

Australasian Evaluation Society Case Study

EvalPartners International Forum

Chiang Mai, Thailand 3-6 December, 2012

Session 9 c) Strengthening VOPEs' Institutional capacities

David Roberts

- President,
- Australasian Evaluation Society

david@robertsbrown.com

Introduction

- AES Case Study
- Details in the Paper
- Highlight some key points
- Discuss examples

The background features a dark purple gradient on the left side, which transitions into a lighter purple and then a light blue gradient on the right. Overlapping these gradients are several large, rounded, semi-transparent shapes in various shades of purple and blue, creating a layered, abstract effect.

Background

History of the AES

- New Zealand & Australia
- Established 1987
- a learned society.
- Dr Elaine Martin
- Founding Fellows
 - Dr Anona Armstrong
 - Dr John Owen.
 - Sue Funnell
 - Chris Milne
 - Professor Colin Sharp
 - Ian Trotman

Objectives

- establishing and promoting ethics and standards in evaluation practice as a service to the community of evaluators and users of evaluations;
- encouraging advances in the theory and practice of evaluation by publishing such advances and by recognising outstanding contributions;
- providing education and training in matters related to evaluation;
- providing forums for networking and the discussion of ideas including society publications, seminars, workshops and conferences;
- acting as an advocate for evaluation and encouraging understanding about the use and application of evaluation;
- linking members who have similar evaluation interests; and
- other activities consistent with this aim.

Membership

- 1000 members
- 38% public sector
- 36% consultants
- 12% Not-for-profit sector
- 12% Academics

CYCLES

- Case study shows cycles in AES
- All organizations - cycles of growth and renewal
- Environment also cycles and affects internal dynamics

Environment

- 2 National Governments
- NZEA
- 8 States and Territories
- My experience largely with Australian Federal Government

Australian Government Changes

- Late 1980s - Golden Age
 - Portfolio Evaluation Plans
 - Evaluations published
- 1998 Output - Outcomes Framework
 - Shift to monitoring
- Big policy review
- Intermittent efforts to increase evaluation
 - Not meeting needs of Cabinet

Current

- Some Departments strong
- Tune Talks the Talk - we'll see
- Focus on Budget Surplus and cutting expenditure
 - Federal and 4 States
- National monitoring processes

Evolution of the AES Structure and Operations

Early Days

- **1982-1992:** Executive Committee comprising three office bearers and a general membership
- In 1992, a corporate plan “AES 2000: Leading the Society into the Future.”
- AES as a broker between “doers” and “supporters” of evaluation
- part time staff to improve services

Incorporation

- 1993 incorporated Capital Territory Association Incorporated Act
- Board of
 - 4 office bearers,
 - regional representatives
 - 5 elected general members

1995 New Strategic Plan

- “AES Leading Evaluation Theory, Practice and Use into the 21st Century.”
- A centralised financing model was established
- A few regions were partially funded through other organisations or by sponsors

Internal v External

- Up till 2009 largely inward focus
- Even case study talks about what we did
- Previous Board started turnaround

Restructure 2009

- **New AES Constitution**
- **8 Member Board**
- **Suite of Committees e.g.**
 - Membership Services and Governance
 - Conference Organising
 - Finance and Audit

STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strengthening an Enabling Environment

- *AES Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations (1997)*
- *AES Code of Ethics (2000)*
- Policy Advocacy - e.g. submission to Commonwealth Financial Accountability Review
- International support
 - e.g. PNG - Association of Professional Evaluators (AoPE)

Strategy and Plans

- AES Ten Year Strategy 2010-2020
 - *Vision: “To be the pre-eminent voice and leader of evaluation in Australasia”*
 - *Mission: “To see rigorous evaluation as central to policy development, program design and service delivery.”*
- Operational Plan for 2011-2013.

Regional Activity

- Two Countries
- 10 Regions
- Volunteer Run
- Local program
 - seminars and discussion forums
 - Book club
 - Social events
- Conference Organising committee

Special Interest Groups

- Indigenous Evaluation
- Eval-Tech
- Performance measurement
- Realist Evaluation and synthesis

Annual International Conferences

- 1982 - Melbourne (before AES)
 - Links between New Zealand and Australian professionals
- 1986 - Sydney.
- Annually on rotation since
 - 350-400 participants
 - AGM
 - Awards Presentation

Evaluation Journal of Australasia

- 1987-88 The Bulletin of the AES
- 1989 changed its name to Evaluation Journal of Australasia (EJA)
- New series commenced 2001
 - Refereed articles
 - Expanding the market reach

Other Publications

- 1977-84 an evaluation newsletter edited by Jerome Winston.
- In 1992 - Evaluation News & Comments
- On-line E-News

Indigenous Evaluation

- Priority for the AES.
- increasing the numbers of Indigenous people in evaluation;
- strengthening the capacity of evaluators to produce high quality, ethical work in Indigenous contexts;
- increasing knowledge, skills and competence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous evaluators.

Key initiatives

- Conference support grants
- registry of Indigenous researchers
- exploring mentoring/training pathways and
- promoting partnerships

Impacts

- Big changes lots of implementation challenges
- Environment challenges
- Membership decreased
- Operating Losses
- Plan to turn it round

BOTTLENECKS/CHALLENGES

- **Building financial momentum and governance capacity**
 - Conferences major source of revenue
 - Sometimes lost \$
 - Appointed EO in 2011
- **Dispersed geographical spread of operations**
- **Building an online presence**
 - www.aes.asn.au
 - 1996 website hosted by the supplier of AES administration services at no cost.
 - New Website this year

KEY ENABLING FACTORS

- **Vision and Leadership**
 - Fellows
 - Boards
 - Committees
- **Professional Practice and Ethics**
- **Building critical mass**
- **Sound governance principles and practice**

Strategic Partnerships

- FaHCSIA & AusAID
 - Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Supporting Good evaluation practice
- Sponsored conferences
- Aim to Develop Partnerships

INNOVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Continuous improvement
 - change and experimentation
- Building Credibility
- Governance processes
- Business model

NEXT STEPS

- Refine structures and processes
- Implement Strategic Plan
- Improve member services
- Increase advocacy for evaluation
- Strengthen communication
- Review