishes the necessary mechanisms to ensure the ethical

conduct of evaluators." The visits from the Vietnamese and Chinese delegations demonstrate the global reach and importance of evaluation serving diverse needs in both the public and private sectors.

AES Annual Report Available Online

The AES Annual Report for fiscal year 2006 is available at <http://www.aes.asn.au/about>. The 40-page report highlights the activities of the association and its financial health among other topics. According to the report, professional development activities were one of the primary reasons more than 170 new members joined during the past year. The AES membership totals 765 and is the highest it has been in the past seven years.

A total of 10 regional workshops were conducted in Australia and New Zealand during 2006. More than 180 participants took part in the professional development programs. The inaugural professional development workshop series was presented by John Owen, and attracted 129 participants. During the second half of 2006, the professional development series continued with Jessica Dart presenting the workshops.

Awards Presented by AES

In 2006, the AES presented awards to distinguished evaluators Rosalind Hurworth, Virginia Lum Mow, Jessica Dart, and Rick Davies. Dr. Hurworth, director of the Centre for Program Evaluation (CPE) at the University

of Melbourne, was recognized with the *Evaluation Training and Service Award* in recognition of her contribution to evaluation for more than 20 years. The *Evaluation Study Award* was presented to Virginia Lum Mow, NSW Department of Education and Training, for the evaluation titled *Evaluation of the 2003 Technology Retraining Program for Computing Studies, Food Technology & Industrial Arts*. The third award, presented to Drs. Dart and Davies for their development of the Most Significant Change Technique (MSCT), was the *Evaluation Development Award*. This award is given to an individual or team that has provided leadership or innovation with respect to the practice or use of evaluation in either the public or private sector.

There are six awards to be offered by the AES in 2007. According to the AES, the awards are intended to encourage the development of evaluation and high quality evaluation practice in Australasia. The AES 2007 award nomination form will be available online at <http://www.aes.asn.au/awards> in early 2007. Nominations are due June 30, 2007.

AES 2006 Conference Takes Evaluators to Darwin

The 2006 Australasia Evaluation Society (AES) International Conference was held in Darwin, Australia from September 4–7, 2006. The theme

of the 2006 conference, *Evaluation in Emerging Areas*, featured multidisciplinary, indigenous and international development approaches to evaluation, tourism, arts and culture, land management, health, and natural resource management among others. A total of 80 papers were presented along with plenary sessions and keynote addresses. More than one-half of the papers presented at the conference are available online at:

<http://www.aes.asn.au/conferences/previous.html>.

The 2007 conference of the Australasian Evaluation Society is scheduled for September 3-7 in Melbourne. The conference theme will attempt to “draw together what [has been] learned about how to do evaluation well - and ways to do it better.” The event focuses on five primary aspects including valuing, describing, attributing, using, and managing. Confirmed keynote speakers include Hallie Preskill, Sue Soal, and Ray Pawson. The following table summarizes the conference theme and presents additional details on each strand. The deadline for receipt of proposals is March 16, 2007, and notification of acceptance is April 23, 2007. More information and registration for the conference can be found at www.aes2007.com.au.

Doing Evaluation Better, Melbourne, 2007 Conference Program

Strand	Aspects	Key Questions & Challenges
Valuing	Criteria and standards for evaluating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outcomes • processes • distribution of costs and benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose values should be used for evaluation? • How should these be identified? • How should differing values be addressed?
Describing	Gathering evidence about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial conditions • resources used • activities undertaken • short-term and long-term results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we develop credible short-term indicators of long-term change? • How can we retrospectively measure change over time? • How can we succinctly capture and communicate the richness of lived experience?
Attributing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing the causal contribution of interventions to the observed outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we account for the contribution of other interventions and external factors?
Using and Influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors affecting use and influence of evaluation • The impact of the process of evaluation • Strategies for increasing appropriate use and influence of evaluation • Identifying and applying lessons learned and best practice • Approaches to evidence-based policy and practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can evaluators facilitate the use and influence of evaluation findings? • What can we learn from implementation of evaluation findings?
Managing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective management of external evaluations – including developing tenders, selecting consultants • Project management challenges and techniques for evaluators • Internal evaluative activity and the learning organization • Developing evaluation frameworks, strategies and guidelines within and across organizations • Quality control in evaluation – accreditation, certification, peer review, and meta-evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How best can evaluation be managed and coordinated? • What are the risks of evaluation and how can they be addressed? • What skills are needed to manage evaluation?

Source: <http://www.aes2007.com.au/program.php>

Upcoming Evaluation Workshops

A workshop presenting techniques for measuring community engagement and individual and group empowerment is

scheduled for February 21-22, 2007 in Hobart and March 21-22, 2007 in Perth. The “Measuring Engagement, Measuring Empowerment” workshops will be presented by Roberts Evaluation Pty. Ltd. More

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information on this workshop can be found at
<http://www.robertsevaluation.com.au/training.htm>.

Contributor's Note

If you have additional information or corrections regarding any of the above mentioned items or if you would like to send contributions regarding these or other evaluation activities in Australasia, please e-mail me at: wes.martz@wmich.edu.