



PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

Program and registration details

Monday 14 & Tuesday 15 September 2026 | Darwin | Garramilla | Australia



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NOTE: The AES cannot guarantee that each workshop will go ahead as scheduled. If a workshop is cancelled, you will be offered a place in another workshop, or a refund.



Target audience

The following categories will help you select sessions best suited to your interests:

Foundation

Foundational sessions assume no previous knowledge from the audience – they are beginner-friendly. The topic is presented at an introductory level using accessible language that can be understood by non-expert audiences.

Intermediate

Intermediate sessions assume the audience has a working knowledge of the topic or concept but provides accessible language and avoids technical details to ensure engagement from non-expert audiences.

Advanced

Advanced sessions assume the audience has in-depth experience with and/or technical understanding of the topic. This stream is also suitable to presentations on niche topics that demand the use of technical language to convey complex concepts with precision.

AES Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework

Each AES professional learning workshop is designed to align with the AES Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework, which outlines the key domains and capabilities essential for quality and ethical evaluation practice. This framework supports evaluators at all stages of their careers by providing a foundation for reflective practice, technical skills, cultural competence, and evaluation management.

[FRAMEWORK.PDF](#)

Monday 14 September

8 am to 9 am REGISTRATION

9 am to 12:30 pm

FULL DAY WORKSHOP

**Navigating AI in Evaluation,
from Basics to Advanced
Applications**

Presented by Gerard Atkinson

FOUNDATION /INTERMEDIATE

FULL DAY WORKSHOP

**Evaluating Systems
Transformation: Frameworks
and Tools for Complex
Change**

Presented by Jess Dart and
Emily Gates

FOUNDATION /INTERMEDIATE

FULL DAY WORKSHOP

**Practical Approaches
to Evaluating Impact
Without Experiments or
Counterfactuals: Contribution
Analysis, Process Tracing
and More**

Presented by Patricia Rogers

INTERMEDIATE - ADVANCED

HALF DAY WORKSHOP

**Indigenous Researcher
Knowledge Sharing**

Presented by Alexander Gyles,
Glenda Wayne and Shane
D'Angelo

FOUNDATION /INTERMEDIATE

12:30 pm to 1:30 pm LUNCH

1:30 pm to 5 pm

HALF DAY WORKSHOP

**Child Voice Methods in
Evaluation: Applying the Voice
of the Child Toolkit Voice**

Presented by Alice Ghazarian
and Lauren Heery

FOUNDATION /INTERMEDIATE

FULL DAY WORKSHOPS CONTINUE

5 pm END OF DAY 1 OF WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Tuesday 15 September

8 am to 9 am REGISTRATION

9 am to 12:30 pm

FULL DAY WORKSHOP

Game on! Game design thinking for evaluation practice

Presented by Matt Healey

FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

FULL DAY WORKSHOP

Using developmentally-written rubrics to enhance evaluative reasoning

Presented by Ben Lawless

FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

FULL DAY WORKSHOP

Essentials of qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluators and evaluation users

Presented by Samantha Abbato

FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

HALF DAY WORKSHOP

From overwhelmed to empowered: using digital tools and AI for community-centred evaluation

Presented by Ethel Karskens and Maree Dibella

FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

12:30 pm to 1:30 pm LUNCH

1:30 pm to 5 pm

HALF DAY WORKSHOP

A step by step guide to ethical evaluation practice

Presented by Emma Williams and Su-Ann Drew

FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

FULL DAY WORKSHOPS CONTINUE

5 pm END OF DAY 1 OF WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Morning tea 10.30 am to 11 am | Afternoon tea 3 pm to 3:30 pm

Monday 14 September

Conference workshop descriptions

FULL DAY WORKSHOP | Foundational and Intermediate

Navigating AI in Evaluation, from Basics to Advanced Applications

Presented by Gerard Atkinson

Workshop Description

In the ever-evolving landscape of policy and program evaluation, this workshop aims to equip intermediate-level professionals with a comprehensive understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the policy and practice guidelines around ethical and secure AI use, and its strategic integration into the evaluation process.

This workshop aims to bridge the knowledge gap for evaluators, ensuring they have the skills to navigate and leverage AI effectively. Focusing on research methods and project management, this workshop will equip professionals with tools to enhance the efficiency and accuracy of evaluations in an AI-driven era. It will also enable them to evaluate programs and policies that incorporate AI approaches as part of their design.

Workshop Content

- Foundational knowledge on AI models and approaches
- Ethical considerations and policy frameworks in applying AI
- AI tools available to evaluators and use cases
- AI prompt engineering for evaluation contexts
- Practical evaluation scenarios applying AI tools

The practical evaluation scenarios include a worked case study where participants will apply AI tools to develop and deliver evaluation outputs.

Learning Outcomes

1. Understand core AI concepts, approaches and tools relevant to evaluation.
2. Navigate policy and practice guidelines around ethical and secure AI use.
3. Apply AI tools and prompt engineering techniques in evaluation contexts.
4. Strengthen research methods and project management practice in an AI-driven era.
5. Assess programs and policies that incorporate AI approaches as part of their design.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice;

Domain 4 – Research methods and systematic inquiry;

Domain 5 – Project management;

Domain 7 – Evaluation Activities.

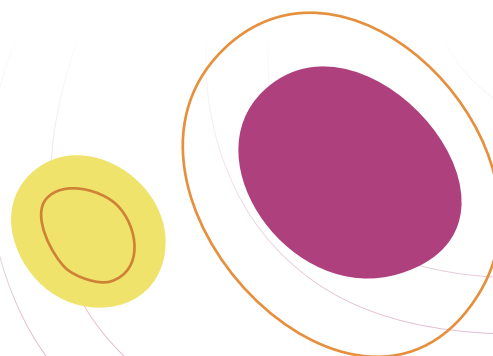
Who should attend

Intermediate – suitable for professionals seeking a comprehensive understanding of AI and its application in evaluation.

About the facilitator

Gerard Atkinson is an independent evaluation consultant who has worked with big data and AI approaches for over 20 years, originally as a physicist then as a strategy consultant and evaluator. He is also Managing Director of Iris Ethics, Australia's first HREC dedicated to reviews of projects in the evaluation, market research, and social research sector. Prior to this he was a Director at ARTD Consultants where he chaired the Learning and Development committee. He has an MBA in Business Analytics focusing on the applications of machine learning to operational data. Gerard has previously presented at AES conferences on big data (2018), experimental tests of AI applications in evaluation (2023, 2024), and applied AI in evaluation (2024, 2025).

The facilitator has over 20 years of experience in working with big data, machine learning, and AI, as well as experience in facilitating workshops and adult learning for the AES and in leading the internal learning and development program at ARTD Consultants.



FULL DAY WORKSHOP | Foundational and Intermediate

Evaluating Systems Transformation: Frameworks and Tools for Complex Change

Presented by Jess Dart and Emily Gates

Workshop Description

The world that shaped traditional program evaluation has shifted. Society's biggest challenges – climate transition, persistent social inequity, growing polarisation, and rapid technological disruption – cut across multiple sectors, actors, and time horizons. Governments, philanthropies and communities recognise these require a collaborative, intersectional systemic response in place, and beyond. No single program, organisation or discipline can achieve lasting impact in isolation. Traditional program evaluation methods fall short here. Instead, evaluators must work with complexity, non-linearity, adaptive cycles, shifting power and long-term collective learning. Whether operating in more concentrated ways within a suburb or town, or beyond, systems initiatives focus on shifting the underlying conditions rather than programmatic fixes – demanding new ways of thinking and working.

This full day workshop helps equip evaluators with practical tools to work with systems-wide collaborative approaches, including place-based approaches.

The workshop introduces participants to core concepts in systems transformation and provides a practical suite of frameworks and tools for evaluating systems wide change. We begin by building a shared understanding of “systems”, “systems change” and “systems transformation” and how these efforts differ from programmatic interventions. Participants explore common evaluation challenges and work hands-on with practical frameworks and tools drawn from international practice.

Workshop Content

- Building a shared understanding of systems, systems change and systems transformation
- Exploring evaluation challenges including emergence, non-linearity, spotting and tracking system shifts, and demonstrating impact
- Working with frameworks and tools including the Four Keys, Multi-Level Perspective Framework, adaptive progress markers, the collective noticing method, and social learning approaches
- Covering relevant evaluation approaches across a nine-year arc of systems transformation evaluation
- Using case studies and guided activities to identify emergent and early signals of change, apply tools, and engage in cross-sector learning

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the work of systems transformation (including place-based approaches) and differentiate these from programmatic approaches.
- Describe the unique evaluation challenges of evaluating systems transformation approaches.
- Identify the key phases and dimensions of systems transformation.
- Select relevant frameworks and participatory tools for evaluating systems-wide change across phases.
- Apply strategies for collective noticing and sensemaking that bring in diverse perspectives.

About the facilitator

Jess is Founder, CEO and Chief Evaluator at Clear Horizon Consulting with over 25 years' experience in evaluating and designing social change initiatives in Australia and overseas. She is passionate about developing real-world evaluation and strategy for social justice and sustainability. In particular, she works with systems change interventions, large-scale strategy and social innovation and specialises in collaborative evaluation and the design of initiatives with complex, intangible outcomes.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice;

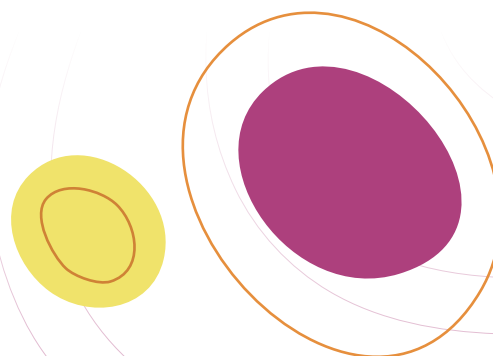
Domain 4 – Research methods and systematic inquiry;

Domain 5 – Project management;

Domain 7 – Evaluation Activities.

Who should attend

Foundational and Intermediate, but all are welcome. Of interest to evaluators, change-makers, partners and collaborators, community leaders, funders, researchers, and policymakers.



FULL DAY WORKSHOP | Intermediate and Advanced

Practical Approaches to Evaluating Impact Without Experiments or Counterfactuals: Contribution Analysis, Process Tracing and More

Presented by Patricia Rogers

Workshop Description

There is increasing demand for high quality impact evaluation, but it is not always possible –or appropriate–to use experimental methods (such as randomized controlled trials involving control groups) or quasi-experimental designs (involving comparison groups). This workshop focuses on rigorous non-experimental approaches to impact evaluation, especially contribution analysis and process tracing.

For evaluators, the workshop will strengthen their ability to design and conduct high-quality non-experimental impact evaluations. For evaluation commissioners, it will strengthen their ability to frame appropriate terms of reference, select and manage appropriate evaluation teams and support use of findings.

Workshop Content

- Different ways terminology is used around causal inference and impact evaluation approaches
- The range of tasks involved in an impact evaluation
- Thinking about cause and effect
- Better theories of change to strengthen impact evaluation
- The logic of non-counterfactual causal inference
- Different types of causal tests and evidentiary basis for impact evaluation
- Key features of contribution analysis
- Key features of process tracing
- An overview of other non-experimental impact evaluation
- Implications for planning and managing evaluation
- When non-experimental evaluation approaches are appropriate

Learning Outcomes

- Understand why experimental approaches are not always feasible and how non-experimental methods can still provide strong evidence of impact.
- Learn the key principles of contribution analysis and process tracing and how they help answer impact questions.
- Apply these methods to practical exercises to assess whether and how a program has contributed to observed changes.
- Identify how these approaches might be applied in their work.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains is:

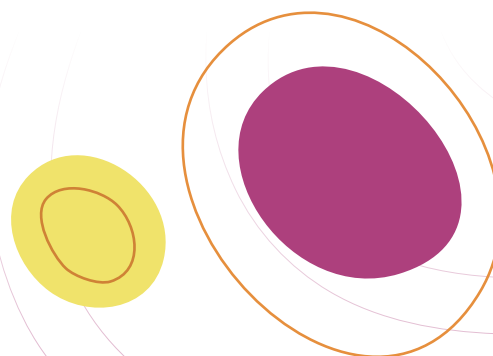
Domain 4 – Research methods and systematic inquiry

Who should attend

The full-day advanced workshop is intended for people with a good understanding of foundational evaluation concepts and data collection, analysis and reporting options.

About the facilitator

Patricia Rogers, former Professor of Public Sector Evaluation RMIT University, has over 30 years of experience working with government and non-government organisations in Australia and internationally as an evaluator, advisor and on capacity strengthening projects. She is the founder of BetterEvaluation, the global knowledge platform on evaluation methods and processes and has a deep commitment to supporting appropriate choices in evaluation design. She has presented keynote and plenary addresses at evaluation conferences in Australasia, Europe, Asia, Africa and North America and successful evaluation workshops in Australia and internationally including AES pre-conference workshops. She has written on appropriate methods for impact evaluation and ways of addressing complexity in evaluation. Her publications include the book (co-authored with Sue Funnell) Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and Logic Models, guidance for the Department of Industry, Science and Resources on choosing appropriate designs and methods for impact evaluation. She is a Fellow of the AES, and recipient of the AES Outstanding Contribution to Evaluation Award and the American Evaluation Association's Myrdal Evaluation Practice Award.



HALF DAY MORNING WORKSHOP | Foundational and Intermediate

Indigenous Researcher Knowledge Sharing

Presented by Alexander Gyles, Glenda Wayne and Shane D'Angelo

Workshop Description

The purpose of the workshop is to provide a comfortable learning space for Indigenous researchers (prioritised) and their allies to meet each other and share their knowledge and practice. This includes sharing stories about evaluation projects and the approach used, as well as broader discussions such as the important role of cultural protocols to inform the design and delivery of culturally safe and effective evaluations.

The objectives are to provide a culturally safe and creative learning environment that is more aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Senior Indigenous researchers will lead discussion on Indigenous evaluation approaches in a participatory way, modelling Indigenous leadership with the aim of growing the leadership of Indigenous evaluators and enabling younger people to learn from older people. The way we share will be as important as what we share.

Workshop Content

- Full group yarning circles interchanging with small breakout sessions
- Sharing stories about valued evaluation projects and the approaches used
- Discussing cultural protocols, team processes, techniques, practices, challenges and enablers of good practice
- Co-creating a learnings output to be shared more broadly if agreed
- Potentially moving beyond the conference room to include outdoor sessions if appropriate

The workshop participants will share and grow their knowledge about Indigenous-led evaluation and co-creation and co-implementation with Indigenous communities. This will help build individual understandings of what is good practice, and the challenges and enablers of good practice.

Learning Outcomes

- Increase knowledge and understanding about good practice in and for Indigenous-led evaluation.
- Strengthen understanding of co-creation and co-implementation of evaluation with Indigenous communities.
- Build individual and collective understandings of good practice, challenges and enablers.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice

Domain 3 – Culture, stakeholders and context

Who should attend

Indigenous researchers are prioritised, along with allies interested in culturally safe and effective Indigenous-led evaluation practice. Participants of all levels are encouraged to join as the workshop participants will be learning from each other and we will endeavor to make the language used very accessible.

About the facilitators

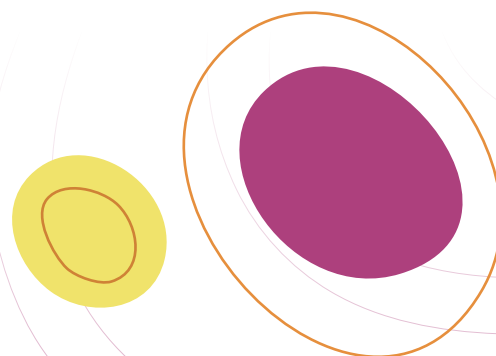
Alex Gyles is a Research Fellow working in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) at the Centre for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University. He works on the YWPP project which he finds an exciting learning experience in MEL where local cultural protocols are fundamental to effective MEL design and delivery. He has over ten years of experience supporting processes of social change particularly in community development, governance, and MEL with Aboriginal land councils in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. He has a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Anthropology and Politics, and a Master of Public Policy and Management.

Glenda Napaljarri Wayne is a Warlpiri woman and a Senior Community researcher at the Centre for Human Security and Social Change at La Trobe University. She is an experienced researcher and

evaluator working across multiple evaluation projects in the Tanami Desert, including the YWPP project and the Lajamanu Good Community Life for Yapa project. She plays an important role in training and mentoring new and younger researchers. She is particularly passionate about growing Aboriginal research teams through following local cultural protocols.

Shane D'Angelo is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Human Security and Social Change at La Trobe University. He is a Kokatha man who carries many years of experience working in Aboriginal Public Health research, with local Aboriginal organisations and government. He has a depth of both practical and academic experience in the space of research and evaluation.

The workshop design and delivery will be led by Senior Warlpiri Aboriginal researchers from La Trobe University with support from other La Trobe University researchers. These researchers aim to centre Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in how it is delivered to provide a culturally safe space for Aboriginal evaluators. The team have applied adult learning techniques for over ten years, particularly in the space of Indigenous-led development and evaluation, and have facilitated multiple workshops at conferences, including the half day AES 2024 YWPP conference workshop that received excellent feedback from participants.



HALF DAY AFTERNOON WORKSHOP | Foundational and Intermediate

Child Voice Methods in Evaluation: Applying the Voice of the Child Toolkit Voice

Presented by Alice Ghazarian and Lauren Heery

Workshop Description

This workshop introduces participants to the Voice of the Child Toolkit, an evidence informed resource developed by the Centre for Community Child Health.

The Toolkit provides tools and approaches that empower children and young people to contribute meaningfully to research and service delivery. It is currently being tested nationally across early childhood education with children aged 3–5, and across Victorian health settings with children aged 3–12.

Part 1 offers an overview of the Toolkit's purpose, structure and theoretical foundations. Facilitators will link the Toolkit to rights based, participatory and developmental evaluation principles, emphasising children's right to express their views and the importance of adapting evaluation approaches to developmental stages. The session highlights the need for evaluators to create conditions where children feel safe, respected and able to contribute meaningfully.

Workshop Content

- **Part 1** – overview of the Toolkit's purpose, structure and theoretical foundations
- **Part 2** – a composite case example following the full evaluation process, including co-designing inquiry questions, a week-long site visit, and analysis of children's contributions
- **Part 3** – early learnings from national testing, highlighting enablers of meaningful child involvement
- **Part 4** – interactive activities using real quotes and artefacts created by children aged 3–12, plus hands-on creative exercises using Toolkit materials and arts-based techniques

Methods demonstrated include playful, arts-based approaches developed with Polyglot Theatre, which honour children's autonomy, creativity and natural communication styles.

Learning Outcomes

- Use practical, developmentally appropriate methods for engaging young children in evaluation.
- Interpret children's contributions and translate insights into recommendations.
- Identify enablers that support meaningful child participation.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice

Domain 2 – Evaluation theory

Domain 3 – Culture, stakeholders and context

Domain 6 – Interpersonal skills

Domain 7 – Evaluation Activities

Who should attend

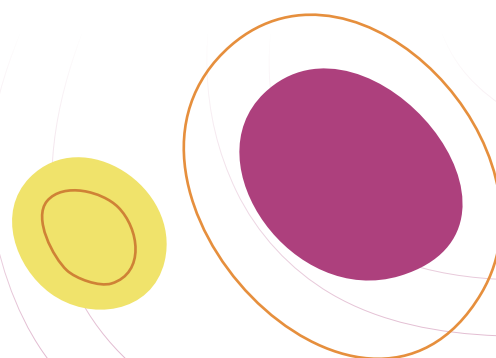
Evaluators, commissioners and practitioners interested in ethical, inclusive and developmentally appropriate approaches to hearing children's voices in evaluation.

About the facilitators

Lauren Heery (MPH, BPhysio(Hons)) is an experienced evaluator and learning facilitator with more than 15 years' expertise in developmental and participatory evaluation across early childhood services, integrated child and family systems, and place based initiatives. At the Centre for Community Child Health, she has led

numerous complex mixed methods evaluations and long term learning partnerships, supporting organisations, service systems and communities to generate and use evidence to improve outcomes for children and families. Currently, Lauren co-convenes, in partnership with The Smith Family, a leadership development network for Early Years Hub leaders. Her work focuses on building learning organisations where adaptation, quality improvement and collaborative inquiry are embedded as core practices.

Alice Ghazarian (MPH, BSci) is an evaluator and facilitator with deep expertise in child voice and over 10 years' experience at the Centre for Community Child Health (Murdoch Children's Research Institute). In her role as Voice of the Child Implementation Lead, Alice is leading Toolkit testing in Victorian community health and early education settings across Australia. Alice is dedicated to supporting organisations, service systems and communities to use and generate evidence that improves services and conditions for children and families. She is an experienced evaluator and facilitator with strong skills in research design, data collection and analysis, and participatory approaches. Alice has presented her work several times at national conferences and has received highly positive feedback.



Tuesday 15 September

Conference workshop descriptions

FULL DAY WORKSHOP | Foundational and Intermediate

Game on! Game design thinking for evaluation practice

Presented by Matt Healey

Workshop Description

Evaluators routinely face two challenges: how to meaningfully engage stakeholders in evaluation processes, and how to communicate findings in ways that land. Traditional approaches to both tend to rely on familiar formats: workshops, surveys, slide decks, reports. These have their place, but they often struggle to hold attention, surface diverse perspectives, or make complex ideas accessible and memorable.

Game design offers a different set of tools. Games are structured systems built on core design principles including rules, mechanics, feedback loops, challenge, interaction, and narrative. These principles are not unique to entertainment. They are transferable to evaluation practice, and once understood, can be applied across a range of purposes: from engaging communities in Theory of Change processes, to communicating evaluation findings to diverse audiences, to building shared understanding of complex systems.

This workshop introduces the foundations of game design and applies them directly to evaluation contexts. It is structured around two core applications. The first focuses on using game design principles to engage: how mechanics like role assignment, constrained choice, and structured interaction can deepen stakeholder participation in evaluation and program design processes. The second focuses on using game design principles to communicate: how narrative, visual design, and feedback loops can make evaluation findings more accessible, interactive, and useful to decision-makers and communities.

Workshop Content

Over the course of the workshop, participants will:

- Learn the core principles of game design and how they relate to evaluation practice
- Explore how game mechanics can be used to strengthen stakeholder engagement in evaluation processes including Theory of Change development, co-design, and data collection

- Examine how game design thinking can improve how evaluation findings are communicated and used
- Apply these principles in a guided sketching exercise, developing a prototype for a game-based tool relevant to their own evaluation context

The workshop involves a mix of short lectures, facilitated discussion, worked examples of game-based tools designed for evaluation and engagement contexts, and a hands-on design exercise. Participants will work individually and in small groups, with structured reflection throughout to connect learning to their own practice.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice

Domain 3 – Culture, stakeholders and context

Domain 6 – Interpersonal skills

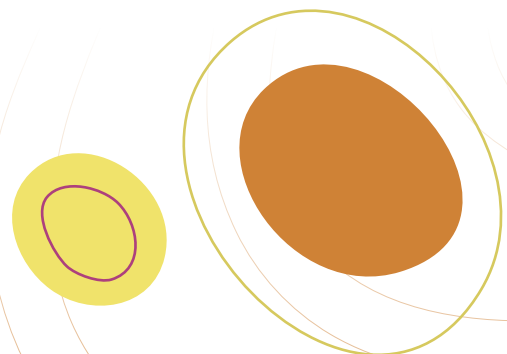
Domain 7 – Evaluation Activities

Who should attend

The workshop is suited to evaluators, program designers, commissioners, and capability builders looking to expand their methodological toolkit with creative, interactive approaches. A basic understanding of evaluation is beneficial to make the most of learning.

About the facilitator

Matt Healey is Principal Consultant and Co-Founder at First Person Consulting, where his practice sits at the intersection of evaluation, systems thinking, and design. Over 10 years and nearly 200 projects, Matt has developed a distinctive approach to designing interactive tools for complex professional contexts. His portfolio of game-based designs spans multiple formats and purposes: Catalyst, a card game for teaching systems thinking in strategy and evaluation contexts; Fusion, an upcoming semi-competitive game on Theory of Change; a character-builder approach derived from role-playing games for professional development planning called The VALUE System; and a suite of card-based tools for place-based evaluation developed through his CECAN Research Fellowship. Matt's passion is the use of different approaches - including games and game play - in design, implementation, and evaluation of impact.



FULL DAY WORKSHOP | FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

Using developmentally-written rubrics to enhance evaluative reasoning

Presented by Ben Lawless

Workshop Description

This full-day workshop brings together best practice in rubrics with best practice in evaluative reasoning: developmental rubrics. A powerful tool for qualitative, growth-oriented program evaluation, developmental rubrics offer deeper insights for monitoring, evaluation, and learning at any point in a program's lifecycle by replacing traditional static ratings with nuanced performance descriptors. Workshop participants will learn the basics, practise on examples, and create developmental rubrics for their own projects.

Workshop Content

Specific Objectives / Learning Outcomes

Participants will learn to:

- Distinguish between developmental and traditional rubrics
- Design rubrics that capture stages of progress with clear criteria and descriptive indicators
- Apply these rubrics to real-world program and systems evaluation contexts
- Avoid common pitfalls such as pseudo-counting and overly vague language

Knowledge, Techniques, and Practices

Drawing on educational research and established frameworks, the workshop emphasises:

- Structuring effective rubrics with progressive, observable quality markers
- Integrating rigorous evaluative reasoning into rubric design
- Providing meaningful feedback for decision-making and stakeholder engagement

Teaching / Learning Strategies

This interactive session uses hands-on activities, small-group discussions, and case studies to guide participants in creating or refining their own developmental rubrics. Templates, sample rubrics, and follow-up materials will be provided to enable immediate application.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 2 – Evaluation theory

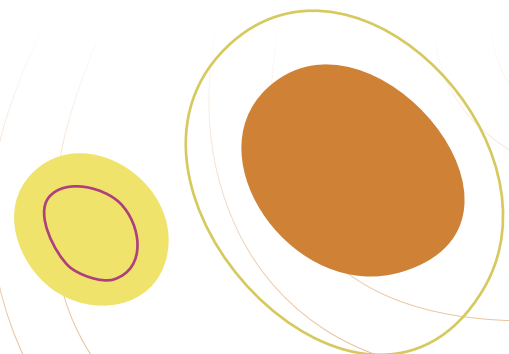
Domain 3 – Culture, stakeholders and context

Who should attend

Designed for evaluators, commissioners, and policymakers with foundational to intermediate experience in evaluation, though no prior rubric-writing expertise is required. Familiarity with basic evaluation concepts is helpful but not mandatory.

About the facilitator

Ben Lawless has 14 years of experience across educational assessment and evaluation. He tutors in evaluation at the University of Melbourne and specialises in designing and using rubrics, applying the logic of evaluation to generate clear information about levels of skill and performance. His work focuses on developmental rubrics and how they can be used to support judgement, feedback, and learning. He runs an education consultancy and has delivered over 40 public presentations and workshops in the past two years on developmental rubric writing, including a rubrics workshop at the most recent Australian Evaluation Society conference. He is currently working with Associate Professor Amy Gullickson on developing a competency framework for evaluators.



FULL DAY WORKSHOP | FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

Essentials of qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluators and evaluation users

Presented by Samantha Abbato

Workshop Description

Have you ever felt baffled by the academic jargon of evaluation methods and skipped to the conclusions of a paper or report hopeful that the author “knew what they were doing”? Or have you felt uncertain about the right way to interpret and assess either qualitative or quantitative methods? The purpose of this workshop is to increase the understanding of core methods and the ability to critique qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods for evaluation. The goal is for participants to apply the learnings of the workshop to increase rigour of method whether they are evaluators or commissioners of evaluation.

The workshop will be interactive, involve the sharing of experiences as well as hands-on exercises. Practical strategies, “how to” and checklists will be provided, discussed and put to the test without the technical or research jargon.

Participants will learn the essentials of qualitative and quantitative methods, their theoretical underpinnings and the fundamental differences between methods and effective ways of combining them for mixed method. They will gain practical skills in cutting to the core of which evaluation findings and recommendations are made. Checklists and other practical strategies are introduced for judging method and improving rigour.

Workshop Content

Content includes:

1. Basic principles foundations and principles of qualitative and quantitative methods, their strengths, limitations and fundamental differences;
2. Understanding sampling, data collection and analysis and similarities and differences for quantitative and qualitative;
3. Practical strategies using checklists, questions and other strategies to assess strength of evidence and identify ways of improving rigour of method;
4. Practical application of skills to real-life evaluation findings based on qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

Real-life examples will be included in the activities. In addition, participants will be provided opportunities to apply the learned skills to their own work.

Learning Outcomes

This workshop is for evaluators, evaluation commissioners and other professionals who would like to:

- Understand the essentials of quantitative and qualitative methods, their theoretical underpinnings and the difference between them
- Apply practical strategies to assess qualitative and quantitative methodologies
- Use checklists to assess credibility of evidence
- Identify weaknesses and strengthen methods
- Confidently apply or challenge evaluation findings

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice

Domain 2 – Evaluation theory

Domain 3 – Culture, stakeholders and context

Domain 5 – Project management

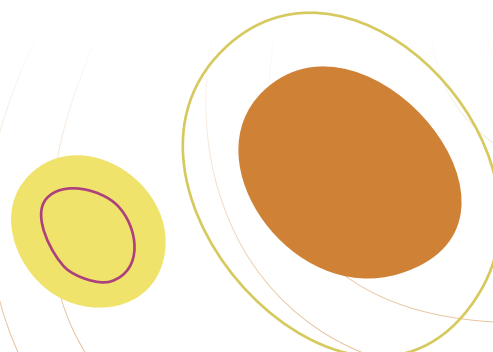
Who should attend

Evaluators, evaluation commissioners and other professionals interested in strengthening their understanding of evaluation methods.

About the facilitator

Dr Samantha Abbato is a senior evaluation consultant with more than twenty years of experience and strong methodological expertise across a range of qualitative and quantitative disciplines. Sam's academic grounding in quantitative methods is built upon a bachelor's degree in mathematics and physiology, a Master's of Public Health and a PhD in epidemiology and biostatistics. She has extensive qualitative training in medical anthropology (PhD, UC Berkeley). This varied academic background enables the facilitator to draw on deep knowledge and examples of critical thinking across numerous disciplines and to bring them to the evaluation context.

Sam employs a utilisation-focused approach to evaluation practice and consistently uses mixed methods, case studies and collaborative processes that consistently incorporate skills transfer to clients. Since 2013, she has introduced a pictures, stories and play approach to evaluation and evaluation capacity building. Using cartoons, animation, and checklists, Visual Insights People has created a range of engaging evaluation training tools for use in AES workshops and client team training.



HALF DAY MORNING WORKSHOP | FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

A step by step guide to ethical evaluation practice

Presented by Emma Williams and Su-Ann Drew

Workshop Description

This half-day workshop will build participants' ability to identify and address ethical issues at each stage of evaluation, from design through data collection and analysis to formulating recommendations and reporting findings. Participants will receive checklists and tools and will practise applying them through interactive exercises and discussions.

This half-day workshop will build participants' ability to identify and address ethical issues at each stage of evaluation, from design through data collection and analysis to formulating recommendations and reporting findings. Participants will receive checklists and tools developed for this workshop by the Co-Chairs of the AES 'Ethics in Evaluation' Special Interest Group, and will practise applying them to their own projects, aided by presentations, scenarios and interactive exercises followed by small group discussions. (Additional materials have been developed for participants – practitioners or commissioners – who may not have suitable projects to work on, but who want to learn how to apply the tools and checklists.)

Workshop Content

Four topics will be covered in the workshop.

Where do I start? – This initial element includes exercises where participants self-assess their strengths and weaknesses in ethical practice. Topics include awareness of ethical requirements and of existing resources and – based on recent research – will identify their own personal values and how these are likely to affect how they deal with ethical issues.

What's the issue? – Step by step checklists will enable participants to identify ethical issues at the evaluation design stage, addressing topics such as cultural safety, informed consent, confidentiality, and meeting professional standards suitable for the paradigm they are working in.

What now? – Participants will be given tools to support them in resolving unanticipated ethical issues that may arise in the course of an evaluation, and that require a quick response.

The final element of the workshop will provide tools to help address some of the trickiest ethical dilemmas, including balancing conflicting ethical commitments, and managing power disparities (both those where the evaluator has power relative to vulnerable participants and those where the evaluator may feel disempowered by powerful commissioners, evaluands, or users).

By the end of the session, participants will have a set of ethics tools they can use immediately and re-use in future evaluations, and greater awareness of ethical issues, available resources and techniques to address ethical issues in evaluation.

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice

Domain 3 – Culture, stakeholders and context

Domain 6 – Interpersonal skills

Who should attend

This is a foundational skills workshop, although may be of use to evaluators and evaluation commissioners with intermediate and advanced skills if they are facing ethical challenges and want better tools to address them.

About the facilitators

Emma Williams is a Credentialed Evaluator with experience in realist, observational and participatory evaluations, each providing different (although sometimes overlapping) ethical issues. Further ethical insights have come from her evaluations on aspects of urban development, throughcare, family violence, service access, employment, environmental issues, and international development. Emma has been involved in both the current and previous update of AES ethics documents, and is Co-Chair of the AES Ethics in Evaluation Special Interest Group.

A former Associate Professor at Charles Darwin University, she has presented and published on multiple aspects of evaluation ethics, and was co-editor with Ana Manzano of *Realist Evaluation: Principles and Practice* (2024/25). Emma is currently undertaking a realist investigation of evaluation ethics for a PhD that also uses Q methodology and would love to talk about evaluation ethics with anyone at the conference.

Dr Su Ann Drew is a Senior Manager in Grosvenor Performance Group's Program Evaluation practice where she designs and delivers complex evaluations for state and federal government clients, with a focus on rigour, transparency and purposeful use of evidence in politically sensitive and complex systems. Since completing her PhD in human reproductive biology, Su Ann has worked across banking, university, government and consulting roles. Her experience includes commissioning and conducting evaluations in the mental health sector within the WA Government, and leading statewide research ethics and governance policy for the WA health system. Drawing on experience as a researcher, evaluator, commissioner and ethics policy lead, she brings a multi-lens understanding of how ethical principles are applied in practice. She also serves as Co-Chair of the AES Ethics in Evaluation Special Interest Group. Her interests centre on power dynamics, independence, accountability and evaluator judgement, particularly within the commissioner–evaluator relationship.

HALF DAY AFTERNOON WORKSHOP | FOUNDATION / INTERMEDIATE

From overwhelmed to empowered: using digital tools and AI for community-centred evaluation

Presented by Ethel Karskens and Maree Dibella

Workshop Description

Evaluation increasingly takes place in community contexts where participants hold diverse relationships with technology, from digital novices to confident users.

This workshop equips evaluators with a practical, inclusive toolkit for designing and facilitating digital data collection and analysis processes that genuinely centre community voices, regardless of participants' digital literacy.

Drawing on hands-on activities and real-world case studies, participants will leave with ready-to-use strategies for selecting and deploying appropriate digital tools, including the latest artificial intelligence (AI) applications, in ways that are accessible, ethical, and community-responsive.

The workshop runs across three progressive blocks. The first uses a 'digital confidence audit' to surface participants' existing tool knowledge. The second involves hands-on activity stations where small groups work through real evaluation scenarios using pre-loaded tools. The third focuses on reflection and application, with participants mapping a digital or AI approach onto their own evaluation project, supported by a take-home decision framework and prompt library.

Workshop Content

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

- Identify and apply a framework for selecting digital tools that match community context, digital readiness, and evaluation purpose.
- Design inclusive digital data collection processes that accommodate low-confidence digital users.
- Use at least two AI-assisted tools to reduce evaluation workload and increase rigour.
- Critically evaluate the ethical considerations of using AI in community evaluation contexts, including data sovereignty, bias, and consent.
- Adapt and immediately apply at least one digital or AI-based technique to their own current evaluation work.

Knowledge and techniques

The workshop addresses community-centred digital evaluation practice across three capability areas:

1. inclusive digital design (accessibility, low-bandwidth tools, offline-capable platforms);
2. AI-assisted analysis (natural language processing for thematic coding, AI summarisation tools, prompt engineering for evaluation tasks); and

- digital facilitation (running interactive online or hybrid data collection with mixed-ability groups).

AES Competency Framework Alignment

This workshop aligns with competencies in the AES Evaluator's Professional Learning Competency Framework.

The identified domains are:

Domain 1 – Evaluative attitude and professional practice

Domain 3 – Culture, stakeholders and context

Domain 4 – Research methods and systematic inquiry

Domain 5 – Project management

Who should attend

Evaluators, commissioners and practitioners working in community contexts who want to use digital tools and AI in inclusive, practical ways.

Suitable for participants with varying levels of digital confidence, from beginners to more experienced users.

About the facilitators

Ethel Karskens is Head of Digital at Clear Horizon, where she has spent over four years designing and advising on digital systems across a wide range of organisations (from government to community-based), applying human-centred design principles to ensure digital solutions are adopted. She thinks strategically about digital and AI tool adoption while keeping the digital maturity of each organisation in view, the same lens she brings to this workshop. Ethel leads Track to Change, Clear Horizon's MEL platform, giving her hands-on experience building digital solutions

for diverse community users. She developed Clear Horizon's ethical standards for AI use and has supported clients through their own ethical frameworks. Prior to Clear Horizon, Ethel worked as a Digital Consultant at Kowa, coached in digital product development and taught Analytics at General Assembly. She has presented at the Australian Evaluation Society conference in 2022, 2023 and 2024, with a focus on digital innovation in evaluation practice.

Maree Dibella is a Senior Digital Consultant at Clear Horizon, specialising in translating evaluation frameworks into practical, usable digital systems. She brings deep expertise in data modelling, dashboard development and reporting architecture, with particular strength in Power BI, building end-to-end reporting solutions that turn complex operational data into clear, decision-ready insights for program teams and leadership. Maree's work sits at the intersection of evaluation, digital capability and organisational reality. She is technically rigorous, yet attentive to user experience, accessibility and the day-to-day constraints of community organisations. She designed and delivered a four-module Power BI training program for evaluators and analysts as part of the Investing in Women initiative across Asia, covering data transformation, AI-assisted workflows and user-centred dashboard design for mixed-ability cohorts. Participants described her as "a top trainer, very calm and very patient".

Workshop registration fees

MEMBER-ONLY EARLY BIRD

4 May - 11 May 2026

EARLY BIRD

12 May - 9 June 2026

STANDARD REGISTRATION

10 June - 1 Sept 2026

Onsite workshop registrations will be strictly limited and subject to availability. Workshops that have sold out in advance will not be available for registration on the day. Participants who register onsite are not guaranteed access to a workbook or any materials prepared for pre-registered attendees. Additionally, dietary requirements for onsite registrations cannot be guaranteed, either at the venue or at any offsite conference events.

To ensure your place and receive all workshop benefits, including materials and full catering consideration, please register by **Tuesday, 1 September 2026**.

Full Day Workshops (including 10% GST)

CATEGORY	MEMBER EARLY BIRD	EARLY BIRD	STANDARD REGISTRATION
Individual Member	A\$475	A\$553	A\$599
Organisational Member staff	A\$580	A\$672	A\$725
Non Member	n/a	A\$750	A\$805
Full-time Student	n/a	A\$415	A\$475

Half Day Workshops (including 10% GST)

CATEGORY	MEMBER EARLY BIRD	EARLY BIRD	STANDARD REGISTRATION
Individual Member	A\$275	A\$330	A\$385
Organisational Member staff*	A\$400	A\$472	A\$525
Non Member	n/a	A\$525	A\$580
Full-time Student#	n/a	A\$310	A\$365

Full-time student discount: For your registration to be valid, you must provide proof of their full-time student status to conference@aes.asn.au. Should proof not be provided we reserve the right to charge for the difference between the full-time student and non-student registration, and cancel the registration should the full fee not be paid.

*** Organisational Staff Member rates:** Before choosing this rate, please check with your organisational member status with your organisation or aes@aes.asn.au. You will be invoiced for the difference if you're not a staff member of an organisational member of the AES.