

## The State of Evaluation in Canada

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### Background and General Context of Organized Evaluation in Canada

The [Canadian Evaluation Society](#) (CES)—Canada's official professional organization for evaluation—serves as the country's core for evaluation related activities. CES is similar to many other evaluation associations around the globe, but differs from the American Evaluation Association in that the majority of its members are from the government sector and evaluators practicing in NGOs, para-government, and the public and private sectors. Presently, the CES has 12 regional chapters, including:

- ✓ [Newfoundland & Labrador](#)
- ✓ [Prince Edward Island](#)
- ✓ [Nova Scotia](#)
- ✓ [New Brunswick](#)
- ✓ [Quebec](#)
- ✓ [National Chapter](#)
- ✓ [Ontario](#)
- ✓ [Manitoba](#)
- ✓ [Saskatchewan](#)
- ✓ [Alberta](#)
- ✓ [British Columbia](#)
- ✓ [Northwest Territories](#)

Since 1991 the CES membership has grown to over 1,750 individual Canadian and student members, as well as over 100 international members (CES, 2004).

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The CES offers a wide range of resources and services for practicing evaluators and students of the discipline including: a comprehensive Web site (available in English and French); an evaluation report bank (academic, government, and private sector reports); a fully-searchable database—the [Grey Literature Bank](#) (unpublished documents of interest to evaluators); a professional development series of workshops; an [annual conference](#) (including the upcoming 2005 joint conference with the American Evaluation Association); and the *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. The CES efforts are strongly supported by the Government of Canada, which has its own specialized evaluation unit; [Evaluation and Data Development](#) (EDD). EDD is one of the largest evaluation shops in the Federal Government of Canada, and focuses primarily on governmental initiatives including analysis of government policy and evaluation of government programs, for example, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) programs. Other government contingencies which influence the Canadian evaluation field include the [National Science and Engineering Research Council](#), the [Social Science Research Council](#), [Transport Canada](#), [Industry Canada](#), [Health Canada](#), the [Treasury Board Secretariat](#), and the [Canadian International Development Agency](#); each of which are also sponsors of the CES. Informed decision making is further facilitated by [Statistics Canada](#) a provider—federally legislated—of statistical data for the whole of Canada and each of its provinces that is intended to inform Canadian citizens and other key stakeholders regarding Canada's population, resources, economy, culture, and society.

In the summer of 2001 the CES announced their new vision, mission, and goals for the future (Canadian Evaluation Society Newsletter, Summer 2001):

**Vision:** The Canadian Evaluation Society will be the leader for evaluation in Canada and a major contributor in the global evaluation community

**Mission:** The society is a Canada-wide non-profit bilingual association dedicated to the advancement of evaluation theory and practice.

**Goals:**

1. **Leadership**—To provide leadership to individuals and organizations in support of evaluation theory and practice in Canada and the global community.
2. **Knowledge**—To improve the state of evaluation theory and practice.
3. **Advocacy**—To promote the importance of an evaluation culture.
4. **Professional Development**—To promote and facilitate the enhancement of evaluation capacity for members and non-members.

The CES also supports various student initiatives including the [CES Student Case Competition](#) and [student paper contest](#) (for undergraduate and graduate students in the field of evaluation). The CES Student Case Competition (initiated in 1996), is an annual event in which teams of three to five students from Canadian colleges and academic institutions compete in the analysis of an evaluation case file. In a preliminary competition, all teams receive on the same day the key to an evaluation case file that has been hidden on the Web. They have five hours to prepare an analysis and then submit it by e-mail for judging by an expert panel. The three best teams are invited to participate in a final round, held at CES's annual conference, in which they must analyze a new case and present findings and recommendations before a live audience. The team that makes the best presentation takes possession of the Case Competition Trophy for a year, receives prizes, and is given visibility in various publications.

## Evaluation Education Programs in Canada

As of 2000 (CES), over 25 Canadian institutions/colleges/universities offered more than 100 evaluation-related courses across a wide array of academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, political science, public administration, economics)—a complete institution, department, and course list is available at <http://www.evaluationcanada.ca/txt/outline200106.pdf>.

## Professional Development of Canadian Evaluators

The CES plans to focus on two key areas in the upcoming years: (1) professional development of its members, and (2) advocacy on behalf of the evaluation function. The articulation of a Core Body of Knowledge (CBK) will guide the Society's professional development and advocacy activities (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2004). The CBK comprises theories, skills, and best practices that people must possess to plan, carry, out, and report on valid and reliable evaluations of programs or policies in governments, not-for-profit organizations, and businesses.

**Essential Skills.** Much of the emphasis on professional development is funneled through the CES Essential Skills Series. Regional chapters offer this series as well as any other form of training they consider adequate for their members. These essential skills include:

1. Understanding Program Evaluation
  - Key terms and concepts
  - Benefits of program evaluation
  - Basic steps in the evaluation process
  - Major approaches to program evaluation

- Formatting evaluation questions
- Designing an evaluation
- Evaluating with limited resources
- Analyzing and reporting evaluation results
- Reducing resistance to evaluation
- Involving staff and clients in the evaluation process
- Increasing evaluation utilization
- Making evaluations ethical and fair

## 2. Building an Evaluation Framework

- Identifying who the client is and what the client needs
- Basic concepts of needs assessment
- Major approaches to assessing client needs
- Evaluation methods for "getting close to the client"
- Building an evaluation framework through logic models
- Involving managers and staff in building an evaluation framework
- Relating program design to client needs
- Defining program components
- Formulating indicators for program success
- Using the evaluation framework for linking program performance to client needs

### 3. Improving Program Performance

- Using evaluation as a management tool for improving program performance and enhancing internal accountability
- Basic concepts of monitoring and process evaluation
- Monitoring program performance with existing administrative data and information systems
- Developing ongoing data collection instruments and procedures
- Linking process evaluation to program decision-making
- Assessing client satisfaction
- Understanding continuous quality improvement
- Using program evaluation for building a "learning organization"

### 4. Evaluating for Results

- Defining program results
- Major approaches to evaluating results
- Developing results measures
- Designing outcome evaluations
- Validity and reliability
- Appropriate use of quantitative and qualitative techniques
- Relating program results to program costs
- Understanding program benefits
- Measuring program equity and responsiveness to community needs
- Communicating evaluation findings

- Using evaluations to improve program effectiveness and accountability  
(Canadian Evaluation Society, 2004)

***Certification of Evaluators in Canada.*** As a body representing program evaluators across Canada and promoting the program evaluation function in Canadian institutions, the CES is concerned with the sustainability, growth and strengthening of the profession. In recent years, this concern has led the Society to consider issues related to increasing professionalization, through means such as professional development programs, development and adoption of practice standards and [ethical guidelines](#), and certification of members. This issue remains unresolved, but is becoming increasingly acute in the wake of recent developments in the federal government sector that have raised the profile of auditing (Cousins, 2004).

This latter issue — developing a form of certification for members — would be a major step for the CES. Therefore, it was the subject of an [in-depth study of the experience of several other organizations with certification](#) (Long & Kishchuk, 1997). A second study, carried out in 1999, reports on a [pilot survey of clients and employers](#) (Stierhoff, 1999) on their views regarding certification of evaluators.

### ***Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation***

The *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation (CJPE)* was launched in 1986 and is published twice a year (available at [www.cjpe.ca](http://www.cjpe.ca)). *CJPE* is sponsored by the CES and the University of Calgary. Individual issues and articles can be downloaded by non-members for a nominal cost. *CJPE* seeks to promote the theory and practice of program evaluation in Canada by publishing:

- Articles on all aspects of the theory and practice of evaluation, including methodology, evaluation standards, implementation of evaluations, reporting and use of studies, and the audit or meta-evaluation of evaluation.
- Research and Practice Notes that provide practical examples of the applications of particular methodologies or procedures within the context of a particular study or group of studies.
- Book Reviews of relevance to the practice in Canada.

(*Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 2004)

Review of the past eight issues (from Spring 2001 to Spring 2004) of *CJPE* revealed a number of insights into the journal's thematic trends. The journal does, in fact, promote and publish articles on theory, practice, implementation, and standards, for example. Notable examples include Christie & Rose (2003)—*The language of evaluation theory: Insights gained from an empirical study of theory and practice*, Levin-Rozalis (2003)—*Evaluation and research: Differences and similarities*, Morris (2002)—*The inclusion of stakeholders in evaluation: Benefits and drawbacks*.

In 2001, the *CJPE* devoted a special issue to provincial evaluation policy and practice in Canada. Accounts of provincial evaluation activity were provided for British Columbia (McDavid, 2001), Alberta (Bradley, 2001), Manitoba (Warrack, 2001), Ontario (Segsworth, 2001), Quebec (Cabatoff, 2001), Prince Edward Island (Mowry, Clough, MacDonald, Pranger, & Griner, 2001), Newfoundland (Ross, 2001) and the Northwest Territories (Hicks, 2001). "Being the first ever account of evaluation activity at the provincial level, this collection of articles represented a very important contribution to the knowledge of evaluation practice in Canada" (Gauthier, Barrington, Bozzo, Chaytor, Cullen, Lahey, Malatest, Mason, Mayne,

Myers, Porteous, & Roy, 2004). A number of general and specific conclusions were drawn about the state of affairs in Canadian evaluation as a result of this special issue and were summarized in *The lay of the land: Evaluation practice in Canada today* (Gauthier et. al., 2004). The authors conclude that program evaluation in Canada:

- Has not acquired an identity of its own
- Tends to neglect key issues
- Loses emphasis on rigor
- Is dominated by program monitoring
- Is insufficiently connected with management needs

### **Regional Perspectives**

Perspectives across Canada's various regions are briefly summarized below. This summary includes: (1) strengths, (2) weaknesses, (3) threats, and (4) opportunities of and for evaluation in western Canada, Alberta, and Ontario, as well as potentials for evaluation teaching and learning.

The Western Canadian Perspective. (Malatest, 2004)

**Strength:** Development of evaluation methodologies—in recent years the provincial and federal agencies have recognized the requirement of good evaluation.

**Weakness:** Inadequate planning of program evaluations—awareness and use of evaluation tools are often an afterthought.

**Threat:** Reduced program evaluation capacity—the ability to design and manage complex evaluation activities has been compromised (e.g., lack of resources).

**Opportunity:** Managing for outcomes—activities in British Columbia and Alberta have been strengthened by strong government-wide commitment to measure and report on the key outcomes for almost all ministries and/or departments.

*Program Evaluation in Alberta.* (Barrington, 2004)

**Strength:** Growing sophistication—evaluators are more skilled and better qualified.

**Weakness:** Dependence on performance measurement—to the exclusion of more relevant, complex outcomes.

**Threat:** Devaluation—avoidance of serious evaluation (e.g., focus on accountability rather than improvement).

**Opportunity:** Linking accountability and evaluation—evaluators believe that they can make evaluation more rigorous and more useful.

*Program Evaluation in Ontario.* (Mason, 2004)

**Strength:** Commitment—Ontario government is being steered toward evaluation by political interest.

**Weakness:** The paradigm—the current approach is to assist the government in determining redirection of funding.

**Threat:** Capacity—Public and non-profit organizations need to demonstrate effectiveness, yet they are limited in their capacity to meet this demand.

**Opportunity:** Collaboration and partnerships—potential to pool evaluation resources across different funders and different funding interest.

***Teaching and Learning Evaluation in Canada.*** (Chaytor, 2004)

**Strength:** Self-definitional capacity—the time for evaluation to define itself and establish itself as a distinct discipline is "now."

**Weakness:** Lack of disciplinary focus—disciplines view evaluation differently rather than having a common ground.

**Threat:** Disconnection—evaluation as part of management is under threat (e.g., lack of common ground).

**Opportunity:** Demand for skills—recognition of the value of evaluation and the demanding skills required.

This paper is an outsider's perspective of evaluation in Canada. Any errors or omissions are entirely unintentional. Comments, questions, and criticism are certainly welcomed. As new and additional information becomes available it will be made available in upcoming issues of the Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation. If you would like to provide additional information or insight regarding the state of evaluation in Canada please contact the the author via e-mail at: [christian.coryn@wmich.edu](mailto:christian.coryn@wmich.edu)

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