EVALUATIONCONNECTIONS

The EES Newsletter

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number 0

The 2008 EES Lisbon Conference
Why you have to be there

MESSAGE FROM THE EES PRESIDENT
Murray Saunders

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this new initiative from the European Evaluation Society. For some time now we have been thinking of ways to engage with our membership and all those interested in developing and furthering the practice of evaluation. The idea of Evaluation Connections is to provide a forum for discussion through 'think or opnion pieces' with the aim of encouraging lively debate on contemporary issues of evaluation practice. These pieces are designed to stimulate discussion and should be opinionated in the best possible sense. Bob Picciotto's article on independance begins this series. We hope to publish responses or disagreements with his position. We will also include items of news or events from the evaluation scene, our lisbon conference is a case in point. In this issue you also find news of an initiative which will be of interest to European Evaluation Societies. This is an example of the kind of item we would like to encourage that will generate wider interest from the evaluation community.

We hope to publish Evaluation Connections regularly. Much will depend on the extent to which readers actively support the publication by submittting pieces for consideration. The Board of the EES will also ask individuals to provide copy on specific issues or themes.

Enjoy this first issue.

We are delighted to remind you of our international conference in Lisbon between the first and the third of October 2008. It is rapidly approaching, but it is not too late if you have not registered. The theme for this year's conference is Building for the future: evaluation in governance, development and progress.

This theme has never been more relevant globally, but particularly in Europe, as we strive to find ways of supporting positive strategies for increasing participation and involvement of individuals, groups and institutions in decision making and policy development. Our focus encompasses the local, regional, national and international.

The conference offers perspectives and examples of evaluation's contribution to 'social capital' (all about strengthening social networks, improving institutions and adapting procedures) with streams on methods, ethics, building informal social capital, international evaluation and evaluation in developing countries, organisational development and encouraging evaluation use.

These streams are explored in a full programme of over 350 submissions in a variety of formats and provide a leading edge snapshot of contemporary thinking and experience in evaluation from a European and global point of view.

Make time to visit the conference and enjoy Lisbon's uniquely beautiful setting in our social programme, exchange ideas, participate in lively debate and expand your understanding of some of the most critical issues confronting evaluation today.

LISBON 08
BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

What is evaluation independence?

R.Picciotto, King's College, London

Independence is widely regarded as a critical determinant of evaluation credibility. A tell tale sign of its privileged status in good governance is that persons or entities that have reason to fear the outcome of an evaluation will frequently throw doubt on its independence. But what is the precise meaning of independence? Is it consistent with the learning function of evaluation? Can it be judged against precise criteria? What role does it play in evaluation excellence?

The meaning of independence

An authoritative definition of evaluation independence is found in the Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management issued by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD. It specifies that an evaluation is independent when it is "carried out by entities and persons free of the control of those responsible for the design and implementation of the development intervention". The statement also makes clear that independent evaluation presumes "freedom from political influence and organizational pressure", "full access to information" and "full autonomy in carrying out investigations and reporting findings".

These principles confirm that independence while critical should not be applied in a way that contributes to organizational isolation. This is because sound evaluation is highly dependent on a regular flow of evidence from public service providers. Hence, independence should not be allowed to undermine access to relevant data and knowledge. Special organizational arrangements are called for in order to combine arm's length relationships between evaluators and program managers with close connectivity to operational realities.

The perception of independence is as important as its reality. In open and accountable working environments, independence induces confidence in evaluation findings, protects the learning process and induces program managers and stakeholders to focus on results. From this perspective, the Handbook of International Auditing of the International Federation of Accountants (2003) distinguishes between independence of mind and independence in appearance. Both meanings are intertwined within the concept of auditors' and evaluators' independence.

Independence of mind is the state of mind "that permits the provision of an opinion without being affected by influences that compromise professional judgment, allowing an individual to act with integrity, and exercise objectivity and professional skepticism". By contrast, independence of appearance is "the avoidance of facts and circumstances that are so significant that a reasonable and informed third party, having knowledge of all relevant information, including safeguards applied, would reasonably conclude (that) integrity, objectivity or professional skepticism had been compromised".

The limits of independence

Independence is only one dimension of evaluation excellence. On its own it does not guarantee quality. Relevant skills, sound methods, adequate resources and transparency are also required. Evaluation independence without quality is highly disruptive since it can lead to mistaken diagnostics and end up doing more harm than good. Conversely, evaluation quality without independence does not assure credibility or induce public trust. Quality and independence go hand in hand: together, evaluation independence and quality contribute to high returns from evaluation activities.

Optimum independence is not maximum independence. Accurate and fair evaluations combine intellectual detachment with empathy and understanding. The ability to engage with diverse stakeholders and secure their trust while maintaining the integrity of the evaluation process is the acid test of evaluation professionalism. This is why diminishing returns set in when evaluation independence assumes extreme forms of detachment and distance.

Independence if it leads to such disengagement ruptures contacts with decision makers and restricts access to relevant sources of information. It leads to high data gathering costs, weak intellectual leverage over operational decision making and a chilling effect on learning. Thus, a basic challenge of institutional design consists in sustaining evaluation independence while maintaining strong links with policy design and delivery systems for public services.

External evaluation is often equated with evaluation independence and quality. Yet, external evaluators often lack an appreciation of the operating context. Furthermore, their judgment may be impaired by their reliance on funding controlled by the very managers in charge of activities being evaluated. In such circumstances fee dependence is a major threat to the integrity of the evaluation process. Accordingly, professional evaluation guidelines such as those of the United Kingdom Evaluation Society give special attention to the distinctive accountabilities of commissioners, evaluators and evaluation clients in order to protect the objectivity and rigor of the evaluation process.

Application of these guidelines requires that clear protocols be embedded in contractual documents so that consultants are not subjected to undue influence from program managers and policy makers. This risk is not present in internal evaluations funded and controlled by a supreme governance authority which combine protection from management influence with proximity to the programs being evaluated. Consequently, built in structural independence is often more likely to overcome information asymmetries while protecting the objectivity of the process from management influence than reliance on external consultants.

Finally, good evaluation just as good science calls for a frame of mind characterized by curiosity, skepticism and a hunger for evidence. It results in a fair and balanced approach that does not shirk from pointing out problems and performance shortfalls but also recognizes success and achievement. To achieve this balance, evaluators should not be so detached as to shirk interaction with program managers, staff or beneficiaries. But they need resilient

protection from threats to their impartiality as well as mandatory access to the operational information they need to carry out their work and they should be immune to capture by any of the parties that share in the responsibilities of operational management. This implies special organizational safeguards but, in addition, it means that distinctive personal characteristics, attitudes and behaviors should be cultivated among evaluators.

Independent evaluation and self evaluation

Evaluation is most effective in organizations that promote learning as well as accountability. Just as financial auditing requires the prior production of accounts, independent evaluation is reliant on the capacity and willingness of line departments to carry out competent self evaluation of their activities. Without the regular and timely production of adequate self evaluation documents, independent evaluation units cannot be expected to focus on the most important areas requiring independent scrutiny in the public interest.

Conversely, the quality of self evaluation hinges significantly on the extent to which intellectual guidance and competent oversight is provided by independent evaluation units. This consideration underscores the need for independent evaluation to enjoy a measure of authority over the design of self evaluation processes, programs and products. Finally, effective oversight also requires regular reporting to the public on the overall status of independent and self evaluation processes. In addition, the dissemination of lessons learnt should be connected to a resilient knowledge management within the organization.

Criteria

How then can one assess the adequacy of independent evaluation? The answer lies in guidelines that reflect the above considerations and draw legitimacy from a participatory design embedded within the profession. Fortunately, such guidelines are available at: https://wpqp1.adb.org/QuickPlace/ecg. Drawing on the good practice standards of official audit and evaluation agencies that span government and the corporate sector, four dimensions of evaluation independence have been recognized by the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG), a network composed of the heads of evaluation of the multilateral development banks (MDBs) and such observers as the DAC Evaluation Network head and the Director of Independent Evaluation at the International Monetary Fund.

The criteria include: (i) organizational independence; (ii) behavioral independence; (iii) avoidance of conflicts of interest; and (iv) protection from external influence. The four criteria are interrelated. Protection from outside interference is facilitated by organizational independence. Conflicts of interest are bound to be frequent absent organizational independence. Behavioral independence is a function of organizational independence as well as avoidance of conflicts of interest and protection from external interference.

Organizational independence ensures that the evaluation unit and its staff are not under the control or influence of decision-makers who have responsibility for the activities being evaluated and that they have full access to the information they need to fulfill their mandate. Behavioral independence measures the extent to which the evaluation unit is able and willing to set its work program, produce high quality and uncompromising reports and to disclose its findings to the Board without management imposed restrictions. Protection from outside interference keeps the evaluation function free to set its priorities, design its processes and products, reach its judgments and administer its human and budget resources without intrusion by management. Conflict of interest safeguards guarantee that current, immediate future or prior professional and personal relationships and considerations are not allowed to influence evaluators' judgments or create the appearance of a lack of objectivity.

Organizational independence

A proper mandate formally endorsed by the supreme governance authority and a reporting relationship to the head of the organization or its board are the most visible features of organizational independence. The issue of evaluation "clout" arises in this context. It implies an appropriate grade and title for the head evaluator position in order to signal the degree to which the sensitivity, complexity and importance of the function are recognized.

Budget allocations for evaluation also need careful consideration since true independence in evaluation means that the budget resources allocated are in line with the evolving mandate of evaluation. To this end, suitable arrangements should be made for independent validation that adequate resources are made available for evaluators to do their work. Finally, a very important dimension of organizational independence has to do with the extent to which the programming of evaluation activities is subject to management interference or budget restrictions.

Behavioral independence

The bottom line of evaluation independence lies in behavior. Behavioral independence is ascertained not only by assessing governance structures, processes and practices but also by examining whether the independent evaluation unit produces evaluations that are endowed with one or more of the following characteristics: (i) criticality: the ability and willingness to judge performance in an objective and transparent fashion; (ii) additionally: a distinctive contribution to operational knowledge creation or dissemination; (iii) timeliness: the delivery of operations evaluation findings and lessons early enough to inform decision making; and (iv) materiality: a deliberate focus on topics and issues that have substantial relevance to development effectiveness.

To demonstrate behavioral independence is to display a willingness and capacity to issue strong, high quality and uncompromising reports – and to do so more often than occasionally. Producing such reports as appropriate is the acid test of behavioral independence. In part, such behavior reflects organizational incentives. Full protection should be offered to evaluators who deliver unvarnished and unwelcome assessments of performance. In addition, the criteria governing the selection, evaluation, remuneration and possible removal of the head of an independent evaluation unit need to be designed with care in a way that helps to guarantee full independence for the function. Furthermore, the evaluation unit should have unrestricted access to the staff and records of the organization.

Finally, unless an evaluation unit feels secure enough to report its findings without fear of reprisal it cannot be deemed to be independent. Equally, behavioral independence is shaped by the willingness and capacity of evaluation managers and staff to stand up publicly to their operational colleagues and defend their evaluation methods and findings. This can be very demanding both professionally and personally since operational managers have greater knowledge of the detailed features of programs and projects subject to evaluation than the evaluators.

Public disclosure, a key criterion of behavioral independence, adds to the stress since transparency offers other stakeholders some of whom have intimate knowledge of the program under evaluation (as well as interests to defend) a chance to comment on the quality of the evaluation. From this perspective, transparency in the reporting of evaluation findings raises the stakes for evaluation quality.

All of these considerations suggest that behavioral independence is inseparable from evaluation transparency, skills, methods and resources. Rather than a once for all organizational characteristic, behavioral independence is an ideal towards which evaluation managers should continually strive. The outcomes are contingent on the performance of individual evaluators but they also hinge on organizational structure and contracting processes that offer adequate protection and incentives for "telling it like it is" and promote intellectual rigor, honesty and firmness in evaluation. Creating such a working environment is a feature of good evaluation governance and organizational learning.

Protection from outside influence

To be sure, quality standards and ethical guidelines strengthen behavioral independence and help guarantee that evaluation findings are grounded in evidence. But good practice evaluation guidelines should also provide all stakeholders with a full opportunity to comment on drafts and to record their disagreements in dissenting footnotes and statements. Full interaction among evaluators, public officials and other stakeholders enhances evaluation quality, and increases the probability of ownership and use of evaluation findings. The ability to report candidly is also a function of the evaluation practices through which reports are prepared, reviewed and disseminated. Disclosure and outreach are equally critical.

Evaluation can be hindered either through active or through passive interference in the conduct of evaluations. Where delays imposed on the evaluation process can be imposed by operational managers, independence is jeopardized. External funding tainted by special interests should also be avoided. Nor should evaluators' reports be subject to mandatory reviews or clearances by program managers or to indirect pressure through personnel regulations and terms affecting hiring/firing, duration of office, rotation, performance review of unit head and unit staff, compensation, etc.

Avoidance of conflicts of interest

Providing a wide range of stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on the findings of an evaluation helps to correct evaluator bias. Participatory evaluation methods whereby beneficiaries of interventions and civil society representatives contribute to the evaluation strengthen evaluation quality and transparency. But good practice standards also require evaluation managers and staff to be excluded from evaluating programs, activities or entities that might involve a conflict of interest or create the perception that current or past associations and/or activities (whether personal or professional) could impair the objectivity and integrity of the evaluation process.

Conclusion

All four dimensions of evaluation independence listed in the Evaluation Cooperation Group matrix are important and none implies trade-offs with the operational relevance or influence of evaluation. Evaluation quality cannot be divorced from its independence: poorly designed evaluations can be misleading, disruptive and costly. Conversely, quality is undermined when the evaluation process is captured and vested interests. Such lack of independence: (i) constrains information so that evaluation products cannot have an adequate critical content; (ii) distorts the content of the evaluation program so that it does not contribute new knowledge; (iii) delays the evaluation process (or the disclosure of evaluation results) until after the decisions that might have been informed by the evaluation are taken; (iv) induces evaluators to focus on irrelevant or marginal aspects of the program or policy being evaluated. Such dysfunctions are all too frequent in the evaluation profession. They need to be addressed in parallel with urgently needed enhancements in evaluation methods.

Robert Picciotto is a member of the United Kingdom Evaluation Society Council and of the European Evaluation Society Board. In his last assignment within the World Bank Group where he served for forty years, he reported to the Board of Directors as Director-General, Evaluation (1992-2002). He had previously held the position of Vice President, Corporate Planning and Budgeting. He is currently a member of the Independent Advisory Committee on Development Impact that reports to the International Development Secretary of the United Kingdom.

National Evaluation Societies and Networks in Europe

Sandra Speer, EES

Over the last ten years we have become more aware of the way evaluation cultures vary considerably from country to country. There is diversity on the demand side, whether evaluation is actually sought and built into civic society. In some countries it is done routinely, in others demand is – apart from mandatory evaluation of EU-funded programs – nearly nonexistent. The evaluation of EU-funded projects and programs was an eminent driver for evaluation capacity building until recently. Diversity also characterizes the channels through which evaluation is provided, from formal and highly integrated in the policy-making process to low level. On the supply side there is also big diversity as evaluators might be both high-ranked professionals as well as self-taught practitioners. The status of evaluation is – among others – associated with the way national evaluation societies are structured and operate. The professional recognition of evaluators is growing apace.

When the European Evaluation Society (EES) was founded in at the beginnings of the ninties by individuals no national evaluation societies or networks existed. The primary goal of the EES is to promote theory, practice and utilization of high quality evaluation especially, but not exclusively, within the European countries. "This goal is obtained by bringing together academics and practitioners from all over Europe and from any professional sector, thus creating a forum where all participants can benefit from the co-operation and bridge building."

Today 18 societies and networks can be identified in Europe, two more might be founded within this year. The sharing of experiences and practices as well as organizing training on national level were the main drivers for the establishment of national societies. In some cases the EES has helped national societies, especially at their beginning. The EU - as the main protagonist in evaluation in

Europe- has significantly fostered the development of evaluation capacity and knowledge building in Europe, linking as well national governmental persons and units.

At the EES Conference in Berlin (2004) a first session with the presidents of national societies took place. Between then and now, no special activities on the level of national societies have been organized. During the last year some evaluation societies in Europe expressed their strong interest in exchange and the SFE initiated in cooperation with the EES a gathering within their pre-conference program on the 2nd of July in Strasbourg. In June 2008 the EES conducted an online-survey for preparing and presenting an overview at a meeting of national societies in the advent of the SFE/DeGEval conference in Strasbourg. All existing societies in Europe had been contacted and answers from 12 national societies – by their (vice)-presidents or members of the boards - have been received.

Some evaluation societies have been founded during the nineties and are today already the „well established" ones. Following this, new networks and societies were formed at the beginning of this millennium and have a wide basis of membership and activities. In these years not only new societies are being organized in the newer member states but also in the old member states. Evaluation societies are confronted with many different social and political environments: E.g. the Flemish Evaluation Platform could initiate an online-forum with 1400 members in a very short time, many administrations, scientist, as well as practitioners sign in. The societies of the new member states have to act in an environment where contacts to national ministries are often changing very quickly and new institutions as well as laws might have big impacts on evaluation culture respectively their establishment.

In two cases the evaluation societies are not "national" societies: in Belgium two distinct evaluation societies have evolved with the Société Wallone d

´Evaluation et de prospective (SWEP) and the above-mentioned Flemish Evaluation Platform (VEP). The other case is the DeGEval, which has been firstly established in Germany and then extended its scope also to Austria and covers now members and activities in both countries.

National society's conference topics of the last years included: public Management and evaluation (Spain), standards of evaluation (Poland), "evaluation in progress, progress in evaluation?" (Sweden), the relationship of evaluation to emerging approaches to quality assurance in organisations (Ireland), "organization of the evaluative practice = professional perspective" (Italy), the development of the professional community (Romania), place of evaluation in the civil society (Switzerland), ex ante evaluation and impact assessment (Finland), "Great Expectations? Meeting the changing needs of stakeholders in evaluation" (UK), evaluation and the participation des citoyens 2006 (France).

Work within the societies have evolved through different structures.. For example, in Sweden, the UK, France, and Romania regional working groups exist. Sector-based working groups around policy fields only exist within the DeGEval, namely on vocational education and training, development policy, research, innovation and development, public health, higher education, schools, social services, urban and regional development, structural policy, environmental policy, public management, business, culture and culture policy. Thematic- based working groups can be found in many societies (Czech Republic, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK). Some societies are publishing evaluation journals: in Italian the "Rassegna Italiana di Valuatazione", in Switzerland "LeGes: Gesetzgebung & Evaluation" (French and German), and in German "Zeitschrift für Evaluation". The French Society publishes on its own "les Cahiers de la SFE". Whereas the Finish Evaluation Society has chosen another way: they have a

yearly evaluation supplement within another quarterly journal ("Hallinnon tutkimus").

Some of the evaluation societies have already cooperated with each other, mostly with their neighboring countries. The Finnish Society has cooperated with the Danish and the Swedish, the French with the Swiss and the Belgium, the Irish with the British, the Spanish with the French, the Swiss with the French and the German, the UKES with e.g. Poland. Additionally the EES jointly respectively cooperatively organized conferences, for example, with the UKES. The societies cooperated in the organization of conferences and seminars, had common training activities as well as seminars and thematic exchanges on topics like public sector accountability, educational Evaluation, the origins of Irish evaluation, and evaluation standards.

The main areas of interest for mutual learning could be identified: raising public awareness, promoting evaluation as a profession, defining and promoting standards, capacity building in the public service, promoting evaluation training and the setting up and organization of an evaluation society. The item "regulating the evaluation profession" was rated high by some respondents and rated low by others, the same holds true for "defining the evaluators´ profession – concerning this issue the interests seem to be diverging and needs further discussion.

The needs which were identified from the national evaluation societies have encouraged the EES to foster more cooperation, exchange and development of partnership activities between the societies in Europe.

At the July meeting in Strasbourg, the discussion of the results from the survey was initiated and objectives for the near future suggested.. More exchange of information between the national societies including a yearly meeting shall take place. A first presentation of good practices from national evaluation societies will be integrated in the next meeting in Lisbon, a survey for the further monitoring of evaluation activities shall be organized. The responsibility for organizing future activities will be divided among the EES and a national society. The French SFE is willing to take on their first initiative and to be active in this regard until the end of 2009. Thereafter another national society would volunteer to be partner with the EES in organizing the activities of mutual learning with the national societies. In conclusion, we can say that there seems to be a substantial potential for the increased development of good evaluation practice in Europe and that exchanges and mutual learning on the level of national evaluation societies will be one important way of fertilizing their respective activities and perhaps strengthening evaluation profession as such.

	Founded in	Individual members	Institutional members
Czech Evaluation Network	2008	8	-
Romanian Evaluation Network (Evalrom)	2008	40	-
Slovak Evaluation Network	2007	6	-
Flemish Evaluation Platform (VEP)	2007	850	-
Irish Evaluation Network (IEN)	2002	370	5
Swedish Evaluation Society (SVUF)	2002	250	17
Spanish Evaluation Society (SEE)	2001	200	10
Polish Evaluation Society (PTE)	2000	62	-
Finnish Evaluation Society (FES)	1999	140	4
French Evaluation Society (SFE)	1999	300	-
Italian Evaluation Association (AIV)	1997	250	-
DeGEval Evaluation Society (Germany/Austria	1997	480	90
Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL)	1996	367	-
UK Evaluation Society (UKES)	1	300	15

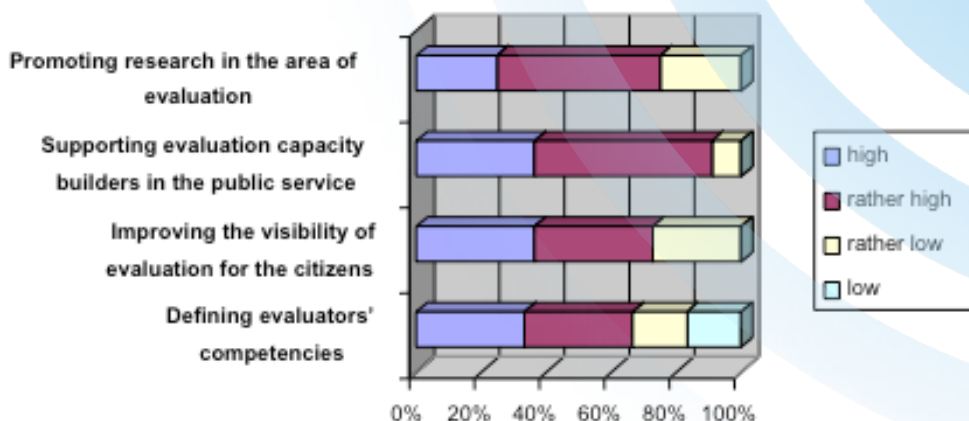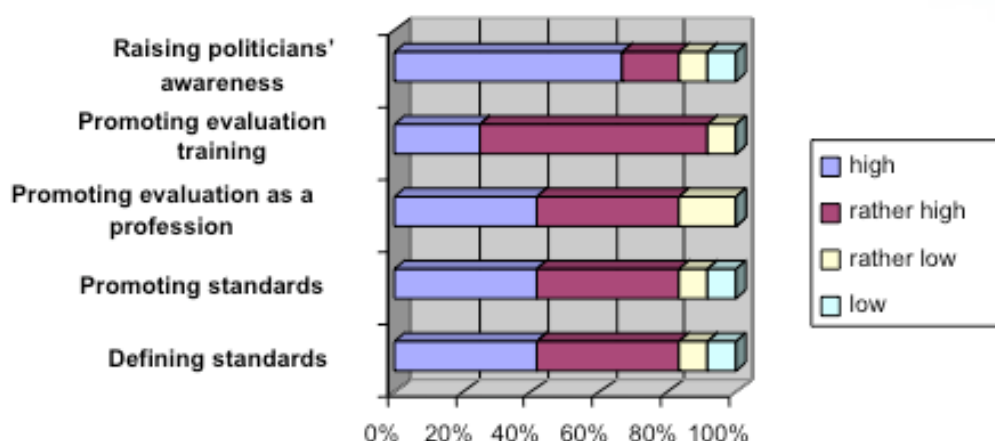|	frequency	participants
UK Evaluation Society (UKES)	annually	1000
DeGEval Evaluation Society (Germany/Austria)	annually	230 (in 2007)
Italian Evaluation Association (AIV)	annually	250
Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL)	annually	80-100
Finnish Evaluation Society (FES)	annually	50
French Evaluation Society (SFE)	biannually	450
Swedish Evaluation Society (SVUF)	Biannually	250
Spanish Evaluation Society (SEE)	Biannually	200
Irish Evaluation Network (IEN)	biannually	120
Polish Evaluation Society (PTE)	every 3y	
Romanian Evaluation Network (Evalrom)	annually	20
Flemish Evaluation Platform (VEP)	planned annually	(200 for kick-off meeting)
Slovak Evaluation Network	planned annually	30-40
Czech Evaluation Network	-	-

EUROPEAN EVALUATION SOCIETY

EES

IMPORTANT!

Next meeting of national evaluations societies and networks in Europe : 1st of October 2008 in Lisbon

LISBON 08
BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Future fields for cooperation

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Future fields for cooperation

Strasbourg 2nd of July 2008