

One confluence of story, many springs: an invitation to the EES 2026 co-inquiry



Before Lille, a map is starting to be drawn. You are invited to contribute, whether or not you're coming to Lille.

The theme of the EES 2026 Biennial (Lille, 28–30 October) is *Evaluation for Vibrant Democracies*. We don't think democracy lives in keynotes, panels and position papers alone. We believe it lives in the ordinary situations of evaluation work: a finding that lands a week after the decision it was meant to inform, the trust you won from one group that quietly cost you another's, what you knew getting in the way of what you heard.

These situations are where the theme is actually being worked out. Most of them are never told. So we're asking you for one. Anonymously as the WHAT is relevant, not the WHO.

What we're asking

Think of one situation from your work that you still remember clearly — large or small, recent or years old. Tell it in your own words, a few sentences or a page. Then choose the question it answers best:

- **Legitimacy & Speed** — When did the time it takes to evaluate properly collide with the time a decision needed?
- **Whose Trust** — When did earning one side's trust cost you another's?
- **Expertise** — When did knowing more make it harder to listen?

Submit it. Nobody else interprets it for you. Fifteen minutes, roughly.

Why we propose a watershed as an anchoring frame

A watershed is all the land that drains into the same river. Rain falls everywhere — a hillside, a field, a rooftop — and each drop starts somewhere different and runs downhill. It joins others in small streams, and the streams meet wherever the land brings them together. Nobody directs the water. The shape of the terrain does.

We're using that picture to hold the co-inquiry. Your story is a spring — a place where experience surfaces. Stories that share a concern flow into the same catchment. Where several meet, there's a confluence: a place the field needs to talk about. You'll meet a few more marks at the Wall, as the terrain itself starts to need them.

The water itself is attention. A story only moves when someone else picks it up and carries it further.

The Wall

In Lille, the terrain becomes a physical Wall at the heart of the conference — beside a water fountain, which we didn't plan but aren't going to argue with. Your story arrives before you do, already placed as a spring. Over three days, participants add to it, connect stories, contest them, trace where they flow. The plenaries refer back to it.

Not coming to Lille?

Your story belongs to the terrain just as much as any told in the room. We'll share the Wall as it grows. The water doesn't stop on 30 October. The Wall is archived and becomes the ground for a second pass later after Lille, and you'll be invited back to it.

How to take part

Complete this form [One story, many springs](#) by 25 October 2026.

A river is made of what flows into it.