IOCE EvalPartners profile survey of Voluntary Organizations of Professional Evaluators (VOPEs)

Basic profile information

Name and acronym of organization (VOPE): Irish Evaluation Network (IEN)

Geographic scope of organization: National- Ireland

Contact Details: Name of main contact person: Conor Sullivan

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VOPE website URL: www.ien.dcu.ie

Current membership –Total membership: 391

Year VOPE was founded: 2002

Current status Informal network

Information about **growth**:

The network is an informal one, and relies on voluntary contributions rather than having any financial resources. Membership numbers have remained fairly stable at around 400 over the last five years. (We have a 'loose' description of members as anyone who registers an interest on the website in being kept up to date on events)

Purpose and mission of VOPE

IEN is a Network of and for those who wish to see:

• better and more consistent quality evaluation, in terms of an improved evidence-base and enhanced evaluation techniques;

• better use by decision-makers of the results of evaluation, in terms of drawing on relevant evaluation where it exists, encouraging it where absent, and generally creating a positive climate towards it;

• examination of the theoretical underpinnings of evaluation with a view to facilitating the continuing relevance of evaluation practice to a changing external climate.

Current strategy and emphasis

The specific objectives of IEN are to contribute to:

• increased awareness of the nature and benefits of evaluation;

- increased awareness of the distinction between systematic, formal, evaluation and other types of reviews, studies, etc;

- encouraging the use of professional evaluation techniques;

- increasing awareness of, and access to, international practice;

- improving the theoretical knowledge base underpinning evaluation practice

- improving the structures and processes that support evaluation practice.

Organizational capacity:

We have a steering group of seven individuals with a long-standing interest in evaluation. As an informal network we have no formal governance structure or dedicated resources. Leadership is provided by the steering group. We have links with the EES and National Evaluation Societies of Europe (NESE)

Means of communication with members: Website and occasional emails advertising events.

Past events (e.g. during past year): Normally run 3/4 lunchtime seminars a year and a bi-annual conference. No events in recent times due to time pressures on steering group members, but plans to re-activate events in October 2012.

Forthcoming key events/ conferences – dates, location

Seminar to be run in October 2012. Consultation with membership by means of survey took place over summer 2012 to identify possible events.

Name and e-address of person submitting this information: Conor Sullivan (conor.sullivan@dcu.ie)

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Experience with Evaluation Capacity Building

1. Background: Please provide a brief history of the formation of this organization (VOPE).

1.1 Richard Boyle (Institute of Public Administration); Gerry McNamara (Dublin City University); Joe O'Hara (Dublin City University); David Hegarty (Department of Finance); Jim Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick Associates); Mary Higgins (independent consultant); Ed Hearne (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)

1.2 The people listed above comprise the IEN steering group

1.3 Particular interest in evaluation at the present time due to the impact of the economic crisis in Ireland and the need to ensure effective use of public expenditure

1.4 Main challenge is making time to organise events as a voluntary body with no fixed resources

2. Organizational motivation: What were/are the driving forces of the VOPE and its historical development?

>During the 1990s/early 2000s, the majority of EU countries established evaluation societies or networks. The European Evaluation Society promotes the development of such national initiatives as a means of strengthening evaluation practice in Europe. This international context combined with a growing national-level interest in developing evaluation. The provision of high quality policy advice to governments is seen as a crucial feature of the public service modernisation agenda

3. Evaluation Capacity Building: What has your VOPE done to promote evaluation (M&E) capacity?

>• held lunchtime seminars presented by a mixture of international and national evaluation experts, with attendance levels averaging between 30 to 70 participants;

>• held a full-day Evaluation Training Workshop in November 2003 attended by over 70 civil servants and others with an interest in evaluation;

>• developed a web page (http://www4.dcu.ie/education_studies/ien/index.shtml) hosted by Dublin City University which also hosts and maintains the Network's mailing list;

>• held two one day conferences each attended by around 100 to 150 participants.

4. Context / target entities:

More specifically, who are the persons or institutions your organization seeks to influence (to strengthen evaluation capacity)? For example:

>4.1 Technical capacities to *supply* quality evaluations, partnering with experts, local universities or others to provide training for members, etc.;

>4.2 Strengthening VOPE organizational capacity itself;

>4.3 Enhancing the enabling environment for evaluation, including strengthening the *demand* for and use of evaluations by policy makers;

>4.4 Influencing governmental policies related to evaluation, evaluation designs and implementation of M&E systems, etc.

Reflecting its goals and objectives, IEN's main target audience consists of two overall groups:

>• evaluation "producers", i.e. those who carry out evaluations. This includes evaluators within the public and voluntary/community sectors, in consultancies, research institutes and academia (both staff and students);

>• evaluation "consumers", i.e. those who use evaluations but do not necessarily carry them out themselves. This sub-divides into two segments:

>>• those directly responsible for organising or commissioning evaluations;

>>• decision-makers who may not deal with the evaluation process directly but who will (or could) ultimately draw on its results.

Those evaluated, the people who are affected by the process of evaluation and its outcomes, are also an important constituency the IEN take into account in developing its activities.

5. Public accountability: Is your VOPE helping to strengthen oversight and transparency of government programs? If so, in what ways? Can you share any success stories of evaluators or others promoting public accountability?

> A Public Service Evaluation Network has recently (2012) been established within Government. It is intended that the IEN will develop links with this Network with a view to helping strengthen oversight and transparency of government programs.

6. More specifically, what are some of the key themes for which you advocate? For example, are you promoting issues related to cultural sensitivity, equity, social justice, empowerment, transformation, gender, environment, poverty? If so, please describe or attach relevant documents.

> No particular themes advocated.

7. Methods: Experiences in strengthening skills of individual members, by (for example):

- organizing workshops led by local experts;
- organizing webinars with international speakers;
- designing and delivering e-learning programmes;
- administering mentoring programmes; etc.

Main means of strengthening skills is by the use of seminars and conferences. We also make relevant information available on the website (for example information on how to conduct advocacy evaluation)

8. Standards: Has your VOPE developed professional standards/ ethical codes/ competencies (or adheres to those developed by others)? If so, please provide documentation.

> No

9. Job opportunities: Do you share employment/ consultancy opportunities with evaluators on your database?

> Yes, on an occasional and informal basis

10. Progress and results: What progress has been achieved so far in any of the above or other domains? What are expected and unexpected results achieved?

> We have developed and maintained a network of several hundred people with an interest in evaluation in Ireland.

11. Lessons learned: Recommendations/ tips to others for good practices on how to organize and sustain VOPEs like yours.

> - We were at our most active/successful in the mid 2000s when we managed to receive a small government grant which supported our seminars and conferences. Since then it has been more challenging.

12. Next steps: What does your organization plan to do next?

We have been relatively inactive of late. We have consulted with the membership to see what the level of interest is in future events. The level of interest expressed was high in its support for the maintenance of an independent network.

The top three preferred activities for the network were listed as: (1) providing opportunities for knowledge sharing among practitioners, commissioners, academics and others; (2) stimulating debate on evaluation; and (3) promoting ethical and professional standards. The top three preferred offerings were (1) online resources; (2) periodic seminars (with lunch time most popular time); and (3) regular e newsletter.

13. Willing to share with other VOPEs? For example, would you be interested in forming peer-to-peer partnerships with one or more other VOPEs to share lessons learned, advise each other? If so, describe what you would be willing to share / advice you would seek.

In principle yes, but time availability would likely be a real issue.

14. Suggestions: What ideas do you have for what should be included in activities of the EvalPartners Initiative?

15. Want to be actively involved? Does your VOPE want to be actively involved in EvalPartners? If so, in what ways?

As in Q.13