

Shaping Professional Evaluation in Europe Together

Achieving success for our members in a systematic way: vision, identity, mission, core values, and objectives

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EES Board (for the AGM of 30 June 2026)

Introduction: time for an update of our strategy

The European Evaluation Society (EES) is the regional voluntary organization for professional evaluation in Europe. Launched 30 years ago, we want our society to be at the heart of today's evaluation community in Europe, providing high-quality services to our members while working together with evaluation partners.

Our aim is and will be to promote the theory, practice, and utilization of high-quality evaluation in Europe by increasing both the demand for and supply of high quality evaluation in European governments. In short, we want to 'Shape professional evaluation in Europe together'.

Yet since our environment and, indeed, the world has changed in many ways since our inception, we decided to revisit and update our strategy. The new strategy is based on the following principles:

- The EES is part of a broader evaluation *system*, in Europe and worldwide. Herein, the key to success and a strong future position depends on the best possible 'fit' (added value) and relationship with our members and key partners.
- We aim to deliver value-for-money to our members and to deliver *clear benefits* to our partners.
- For a viable EES, five elements must be aligned: purpose, governance, professional support, products, and partnerships.

We want to develop our new strategy together with EES members and partners: this document was prepared for that purpose. Earlier versions of this draft strategy were discussed in the EES Board.

1. Vision statement: promoting the theory, practice, and utilization of high-quality evaluation

In the 1990s, the EES was born as the regional Voluntary Organization for Professional Evaluation (VOPE) for Europe. Back then, our goal was 'to promote the theory, practice, and utilization of *high-quality evaluation* in Europe and beyond'. Our ultimate purpose was 'to contribute to viable evaluation systems in Europe'.

These ambitions are still relevant. Plus: they are never finished or 'done'. They can therefore be preserved, yet need to be continually monitored and adapted. Anno 2026, the value of evaluative knowledge and evidence is being challenged by information overload, disinformation, and polarization of debate. Policy makers and politicians' attention for evaluation faces strong competition by social media, AI and other sources of 'instant truth'.

In addition, our open European democracies are under strain. Therefore, we want to put our contribution to the viability and success of democratic government more to the foreground. We aim for more than we did back in the 1990s: *'We envision a Europe where professional evaluation is integral to democratic governance, where high-quality evaluative knowledge and evidence informs policy debates and decisions at all levels, and where evaluators contribute successfully to systemic and inclusive policy-oriented learning and accountability.'*

2. EES identity and mission

Identity: the European voluntary organization for professional evaluation

The EES will keep its uniqueness by remaining the *voluntary* organization for professional evaluation in Europe. This is what sets us apart from other evaluation organisations and groups. In addition, it is the combination of evaluation professionals and evaluation scholars (academia) that makes up the identity of the EES.

The basis of our existence are our institutional and individual *members*: they legitimize our activities and proclamations and provide the necessary means to operate. The key to our long-term success is to offer them affordable and easy access to high-quality content, events, and networks. The key to success is an optimal 'fit' (in terms of added value) between what the EES is,

does, and offers and the interests of its members and partners. In addition, we aim to forge strong, long-time partnerships with EU and other European institutions active responsible for evaluation.

The EES wants to be the first 'go-to' platform for professional evaluation in Europe when people want to know more about – the practice, theory, and utilisation of – high quality and impactful evaluation. We aim to provide a clear vision on the future of European evaluation and provide its institutional memory.

Moving towards the 2030's, professionalisation of evaluation remains important in what we offer to individual and institutional members. We want to 'step up' our ambition in this regard by introducing European Evaluation Principles and Standards and explicit guidance on emerging issues (AI ethics, evaluation in challenging political contexts, et cetera).

Mission: advancing high-quality evaluation in Europe

The EES aims to advance theory, practice, and use of high-quality, ethically grounded evaluation in Europe, and beyond. In practice, this means building evaluation capacity by developing evaluator competencies, strengthening institutional capabilities, and supporting national evaluation systems, societies, and professionals. Therefore, we aim to generate and share knowledge by maintaining repositories of European evaluation expertise, facilitating access to evaluation knowledge and guidance, providing platforms for research-practice dialogue and for the dissemination of successful innovation.

At the same time, we will foster inclusive communities by connecting diverse evaluators, supporting emerging professionals, and ensuring equitable access to evaluation resources and opportunities. We aim to achieve this through the combination of academic rigor and professional practice, bringing together individual and institutional members in a learning, action-oriented community.

We also want to champion evaluation use by engaging policymakers, promoting evaluative thinking in democratic institutions, and demonstrating evaluation's contribution to responsive, effective, learning, and accountable government and public policy.

Perhaps most importantly, we strive to uphold European democratic values and champion evaluation as a force for public good in our democratic societies.

3. Democratic and professional values and Principles

European democratic values and evaluation professional values define what the EES is and stands for. They include: diversity, equity, inclusion, responsiveness, representative and participatory government, lawfulness, impartial and independent evaluation, academic freedom, credible research and evidence, transparency, learning, and accountability.

We want to actively connect these values to professional evaluation values and principles. They include independence, impartiality, credibility, transparency, usefulness, and participation of stakeholders and beneficiaries. The EES favours the use of appropriate methods and criteria. We recognise that the evaluation discourse has changed: equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) and responsiveness and – more general – qualitative and participatory methods have gained more prominence. The EES formally endorses a methodologically diverse approach (since 2007).

We aim to articulate and practice our core values in the things we write, say, and do. Being clear about these values and principles helps to 'manage' demand-side expectations of evaluation and can highlight the importance of distinguishing our special European evaluation identity and responsibility. At the same time, transparency about our stance and about the way we seek to promote our values will help to maintain the perceived neutrality and impartiality of evaluation.

We live in a highly politicized world that appears to be in a constant (poly)crisis – interests and values both appear to resonate deeper than ever and prove to be more divisive than ever. However, the EES will not issue what can be seen as political statements: 'speaking out' does not relate directly to the mission of the EES and does align with the objectives of the EES. There are several reasons for this: we should not take a position without our own research, members may come to be seen 'compromised' in their evaluation work, while the effectiveness will be limited. Still, we believe in an EES where disagreement is not viewed with fear or hostility, but as something that is part of open and respectful debate and discussion.

4. Long term goals

4.1 Promoting professional evaluation

With evaluation approaches, methods (data and information technology), and contexts constantly evolving, professionalisation should never stop. Professional evaluation principles and standards, as well as guidelines need to constantly be 'in sync' with the needs and demands of European democratic government whilst being stable enough for reliability, quality and rigor.

As the VOPE for Europe, the EES aims to provide (1) opportunities and platforms for professional evaluation innovation while at the same time (2) providing a solid yet developing 'knowledge and practice base' for evaluators and others who seek information on what it means to perform, commission, and organise professional evaluation. We want to be "the-place-to-go" for answers to the question: 'What does a professional evaluator in Europe needs to know, be capable of, and 'be'?

We will explore possibilities to develop a structured framework of:

- Individual evaluator competencies
- Organizational evaluation capacity development
- National evaluation systems' strengthening

Herein, we will build upon the solid foundation already provided by the current EES documents. Part of this can be 'the professional European evaluator's toolbox'.

4.2 Advocating evaluative thinking in politics and policy

In addition to professional evaluators, the professionalism of commissioners and of the enabling system is also determining the overall quality and viability of European evaluation: the rules, guidelines, and institutional arrangements in which evaluation takes place. Without a clear and 'heartfelt' demand for evaluative knowledge and its utilisation, even the best evaluations will not succeed in policy-oriented learning, accountability, and, hence, improving public policies.

Though initiatives like the Evaluation Evidence Forum, the EES seeks to demonstrate the advantages of evaluative thinking and knowledge for policy makers and elected officials in Europe that are active in relevant policy fields like climate, education, safety, and international cooperation.

4.3 A compelling European perspective on evaluation, with global openness and reach

In Europe, democracy is still widely considered to be the best possible system for government. Important features are freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and speech, voting rights, freedom from unwarranted governmental deprivation of the right to life and liberty, and minority rights. These things are imperative: in government, in public policy, and in evaluation.

For the EES as the European VOPE, we want to put emphasis on not just evaluation quality and utilization, but also on Europe's democratic values. Herein, we aim to take a constructive and sustainable systems' approach to Europe's societal challenges.

We recognize that the way evaluation is organized and regulated in Europe has been heavily influenced by the process of European unification: standards and guidelines reflect not only the way policy evaluation is regulated and taught nationally, but also by European Union institutions.

At the same time, we believe that European evaluation values and approaches may both learn from and contribute to the global evaluation discourse. Therefore, we want to strengthen strategic partnerships with other regional VOPEs and explore systematically how we can engage with questions in the domain of international cooperation.

5. Membership benefits

The EES aims to really understand its members and their interests through regularly feedback through surveys et cetera, but especially through personal contacts and discussions when we convene as a society. The principle here is that the EES exists for its members, and the EES board consists of EES members.

We want to provide our members with 'affordable and easy access to high quality content and networking opportunities'. Therefore, we aim to develop and present a concrete set of 'member benefits', connected to professional development.

- For individual members: guidelines & norms, learning & training, access to knowledge, inspiration, network opportunities, opportunities to present work and get feedback, direction for young evaluators, credentials, job opportunities, tender opportunities, a 'who's who?' almanac, recognition of quality.
- For institutional members: 'all of the above' plus institutional visibility, quality criteria and guidelines for quality control.

New online and repository technologies offer opportunities to engage members and can help offer them easy, value-for-money access to high-quality content and networking opportunities.

Every second year the EES organizes its 'flagship event': the biennial EES conference. Bringing together hundreds of evaluation academics and professionals from all over Europe and beyond, they provide an excellent opportunity to gain or share new knowledge, meet new colleagues and friends, and get inspired. Pre-conference Professional Development Workshops (PDW's) have become the mainstay of EES' contributions to skills development. In addition, we organize online events, workshops and webinars and new projects like the EES Learning Hub.

Thematic Working Groups (TWG's) are intended to enhance cooperation among subgroups of EES members, mobilize their energies and coordinate their activities within specialized areas of interest. In fact, TWG's are the cornerstone of professional development in theory and practice: this is where 'thought leadership' is facilitated and happening.

Without losing the 'grassroots' nature of the TWG's, we aim to better cross-fertilise between the TWG's. The aim is to make the TWG's a better part of the EES 'as a whole'. In addition, we want the TWG's to become more visible in what we do, for instance at the biennial conferences and at a new event (working title: 'The EES TWG Festival'). The idea is an in-person participation event.

The EES website is the entrance to our society and to our institutional memory: our new website needs to 'add it all up'. We want it to become the central 'hub' for our members: the place to go to for information, events, other members, and presenting yourself to the EES-community.

6. Planning and Roadmap

This draft strategy was prepared for the 2026 AGM in June, where it was presented to members for initial discussion and feedback. The current draft will be further developed based on input from our (institutional) members, TWGs-leaders, and partners. In addition, national evaluation societies and NESE will be consulted. We will also revisit earlier consultations of our members.

The intention is to use this consultation process to further refine the strategy and present a final version for adoption at the SGM in June 2027. More details in the roadmap below:

Timing	Milestone
Jan - Jun 2026	The first draft of the strategy was prepared for the 2026 AGM and presented for initial discussion and feedback.
Oct - Nov 2026	The draft will be further developed through discussions and consultation with members at the 16 th Biennial conference in Lille, though consultation meetings and a member survey.
Dec 2026 - May 2027	Feedback will be reviewed and incorporated, and the strategy will be refined towards a final version.
June 2027	The final strategy will be presented to the AGM, with the aim of adopting it.