

TOWARDS VALIDATING EVALUATOR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES:

A PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE AEA EVALUATOR COMPETENCY TASK FORCE



SUSAN TUCKER, DONNA PODEMS, ROBIN MILLER
UK EVALUATION SOCIETY, LONDON, UK MAY 2017

AEA CONTEXTS

- **AEA has been looking at professionalization since 1980's**
- **Foundational work by Jean King and colleagues**
- **AEA's evolving contexts**
 - 1986: Evaluation Research Society and Evaluation Network merged to form AEA
 - Currently 7300+ members
 - Representing all 50 states
 - Over 20% members outside of US (50+ countries)
 - 57 special interest groups known as "TIGs"
 - 30 affiliate organizations

1981

- Kirkhart: Defining evaluator competencies: New light on an old issue

1990

- Patton: The challenge of being a profession

1996

- Scriven: Types of evaluation and types of evaluator

1998

- **King et al. present on competencies research at AEA annual meeting**

2001

•King et al.: **Toward a taxonomy of essential evaluator competencies**

2005

•Stevahn et al.: **Establishing essential competencies for program evaluators**

2006

•Intl Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction: **Evaluator Competencies**

2009

•Canadian Evaluation Society (CES): **Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice**

2011

•Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (azea): **Evaluator Competencies**

2012

•Intl Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS): **Competencies for Dev Evaluation Evaluators, Managers, and Commissioners**

2013

•Australasian Evaluation Society (AES): **Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework**
•UKES **Evaluation Capabilities Framework**

2014

•Gesellschaft für Evaluation e.V. (DeGeEval): **Recommendations on Ed and Training in Evaluation: Requirement Profiles for Evaluators**

2015

•AEA **approves creation of a set of program evaluator competencies & establishes 12-person Competency Task Force (TF)**
•The **EES Evaluation Capabilities Framework**

OUR CHARGE

The AEA Evaluator Competencies Task Force is committed to:

- ✧ **Creating an inclusive, thoughtful process for member dialog about appropriate next steps in professionalization of evaluators in US**
- ✧ **Systematically obtaining member feedback**
- ✧ **Analyzing feedback**
- ✧ **Building on previous work in US as well as 20 other sets of competencies**
- ✧ **Consulting with leaders from other VOPEs**

ENGAGEMENT METHODS

COMMITMENT TO MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Established Engagement Team to seek input on form and content of drafts

- **Operate independently & in cooperation with Competencies Development Team**
- **Create and implement multiple and ongoing input mechanisms**
- **Post feedback in AEA website & monitoring online feedback for results**



2015

- Studies all competencies developed worldwide
- Creates draft competencies
- Holds listening posts at AEA 2015 Annual Conference
- Revises draft competencies

2016

- Leads 15+ focus groups with members
- Posts draft on AEA website
- Establishes email address for feedback
- Offers webinar to AEA membership
- Distributes proposed competencies to members on email
- Revises draft competencies
- Pilot discussion guide for affiliates
- Listening post at AEA 2016 Annual Conference & Summer Institute

FUTURE ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- **Preparing and Disseminating AEA member survey in Summer 2017**
- **Member vote to approve competencies**
- **Developing validation study; book; embedding competencies in AEA events**

2017

- *Seeking additional round of member feedback in Spring*
- *Survey members*
- *Revises draft competencies*

2018

- *Board vote on competencies*
- *Members ratify competencies*

PARTICIPANTS

- **15+ virtual and face-to-face sessions conducted**
- **33 participants (Avg. = 2.5 people per group)**
- **22 of 55 TIGS represented**
- **3 affiliates piloted**
- **VOPE interviews**

TIG REPRESENTATION

- Alcohol, Drug Abuse & Mental Health
- Cluster, Multi-site & Multi-level
- Community Psychology
- Disabilities & Other Vulnerable Pop.
- Environmental Program Evaluation
- Evaluation Managers & Supervisors
- Feminist Evaluation
- Independent Consulting
- Indigenous Peoples in Evaluation
- Internal Evaluation
- International & Cross Cultural
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender
- Multiethnic Issues in Evaluation
- Mixed Methods
- Nonprofit & Foundations
- Program Design
- Qualitative Methods
- Research on Evaluation
- Research, Technology & Developmt Eval
- STEM Education & Training
- Systems in Evaluation
- Use & Influence of Evaluation

PROCEDURES

- Virtual focus groups via GoToMeeting
- Draft competencies and prior feedback received at AEA 2015 emailed in advance
- Two facilitators for each group
- Verbatim notes taken and shared via computer in real time
- Sessions audio-recorded

5 DOMAINS

- ① **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DOMAIN**—focuses on what makes evaluators distinct as practicing professionals.
- ② **METHODOLOGY DOMAIN**—focuses on technical aspects of data-based, systematic inquiry for valued purposes (e.g., understanding, decision making, judging)
- ③ **CONTEXT DOMAIN**—focuses on understanding the unique circumstances, multiple perspectives, and changing settings of evaluations and their users/stakeholders.
- ④ **PROJECT PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DOMAIN**—focuses on logistics such as determining and monitoring work plans, timelines, resources, and other components needed to complete and deliver the study.
- ⑤ **INTERPERSONAL DOMAIN**—focuses on human relations and social interactions that ground evaluator effectiveness

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Protocol developed and piloted:

- **at AEA 2015**
- **with Affiliate and TIG representatives in 2016**

Discussion topics:

- ① **adequacy of the proposed domains**
- ② **sub-domain item-level feedback**
- ③ **missing domains and items**
- ④ **uses for the competencies**
- ⑤ **concerns and opportunities**

ANALYSIS

- **Three analysts worked independently from verbatim notes to identify preliminary themes**
- **Analysts met three times to discuss identified themes and reviewed each others' analytic work**
- **Draft of findings sent to participants for review and comment**
- **Results shared with all members of Competency Task Force**

KEY FINDINGS

PROBES IN FOCUS GROUPS

- **Reactions to the substance of the proposed competencies**
- **Potential uses for competencies**
- **Opportunities and challenges presented by professionalization**

The effort was viewed as an important and positive step for AEA, BUT...

- **Purpose of AEA having competencies unclear**
- **Narrow focus on program evaluation viewed as limiting and dated**
- **Not clear what made each domain unique to evaluators compared to other professions such as “researchers”**
- **Does not unpack novice vs. expert expectations and acceptable levels of knowledge**
- **Fails to address overlaps and synergies across domains**
- **“Competency” not defined**
- **Cultural responsiveness, diversity, inclusion, and power inadequately addressed**

“But it is not clear how these will be used or why AEA needs these. What is their purpose? Evaluating the content depends on the purpose.”

DO DOMAINS CAPTURE UNIQUE COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF AN EVALUATOR?

“Yes” and “No”

- **Domains “important” but not all competencies required for every scope of work**
- **Distinct TIG centric perspectives**

Frequent requests for:

- **Cross-walking with AEA Guiding Principles and Cultural Competency Statement**
- **Clarifying with concrete examples at sub-domain level**
- **Separating knowledge from skills, dispositions, and traits**
- **Rewording at domain and sub-domain levels**

MISSING CAPABILITIES/SKILLS

- **Facilitating use and influence**
- **Client consultation**
- **Client capacity building/teaching**
- **Theories and frameworks**
- **Advocacy**
- **Self-knowledge**
- **Teamwork**
- **Credible evidence (producing, assessing)**

ITEM-LEVEL FEEDBACK WITHIN DOMAINS

- **Extensive suggestions for revision at the item-level in every domain**
- **Nature of suggestions were generally not trivial**

Examples:

- **Use of terms such as “social justice” generated debate about appropriateness**
- **Divorced from culture and context and use**
- **Unique purposes and circumstances of evaluation and valuing; power and privilege; ongoing scanning and adaptation to context**
- **Leadership, communication, stewardship**
- **Evaluator as mediator and servant**
- **Systems perspectives**

USING COMPETENCIES

USES

“It is important as we grow to identify what is it specifically we should know, what knowledge we expect of evaluators, what is teachable.”

- **Guiding course, curriculum, and professional development**
- **Communicating defining features of the field to clients and other stakeholders**
- **Hiring**
- **Assembling and supervising teams**
- **Self-assessment and reflection**
- **Mentoring**
- **Establishing credibility**

“The team issue may come in here. This whole slate may be evaluation competencies, but they may not reside in or need to reside in an individual evaluator. They might be used to ensure that the assembled team covers all the competencies.”

“I can give it to clients and use it to set expectations for clients about what they will and should get.”

REASONS FOR NOT USING

- Cumbersome and long
- AEA Guiding Principles “are better”
 - Simplicity, ease of recall
- Too generic
 - **No differentiation across roles or levels of experience**

PROFESSIONALIZATION

OVERARCHING CONCERNS

- The concept of “Professionalization” and “Professional” gave some pause
- How we define professionalization?
 - What does that mean?
 - We are professionals, just not professional evaluators
- How are we different from other professionals? (What distinguishes us from others)
- Any movement toward credentialing problematic at individual and organizational levels
- What is transfer to international members?
- Validation studies lacking
- Unclear next steps as an association:
 - Certification? Accreditation?

POSSIBLE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

- **How commissioners operationalize this could be detrimental – if only look for minimum standards, people only get minimum**
- **“Dumbs down” the field – people meet the minimum standards and stop there**
- **Makes the profession ‘mechanical’ – loses the essence of its art**
- **Could be perceived as developed by “elites” – a biased view of what profession requires**

EVALUATION AS A BROAD-TENT PROFESSION

Sets up barriers

- **Keeps people in/keeps people out (maybe a good thing---?)**
- **May not fit some people's circumstances**
- **Careful not perceived as developed by "elites" and a biased view of what profession requires**

Varying roles- varying competencies?

- **Internal and external roles**
- **Team lead or part of team as specialist**
- **Beginner to advanced—certain core at different levels or for different roles, or more competencies areas, or all core for everyone at basic level?**
- **Academic or practitioner (e.g. consulting, budgeting versus depth of theory and ability to contribute to scholarly knowledge)**

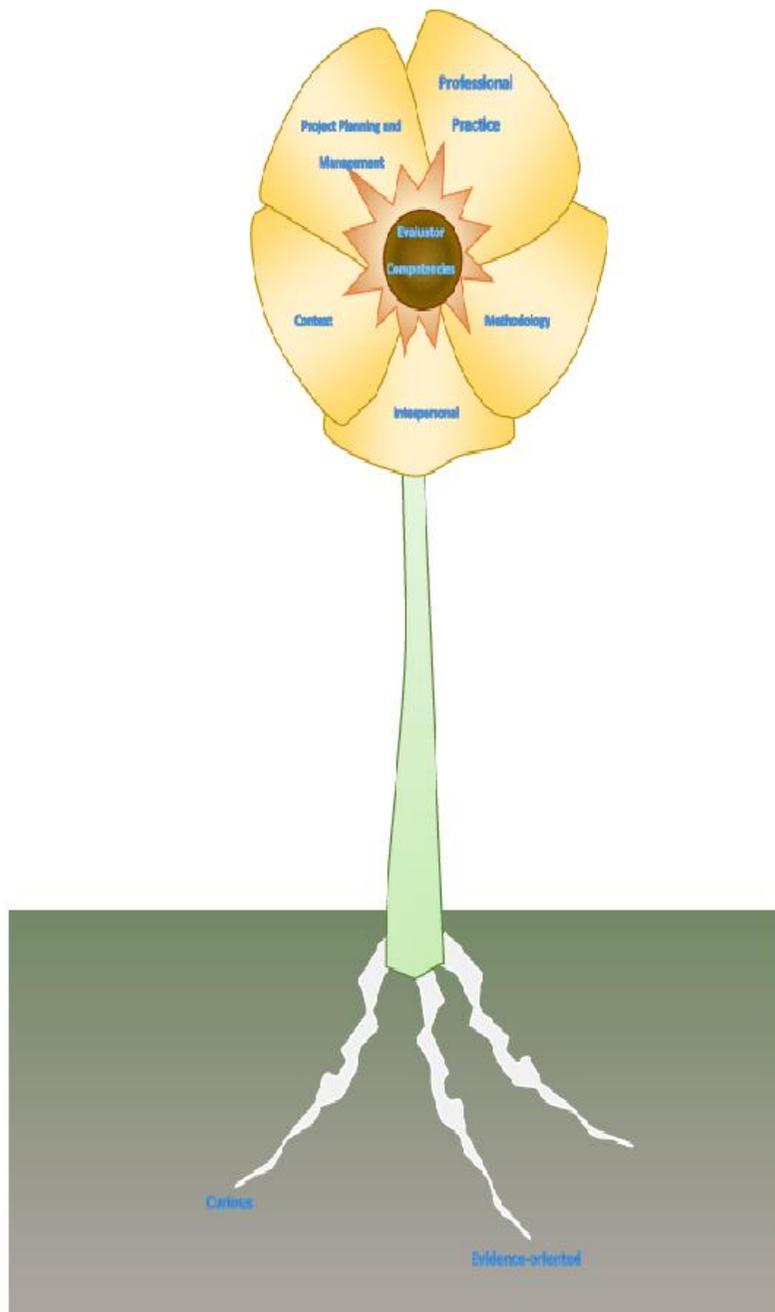
CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **Context, context, context...**
- **Process generated incredibly rich data**
- **Members voiced deep appreciation for the opportunity to have input**
- **Members look forward to their input being used to create an improved competency statement and support for validation work**
- **Task Force looks forward to more engagement and continuing work toward validation**

SPECIAL THANKS

AEA Competency Task Force led by Jean King:

Sandra Ayoo	Robin Lin Miller
Eric Barela	Donna Podems
Gail Barrington	Anna Rodell
Dale Berger	Laurie Stevahn
Nicole Galport	Hazel Symonette
Michelle Gensinger	Susan Tucker
John LaVelle	Elizabeth Wilcox



- **Professional Practice – Evaluators’ unique professional knowledge base and perspective**
- **Methodology – Systematic inquiry techniques for valued purposes**
- **Context – Understanding of changing circumstances, perspectives, and settings affecting evaluand**
- **Project Planning and Management - Logistics of delivering an evaluation study**
- **Interpersonal – Human relationships and interactions that ground evaluators’ effectiveness**

1.0	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DOMAIN —focuses on what makes evaluators distinct as practicing professionals
	The competent evaluator . . .
1.1.1	Knows and applies evaluation foundations that ground and guide professional practice: The Program Evaluation Standards, the AEA Guiding Principles, the AEA Statement on Cultural Competence, and the AEA Program Evaluator Competencies.
1.1.2	Knows multiple evaluation approaches and theories.
1.2.1	Demonstrates integrity as an evaluator through ethical evaluation practice that respects all people, including confidentiality, data storage, data responsibility, etc.
1.2.2	Demonstrates integrity through appropriate practice in cultural groups and sovereign nations.
1.3	Reflects on personal evaluator competence and perspectives, areas for growth, and implications for professional practice.
1.4	Engages in ongoing professional development to extend personal learning, growth, and connections.

1.0	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DOMAIN —focuses on what makes evaluators distinct as practicing professionals
	The competent evaluator . . .
1.5	Contributes to the public good through evaluation practice.
1.6	Stays abreast of current trends and developments in the field.
1.7	Considers social justice implications of program evaluation practice
1.8	Reports, disseminates/communicates evaluation findings/results.
1.9	Facilitates processes that foster the use of evaluation and its results.
1.10	Advocates for the field of evaluation.

2.0	METHODOLOGY DOMAIN —focuses on technical aspects of data-based, systematic inquiry for valued purposes (e.g., understanding, decision making, judging)
	The competent evaluator . . .
2.1	Understands methodology that grounds inquiry in evaluation practice.
2.2	Understands diverse value orientations that underpin methodological choices.
2.3	Conducts reviews of the literature as appropriate.
2.4	Identifies evaluation purposes.
2.5	Frames evaluation questions.
2.6	Designs credible and feasible studies that address evaluation purposes and questions.
2.7	Determines appropriate methods, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.
2.8	Identifies data sources and samples.

2.0	METHODOLOGY DOMAIN —focuses on technical aspects of data-based, systematic inquiry for valued purposes (e.g., understanding, decision making, judging)
	The competent evaluator . . .
2.9	Collects data using sound and credible procedures.
2.10	Analyzes data using sound and credible procedures.
2.11	Interprets findings/results and draws conclusions by identifying possible meanings in context.
2.12	Advocates for the field of evaluation.
2.12	Justifies evaluation findings/results and conclusions, judging merit, worth, and value when appropriate.
2.13	Reports evaluation findings/results, including strengths and limitations.
2.14.1	Conducts informal and formal meta-evaluations of studies, identifying their strengths and limitations.
2.14.2	addresses meta-evaluation as appropriate for accountability and improvement.

3.0	CONTEXT DOMAIN —focuses on understanding the unique circumstances, multiple perspectives, and changing settings of evaluations and their users/stakeholders
	The competent evaluator . . .
3.1	Respects and responds to the uniqueness of the evaluation context.
3.2	Describes the evaluand/program, including its basic purpose, components, functioning in its broader context.
3.3	Determines evaluability of the evaluand/program.
3.4	Identifies and understands the evaluation context from multiple perspectives (e.g., its site/location/environment, participants/stakeholders, organization/structure, culture/diversity, history/traditions, values/beliefs, politics/economics, and power/privilege).
3.5	Identifies and engages users/stakeholders throughout the evaluation process.
3.6	Attends to issues of evaluation use in context, including the information needs of intended users.
3.7	Considers broader contexts within which the evaluation takes place.

4.0

PROJECT PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DOMAIN—

focuses on logistics such as determining and monitoring work plans, timelines, resources, and other components needed to complete and deliver the study.

The competent evaluator . . .

4.1

Knows how to obtain evaluation projects (e.g., networking, developing proposals, contracting, and work assignments).

4.2

Collaboratively negotiates and manages a feasible project plan, budget, resources, and timeline for the evaluation.

4.3

Coordinates and supervises others to deliver evaluation processes and products effectively.

4.4

Uses appropriate technology and other tools to support and manage the evaluation.

4.5

Communicates processes and results in appropriate, timely, and effective ways.

4.6

Monitors evaluation progress, problem solves issues, and makes adjustments appropriately.

4.7

Documents the evaluation process and its products.

5.0	INTERPERSONAL DOMAIN —focuses on human relations and social interactions that ground evaluator effectiveness
	The competent evaluator . . .
5.1	Values and fosters constructive interpersonal relations foundational for evaluation practice.
5.2	Uses appropriate social skills to enhance interaction for effective practice.
5.3	Listens to understand, engage, and honor diverse perspectives.
5.4	Develops a shared understanding of the evaluand/program.
5.5	Recognizes issues of power and privilege in interpersonal interactions.
5.6	Navigates power dynamics in interpersonal relations.
5.7	Communicates in meaningful ways throughout the evaluation (written, verbal, visual, etc.).

5.0	INTERPERSONAL DOMAIN —focuses on human relations and social interactions that ground evaluator effectiveness
	The competent evaluator . . .
5.8	Demonstrates culturally responsive interaction throughout the evaluation.
5.9	Facilitates constructive interaction among those involved.
5.10	Collaborates and effectively engages in teamwork.
5.11	Negotiates evaluation decisions fairly.
5.12	Addresses conflicts constructively.