

Building the Foundation for the CES Professional Designation Program

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Abstract: *This article provides the historical and conceptual context of the CES professional designation program. It highlights the noteworthy debates, controversies, and deliberations in Canada and the United States that culminated in the decision by CES National Council to find a feasible approach to professional designation. The article outlines the crucial contributions of key CES initiatives, such as the Essential Skills Series, Core Body of Knowledge Project, and Member Surveys, by drawing on the experience of those CES members who led these efforts.*

Keywords: *foundation of professional designation, history of professional designation, professional designation development, professional designation debates*

Résumé : *Cet article présente le contexte historique et conceptuel du Programme des titres professionnels de la SCÉ. Il souligne les débats notables, les controverses, et les délibérations au Canada et aux États-Unis qui ont mené le Conseil national de la SCÉ à chercher une approche appropriée en vue de créer des titres professionnels. En se fiant à l'expérience des membres de la SCÉ responsables, l'auteur souligne la contribution cruciale des principales initiatives de la SCÉ comme la Série des compétences essentielles, le Projet de connaissances essentielles, et les sondages auprès des membres.*

Mots clés : *fondation de la désignation professionnelle, historique de la désignation professionnelle, développement de la désignation professionnelle, débats sur la désignation professionnelle*

Are you proud to be known as a program evaluator? You should be. According to the *U.S. News & World Report*, program evaluator is one of the “best-kept secret careers” today (Nemko, 2008). It surfaced as a “hidden gem” that scored well on the “best careers” selection criteria, such as national median pay, job satisfaction, prestige, and job market outlook. The article explained that program evaluators not only enjoy high status and a good income, they also have solid job satisfaction because they answer important questions, evaluate a wide

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variety of programs, and play an important role in making programs better or assessing whether programs are worth hard-earned taxpayer or donor money. What education, training, experience, and skills does someone need to pursue a prestigious and well-paid career as an evaluator? According to the article, not much of anything. In fact, a headline boldly states that it is possible to become a program evaluator with only a bachelor's degree and no special training. Lack-
ing advanced technical skills? No worries there either. You can readily hire a consultant to supply them for you—even though the small print acknowledges that some projects require evaluators with advanced graduate degrees from specialized training programs.

Aimed at the general public, this popularized assessment of a career as a program evaluator in the *U.S. News & World Report* succinctly captures several of the persistent paradoxes faced by the evaluation field over the past 50 years—paradoxes that have stoked the demand for a professional designation. Although evaluation continues to grow rapidly around the world, why does it remain a best-kept secret? Although evaluators enjoy respect and good pay, why do the qualifications and competencies required by evaluators seem either obscure or utterly commonplace? Although evaluators shape important policy and program decisions and influence the allocation of countless millions of dollars, why does it appear that virtually anyone can assume the mantle of an evaluator, irrespec-
tive of his or her education, competencies, or experience in the evaluation field? Although national and regional evaluation associations in Canada, the United States, and the rest of the world continue to thrive and expand, why are they bereft of serious mechanisms for fostering and ensuring the expertise of evaluators and the quality of evaluation practice?

The decision by CES National Council to develop a Professional Designation Program (PDP) is the culmination of one of the most enigmatic and controversial quests in the history of the evaluation field. The development of the CES PDP was strongly influenced by the work of the early pioneers in the field, in both Canada and the United States. This seminal work from the 1960s to the turn of the century is likely less familiar to readers than efforts made during the last decade. As an eyewitness to many of the pivotal events, I will try in this article to illuminate the myths and realities, debates and initiatives, positive steps and dead ends that built the foundation for the Request for Proposals for an Action Plan for the CES PDP in 2006.

Because history is both collaborative and malleable, preparation for this article benefitted enormously from my discussions with many dedicated program evaluators in both Canada¹ and the United States² who shared their experiences of these historical events with me. Any shortcomings, of course, are mine alone. It is my hope that the lessons and observations from my journey will give useful guidance to other evaluation organizations that are planning to embark on a pro-
fessional designation quest of their own. Although my article draws the curtain in mid 2006, the article by [Halpern, Gauthier, and McDavid \(2015\)](#) in this special

issue continues the story of the CES PDP with the development of the Action Plan in 2006. This is followed by articles that detail additional important activities and events in the evolution of the CES PDP from 2006 to the present.

Table 1 provides an overview of the long history of pressures, innovations, discussions, and debates that lie behind the decision of the CES to embark on a professional designations initiative.

Table 1. Chronology of Major Events Leading to the RFP for the CES PDP from the 1960s to 2006

Time Period	Major Events
1960s	Birth of modern evaluation spurred by implementation of large-scale education and social programs in the United States and evaluation of the effectiveness of highly visible federal government programs by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada
Early 1970s	Concerns about the professional competency of evaluators
Mid 1970s	First evaluation groups formed in the Canada and the United States
Late 1970s	Evaluation societies begin work on evaluation standards and defining evaluator competencies, accompanied by fierce debates about the pros and cons of standards and competencies
1980s	CES and AEA formed to meet the needs of evaluators from the full range of disciplines and practice settings Initial evaluation standards developed and field-tested by several evaluation societies and organizations
1990s	Sweeping management innovations greatly increase demand for evaluation in government and nonprofit organizations and expand evaluation approaches, methods, and evaluation use CES National Council endorses the <i>Joint Committee Standards</i> CES disseminates <i>CES Guidelines for Ethical Conduct</i> and AEA releases <i>Guiding Principles for Evaluators</i> CES introduces the <i>Essential Skills Series</i> , the first nationally disseminated set of basic courses in evaluation that reflect Canadian approaches to evaluation and Canadian cases and resource materials CES and AEA commission background research and debate ways to develop evaluation as a profession, especially proposals for developing a professional designation AEA President Len Bickman encourages members to adopt certification, and AEA Board strikes a Task Force on Certification CES and AEA debates shift from whether to have a professional designation to an exploration of feasible approaches Jim Altschuld presents recommendations of AEA Task Force for a system of "voluntary credentialing" as a feasible option

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Table 1. (Continued)

Time Period	Major Events
Early 2000s	<p>CES launches Core Body of Knowledge (CBK) project to identify key evaluator competencies</p> <p>Evaluation researchers at the University of Minnesota begin a process for defining “essential evaluator competencies”</p> <p>Evaluation and evaluation societies expand rapidly worldwide; International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation formed; second international evaluation conference held in Toronto; the <i>Program Evaluation Standards</i> of the Joint Committee become the de facto international evaluation standards</p> <p>Gauthier, Borys, Kishchuk, and Roy conduct a series of high-quality online surveys, consultations, and conference panels that confirm the need for a professional designation by specific segments of the CES membership</p> <p>University of Minnesota evaluation researchers validate and refine their taxonomy of essential evaluator competencies into six major competency categories. Then the researchers “cross-walk” their competencies with the CES Essential Skills Series and the CES Core Body of Knowledge findings</p> <p>The Japan Evaluation Society uses the CES Essential Skills Series as framework to develop a program to train and certify school evaluators who have a “functional level” of evaluation competencies</p> <p>Centre of Excellence for Evaluation calls for greater evaluation capacity across government and for more evaluators with proper training and competencies</p>
May 2006	<p>CES National Member Services issues an RFP for “Fact Finding Regarding Evaluator Credentialing” to produce an action plan to aid in establishing a professional credentialing system including a member registry</p>

DAWN OF THE MODERN ERA OF EVALUATION

The implementation of large-scale education and social programs in the United States during the 1960s created an unprecedented demand for high-quality evaluations (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). About the same time, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, first under the leadership of Maxwell Henderson and then under J. J. Macdonell, began evaluating the effectiveness of highly visible federal government programs, using the latest social science methodology and then gaining media attention by publicly disseminating the findings (Segsworth, 1990). Management innovations, such as Management by Objectives (MBO) and the application of cybernetics and systems theory, promoted the use of evaluation feedback to guide and build organizations in all sectors. In both Canada and the United States, this period is known as the “First Boom in Evaluation” (Donaldson & Scriven, 2003), not only in recognition of the exceptional growth

in the number of evaluations and evaluators, but also for remarkable advances in knowledge about methods for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of policies and programs, especially the application of experimental and quasi-experimental designs, as well as the integration of evaluation into program decision-making and organizational design.

In the larger population centres in Canada and the United States, evaluators from similar disciplines were gathering and exchanging information on a regular basis. In Toronto, for example, there were thriving groups of evaluators from education, health, mental health, children's mental health, social services, corrections, and various provincial government departments and directly operated services who met with their colleagues several times per year, if not monthly. Likewise, established professional organizations, such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), began hosting evaluation sections or topical interest groups for their members. In short, disciplinary and/or sectoral groupings of evaluators appeared to be the typical state of affairs. Given this situation, what was more remarkable, to my mind, was the recognition on the part of so many evaluators that evaluation was sufficiently important and the body of evaluation knowledge was sufficiently unique, that they should work together to build the evaluation field and strengthen their own professional practices through exchanges with evaluators from diverse disciplines, sectors, and jurisdictions.

By the time the Evaluation Network (ENet) and the Evaluation Research Society (ERS) were formed in the mid 1970s, the brand new profession of program evaluation already had seven scholarly journals and thousands of evaluators drawn from many disciplines and practicing in diverse sectors. In 1981 CES was incorporated and, in 1986, ENet and ERS merged to become the American Evaluation Association (AEA). These evaluation societies marked the first efforts in Canada and the United States to form organizations that had the express mission to serve the needs of the growing number of evaluation professionals from the full gamut of disciplines and practice settings, rather than serving only a narrower group, such as educational evaluators, mental health evaluators, or evaluators in large consulting firms. During a time when print media and ordinary mail were the main channels of communications, the needs of evaluation professionals were basic but essential, such as information about evaluation conferences and courses, relevant evaluation publications, and employment opportunities.

Already at this early stage, major tensions were emerging that would colour the debates regarding a professional designation for decades to come. These tensions encompassed conflicting views about the definition and nature of evaluation as a profession, managing the potential dominance of powerful interest groups, hesitancy about the inclusion of internal evaluators and part-time evaluators, and conflict with those who questioned the supremacy and limitations of the social science or economic approaches to evaluation. Moreover, there was the fear that the evaluation field would "follow the money" and that, instead of "speaking truth to power," evaluators would "support the truth of power." From my vantage point these perceived threats were largely real but not adequately addressed at the time, leading to ongoing fear and conflict. Although the evaluation field has largely

resolved these early issues, others have replaced them. The lesson, however, is the same: fundamental issues need to be addressed and resolved before a professional designation can progress from vision to reality.

WORRIES ABOUT EVALUATORS' COMPETENCIES GROW

The need for a professional designation for evaluators was one of the contentious themes that first appeared in this early dawn of the modern evaluation era. Although the demand for evaluation was growing rapidly in Canada and the United States during the First Boom, so were the burgeoning worries that too many evaluators with inadequate competency were designing evaluations that lacked usefulness and relevance. As tangible proof, already by the early 1970s, the professional competency of evaluators was such a concern that AERA was considering the feasibility of requiring the certification of educational evaluators ([Worthen, 1972](#)).

In 1977, only a year after the ERS was founded, several government agencies approached it to work with them on the development of evaluation standards ([Anderson, 1982](#)). Although the Lilly Foundation was funding the drafting of standards for educational evaluation, the government agencies wanted standards that could be applied to a broad range of sectors (health, education, law enforcement, urban planning), as well to different forms of evaluation (needs assessment, formative evaluation, program monitoring, impact evaluation). The ERS Task Force on Standards was struck. Two of its members were Canadian evaluators: one from the mental health sector in Ontario and the other from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

Importantly, evaluation standards and evaluator competencies were seen as two sides of the same coin: standards defined the key elements required for effective and efficient *evaluations*, whereas competencies defined the knowledge and skills required for effective and efficient *evaluators*. As a result, defining evaluator competencies was one of the main issues on the table during the initial work on the ERS standards. Of equal importance, the advantages and disadvantages of evaluation standards and competencies identified by the ERS Task Force in 1977 are nearly the same ones that persisted during the professional designation debates over the next 40 years.

On the positive side, according to [Anderson \(1982\)](#), standards and competencies were perceived to have important advantages: standards and competencies developed by the profession had the potential to generate better evaluations, lead to better theory, guide the training of evaluators, provide a yardstick against which funding agencies could measure proposals and evaluation deliverables, and facilitate productive negotiations between evaluators and their employers regarding evaluation designs. On the negative side, concerns were raised that standards and competencies were premature because the evaluation field was too

young and evaluators didn't agree about the definition of evaluation or the scope and content of the standards or competencies. There were fears that minimum standards and competencies would become normative (maximum) and lead to inferior evaluations, and that standards might constrain the growth of evaluation theory and methodology.

At the same time, initial work was being completed on evaluation standards for educational programs ([Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1981](#)), a process that also involved Canadian evaluators. CES later applied the lessons learned from the development of the ERS Standards ([Rossi, 1982](#)) and the Joint Committee Standards ([Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1981, 1994](#)) to the development of the CES PDP. For example, these committees worked cooperatively by comparing and field-testing each other's standards (i.e., cross-walked the standards). They made intentional efforts to consult broadly with evaluators and other stakeholders who were not part of the formal committees. They found that attention to process rather than procedure was necessary to develop robust and widely accepted standards. Both committees took care that the standards were general enough so they could evolve over time, but prescriptive enough to improve the quality of evaluations.

A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS

The 1990s heralded a series of “fortunate events” that had a profound effect on the field of evaluation. In my opinion, these fortunate events paved the way for the development and acceptance of the CES PDP initiative. By 1990, both CES and AEA saw promoting evaluation as a profession to be a key element of their missions. By that time, evaluation had its own knowledge base, training programs, and professional associations. Evaluation was emerging rapidly as a specialty area and also growing quickly worldwide, as evidenced by the first international evaluation conference that was held in Vancouver in 1995 and brought together more than 1,600 evaluators from 65 countries ([Love & Russon, 2000](#)).

In my view, the first “fortunate event” was a series of profound innovations in the management and design of private, public, and nonprofit organizations. Each of these innovations had some form of evaluation either at its core or as a necessary component of its implementation. For government and nonprofits, these innovations were driven by several initiatives, such as New Public Management ([Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000](#)), Results-Based Management, Outcomes Measurement, and/or by legislation, such as the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) (P.L. 103-62), a United States law enacted in 1993. These innovations were further popularized by books such as *Reinventing Government* ([Osborne & Gaebler, 1993](#)) and by publications and training events of major funding bodies, such as the United Way of Canada and the United Way of America.

These management innovations cast a strong spotlight on evaluation as essential for accountability and program improvements, as well as an integral part of organizational learning and a key aspect of democratic institutions. These

innovations continued throughout the 1990s and created a very strong demand for evaluation expertise. They opened a career path for evaluators and allied professionals (program analysts, knowledge management specialists), increased the status of the evaluation profession, and broadened the purposes for and approaches to evaluation. They set the stage for a major expansion of evaluation across the globe during the first decade of the 21st century. More importantly, these innovations helped to create the “Second Boom in Evaluation” that began in the 1990s and continues to this day ([Donaldson & Scriven, 2003](#)). Coupled with retirements, the Second Boom created a fertile ground for the CES PDP by bringing new and often inexperienced individuals into the field—ones who were eager to increase their competencies and find a structured way to build their careers as evaluators.

The second “fortunate event” in the 1990s was the endorsement by CES National Council of the *Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs* ([Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994](#)). This was the second edition of the *Standards*, which were originally disseminated in 1981. Since the late 1980s, the CES Standards Development Committee had been exploring the implications of adopting standards and competencies for program evaluation in Canada. In 1991, Daniel Caron, with the support of the Office of the Comptroller General of Canada, completed a study of the knowledge and skills needed by evaluators to meet evaluation standards and perform the various tasks of an evaluator ([Caron, 1993](#)). This exploration reflected the commitment of CES to achieving its objective of promoting the practice of quality evaluation of public and private programs across the country. CES held the strong belief that evaluators from different disciplines and practice settings shared common concerns about the quality of evaluation. This conviction led to a search for standards, codes of conduct, and competencies to guide program evaluation practice and focus attention on issues facing the emerging evaluation profession.

The [Canadian Evaluation Society Standards Development Committee \(1992\)](#) noted that professional organizations often adopt standards to ensure minimum levels of quality and their services, to define exclusive domains of practice, to be able to protect their members in litigation, and/or to promote a collective sense of professional identity. To the extent that the adoption of standards for program evaluation in Canada could achieve such aims, it could be a powerful tool for the development of the profession. Even so, experiences in the United States had shown that the adoption of evaluation standards was not a trivial matter. At stake was the definition of the profession, an understanding of its commitments, and clarifying the extent that the professional society will shape the work of its members. Although there might be much to gain in terms of improving Canadian evaluation practice, there were concerns about the possible loss of professional liberty and innovation, and costs of developing and maintaining the standards.

In my opinion, there were several key process factors that encouraged the adoption of the Joint Committee’s *Program Evaluation Standards* ([Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994](#)) as the overall program evaluation standards by CES. These process factors ensured that the second edition of the *Standards* were relevant to a broad range of Canadian evaluation settings and also

offer important strategies for organizations contemplating a professional designation program of their own. Of primary importance, the CES was fully engaged in developing the *Standards* as a sponsor organization, one of 17 members from 12 professional associations. Not only did CES have equal status with the other partners, but the *Standards* were deliberately intended to also be relevant in Canada as well as the United States. Next, the Joint Committee is a volunteer organization and numerous Canadian volunteers were widely involved over a period of years in writing and vetting the *Standards* and in quality control and improvement efforts. Further, the Joint Committee adopted a “task force” approach that coupled strong leadership, a clear mandate, and flexible use of volunteers from the sponsoring organizations in a time-limited and focused way to achieve the project mission and goals. This proved to be an efficient and effective way to manage an inclusive and consensus-driven project that relied upon a large number of volunteers from many organizations. Lastly, the Joint Committee followed principles that addressed concerns expressed by the members of both CES and AEA that the *Standards* would be credible and legitimate by fairly representing the full range of evaluation practice and not be dominated by one set of interests or perspectives. For example, there were explicit principles that mandated the involvement of professional organizations, government agencies, and the general public in the process and intentionally prevented its dominance by special interests. Participants included evaluators and also those who commissioned, used, or were affected by the results of evaluations.

The third “fortunate event” was the dissemination of the *CES Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* a few years later with the express purpose of making the principles for ethical evaluations clear to CES members and those who commission, fund, or use evaluations. Work on the *CES Guidelines* began in 1988 with a series of consultations with the CES chapters, followed by a discussion paper, additional chapter consultations, panel discussions at the CES annual conference in 1994, and then circulation of the draft version of the *CES Guidelines* to the membership accompanied by a feedback questionnaire. This was the same year that the AEA released the *Guiding Principles for Evaluators* but the decision was taken to continue work on the *CES Guidelines*. Two years later, CES National Council approved and disseminated the final version of the *CES Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* ([Canadian Evaluation Society, 1996](#)). It was integrated into the CES Essential Skills Series of professional development courses shortly afterwards.

In my view, the fourth “fortunate event” was the design and pilot testing of the Essential Skills Series (ESS) by the CES Ontario chapter in response to the findings of a needs assessment of members. Nearly one half of the respondents wanted training in basic evaluation knowledge and skills (e.g., principles of evaluation design) that reflected the Canadian context ([Love, 1994](#)). The original ESS was a series of four short courses on basic evaluation topics delivered by highly qualified Canadian university faculty who were also experienced evaluators. The ESS featured Canadian examples, case studies, and resources. Participants who completed the four courses received a “certificate” from CES. The ESS proved successful, and it continues to be updated and delivered to this day. Some of the reasons cited for the success of the ESS when it was released for presentation nationally

across Canada included provision for some modifications for specific audiences and provincial/territorial variations. There was recognition of the strong network of CES chapters across Canada that administered the ESS and selected local facilitators. The CES National Professional Development Committee implemented a process for frequent updating and improvement of the ESS. The original design of the ESS also had a provision for the accreditation of specific educational institutions and other organizations to deliver the ESS courses with the approval of CES. Although this accreditation process was never implemented in Canada, it became a key aspect of the Japan Evaluation Society's accreditation and certification scheme for school evaluators (Nagao, Kuji-Shikatani, & Love, 2005).

DEBATES ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATIONS

In terms of the CES PDP initiative, the last “fortunate event” of the 1990s was a series of intense and sustained background research efforts and debates commissioned by CES and AEA regarding the professional designation of evaluators. The process began in 1994 as an examination of certification and licensure and culminated in 1999 with a proposal by the AEA Task Force on Certification for a system of “voluntary credentialing” for evaluators. The shift in focus from certification and licensure to credentialing had a profound effect on the direction of the CES PDP.

In the 1990s the CES and AEA, as national evaluation organizations, faced the challenge of how to develop evaluation as a profession and promote an appropriate level of professionalism. Since their inception, both CES and AEA were under pressure because evaluation had not yet achieved the status of a full profession. A full profession is an occupation that has the legal power (i.e., licensure) to control access to the profession, enforce its performance standards and ethical codes, and exercise control over graduate training programs by a process of accreditation (Love, 1994). Many CES and AEA members, however, felt it would be more appropriate to view evaluation as a new profession (also known as an *emergent profession*). Because the absence of legal power to regulate itself and discipline its members is the major difference between a new profession and an established profession (Hodson & Sullivan, 2011), these CES and AEA members felt that the administrative costs and risks of potential litigation were not worth the benefits of becoming a full profession (Long & Kishchuk, 1997; Smith, 1999; Worthen, 1994, 1999). Although members of new professions may have considerable autonomy, one drawback is that they are more likely to be constrained by the policies and guidelines of their practice settings and more accountable to managers or supervisors, rather than to their profession alone. This did not appear to be a compelling concern in Canada, however, because nearly 50% of CES members were internal evaluators who worked for the federal or provincial governments and already had similar constraints affecting their employment (Borys, Gauthier, Kishchuk, & Roy, 2005). In recent years, moreover, the distinctions between established professions and new professions has been becoming more fluid: courts or government often recognize members of new professions as expert professionals; the public may give

new professions respect and legitimacy; and many new professions have codes of ethics, standards, and some form of professional designation or licensure ([Hodson & Sullivan, 2011](#)). In short, some felt that positioning evaluation as a new profession carried most of the benefits but limited the risks of a full profession and it gave evaluation the flexibility to capitalize on its strengths and develop a practical but meaningful approach to a professional designation.

In 1994, former CES President Arnold Love wrote an article, "Should evaluators be certified?" in a special issue of *New Directions for Program Evaluation* that was focused on the preparation of professional evaluators. One of Love's suggestions, a professional development approach, foreshadowed the CES Credentialled Evaluator program discussed in this issue. [Love \(1994\)](#) argued that instead of licensure based on regulation, the professional development approach based on the strengthening of evaluation-related competencies would have practical advantages for the new profession of evaluation. Some advantages included clarifying the professional identity of evaluators, expanding inclusiveness by embracing evaluators trained in diverse disciplines and with different levels of evaluation responsibility, permitting a flexible combination of formal and informal professional development activities, and giving evaluators incentives to upgrade their knowledge and skills continuously.

In 1995, [Saunders and Bickman \(1995\)](#) proposed that the AEA develop a voluntary system of certification. During his presidential address, Len Bickman emphasized that he supported certification because it would establish a clearer identity for evaluation as a profession and AEA as an organization ([Bickman, 1997](#)). The AEA struck a Task Force on Certification, with Jim Altschuld at the head, that examined the literature, surveyed the AEA membership, submitted a final report to the Board in 1997 ([Altschuld, 1997](#)), and organized debates about certification at the 1997 and 1998 AEA annual conferences.

Although the focus of the Task Force was certification, Jim Altschuld raised the important distinction between certification and credentialing in his interim memorandum to the AEA Board ([Altschuld, 1996](#)). Credentialing required a person to complete certain educational and experience requirements (e.g., practicums, evaluation projects), whereas certification required the testing of skills and competencies. In his view, credentialing better suited the majority of evaluators who were trained in different disciplines and did not have degrees in evaluation. As will be seen below, this important distinction between credentialing and certification had substantial impact on ideas about professional designation in both Canada and the United States.

In 1997, Len Bickman, then president of the American Evaluation Association, asked if Altschuld would lead a task force investigating what would be necessary to create a process for certifying evaluators. Bickman stated that credentialing and certification are processes that can help the field of evaluation establish a clearer identity as a profession. Bud Long and Natalie Kishchuk presented a report to CES National Council that summarized the key aspects of professional designations, the issues debated by other professional organizations, and the feasibility

of various options for professional designation in the Canadian context ([Long & Kishchuk, 1997](#)).

The same year, the AEA Board received the draft report about the certification of evaluators from the Task Force on Certification ([Altschuld, 1997](#)). As a follow-up to the report, Blaine Worthen and Jim Altschuld organized an important debate at the 1998 AEA annual conference about the key issues regarding certification and credentialing for evaluators. CES members participated in this debate, sharing their ideas about professional designations and their experiences about the value of the CES Essential Skills Series as a way of improving the quality of evaluations and evaluators' competencies across Canada. The often-heated discussions probed deeply the strengths and weaknesses of the reasons in support of professional designations, such as protection of the public and the evaluation field, enhancing the credibility of evaluators, and better clarification about evaluation and the core values and knowledge of the profession. For the interested reader, [Jim Altschuld \(1999a\)](#) wrote an article offering a very useful summary of the issues debated during that session and the various arguments supporting and opposing each position.

In 1999, CES National Council commissioned a survey to obtain the perceptions and opinions of clients and employers of evaluators about the advantages and disadvantages of certification ([Stierhoff, 1999](#)). The response rate to the pilot survey in three provinces and the National Capital Chapter was too low to continue with the full survey. According to the interviewers, a considerable number of potential respondents were not interested in the issues about the certification of evaluators and refused to complete the questionnaire. During the same year, AEA conducted a survey of its members to get a sense whether a certification process was necessary and if it would be effective ([Jones & Worthen, 1999](#)). The response rate to this survey was also very low. The AEA members who responded were not confident that a certification process was necessary or that it would be effective. Although the paucity of data did not allow the results to be generalized, the absence of demand for certification among the respondents was clear.

An important lesson learned from these surveys regarding certification of both the CES and AES memberships is that these surveys were hampered by low response rates and insufficient data to accurately analyze findings according to demographics and other factors. In contrast, a few years later, CES employed well-constructed online surveys that had good return rates and were reported in ways that engaged the majority of CES members. These surveys marked a giant step forward in obtaining accurate information that proved essential in guiding the professional designation initiatives of CES.

THE SHIFT FROM CERTIFICATION TO VOLUNTARY CREDENTIALING

In 1999, the tenor of discussions about professional designations began to change. Up to that time, the major debates were focused on whether or not evaluators, or the evaluation field, needed a professional designation based on

certification. Based on feedback from small numbers of evaluators who participated in debates and surveys, it was clear that some evaluators felt strongly that certification was necessary, but others did not. By 1999, the idea of the importance of some form of professional designation began to be accepted in principle, but its feasibility was uncertain. As a consequence, articles, discussions, debates, and fact-finding missions began to closely examine alternative solutions instead of certification.

To illustrate this shift, in an article highlighting the recommendations of the Task Force on Certification to the AEA Board, [Jim Altschuld \(1999b\)](#) suggested that AEA adopt “voluntary credentialing” approach. In a companion article, [Altschuld \(1999a\)](#) noted:

But there is that one unfinished piece of business—credentialing (and certification). Can we continue to think of evaluation as a field or an emerging profession and still have the situation where anyone who wants to call themselves an evaluator can simply do so? That situation is unsettling and not tenable. Indeed, we must conclude that there is an imperative that we attend to this problem. (p. 516)

In this article, Altschuld made his case for the advantages of credentialing compared to certification. Some notable advantages of credentialing were a shorter development period, less expense, affordability even with moderate participation rates, absence of examinations, reduced risk from legal challenges, and greater chance of acceptance by the membership.

In short order, several influential evaluators supported the move toward credentialing. A few years earlier, as AEA President, Len Bickman had established a Task Force on Certification ([Bickman, 1997](#)). When [Altschuld \(1999b\)](#) tabled his report to the AEA Board supporting credentialing instead of certification, Bickman urged evaluators to be bold and adopt Altschuld's proposal. Bickman felt that a profession designation process, whether credentialing or certification, was a way to better define the field of evaluation by describing its unique body of knowledge and competencies. He also felt that a professional designation would establish AEA as the premier organization in evaluation.

As a veteran of the professional designation debates since the 1970s, Blaine Worthen had first-hand experience with the pessimism, concerns, and frank opposition to certification of evaluators over the decades. Even so, he concluded that certification based on competencies was essential for evaluation to reach its full potential and attain the status of a full profession. [Worthen \(1999\)](#) voiced his view that it was not certification at issue, but how to develop a certification process. In this regard, he supported credentialing as a reasonable step toward a certification program:

My earlier criticisms of credentialing were only intended to point out that it is a less desirable alternative, not to suggest that it would be of no benefit at all. As an interim measure, some type of credentialing such as [Altschuld \(1999a\)](#) proposes could be very useful indeed, if marked clearly as a placeholder for a better system. (p. 554)

COMPETENCIES AND CORE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

As the 1990s drew to a close and the new century began, the major remaining obstacle to a professional designation was defining the unique competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes) of effective program evaluators. Since the 1970s there had been a general pessimism that evaluators, trained as they were in many different disciplines and specializations and through many diverse methods, would agree on a common set of competencies relevant to the quality of their practice.

A group of evaluation researchers at the University of Minnesota recognized the importance of defining competencies for effective evaluators as being distinct from defining the standards and guiding principles for effective evaluations. The breakthrough occurred when they devised a systematic process for identifying what they called the *Essential Evaluator Competencies* and validating them by empirical consensus building among diverse evaluators ([King, Minnema, Ghere, & Stevahn, 1999](#); [King, Stevahn, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001](#); [Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005a, 2005b](#)). Their work is of special importance because it became the model of competencies in the CES PDP. The reader will find details about the foundational work on competency identification in the article by Jean King in this special issue.

In 2001, CES National Council commissioned a *Core Body of Knowledge* (CBK) project to support its advocacy efforts and to guide the professional development activities of CES and individual evaluators. The CBK project identified the theories, skills, and effective practices needed to plan, implement, and report on valid and reliable evaluations of the programs of governments, other public sector agencies and organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and businesses. In the CBK report, Rochelle Zorzi and her colleagues ([Zorzi, Perrin, McGuire, Long, & Lee, 2002](#)) described the key benefits, outputs, and knowledge elements essential for high-quality evaluations. An innovative aspect of the CBK project was the extensive use of online consultations with CES members, two discussion sessions with delegates at the CES 2002 National Conference, and online consultations with members of an international expert reference panel. In addition to identifying key benefits of evaluation, the activities needed to generate those benefits, and several knowledge elements that evaluators employ in their work, the CBK project illustrated that the engagement process itself forged important links among evaluators and generated valuable discussions about evaluation among the participants.

SURVEYS AND SOUNDINGS

In 2005 Borys, Gauthier, Kishchuk, and Roy presented the results of a national online survey that described the professional and practice profiles of program evaluators in Canada, their views of their working conditions, and their sense of belonging to the field of evaluation. These findings from over 1,000 respondents also appear in an article by [Gauthier, Borys, Kishchuk, and Roy \(2006\)](#). This same team of evaluators frequently took soundings of the CES members' views about professional designations using well-constructed and administered surveys with

adequate sample sizes. In summary, the results of these surveys showed a pattern that a professional designation would be supported by those CES members who were more deeply involved in evaluation, were younger and had the fewest years in the workforce, planned to stay in the field, and felt that they belonged to a community of evaluators.

STRENGTHENING EVALUATION IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

In 2005, Gussman Associates released a report that summarized the developments and trends in program evaluation in the context of evolving public service management challenges, including expenditure review, new management frameworks, and a need for greater public sector accountability. The report urged the creation of an evaluation identity separate from internal audit, including separately defined criteria and standards for evaluators and auditors and separate administration of the evaluation and internal audit functions. It recommended the development and promotion of appropriate professional standards, competencies, and training for evaluators. To ensure evaluators had sufficient skills and education, the report suggested the creation of a supportive education and training scheme. Evaluators within government would be expected to demonstrate a defined skill set and effectively apply appropriate evaluation approaches to specific evaluation situations. The report also mentioned the use of a national partnership between the federal government and university-based programs that would accredit programs throughout Canada to provide entry-level training and certification of evaluators who worked for the federal government.

During the same time, a small group of evaluators was actively speaking with potential partners in different sectors about the professional designation. This kept lines of communication open and provided rapid feedback about the feasibility of various options. Brad Cousins and Tim Aubry worked with partners in government. Jim Halpern and Jim McDavid reached out to professional private evaluators and to academic evaluator scholars, and Jim Cullen was the CES representative on the Joint Committee during their work on the third revision of the *Program Evaluation Standards*.

USE OF COMPETENCIES FOR GUIDANCE AND TRAINING

In the same year, McGuire and Zorzi (2005) wrote an article that approached competencies from the viewpoint of a consulting organization. The authors provided a detailed list of the evaluation competencies needed, an appraisal form for an employee to evaluate himself/herself against them, a form for determining the quality of an individual's work, and a discussion of how such measures might be linked together for enhancing skill levels and staff development. The authors noted that the competencies might be used for hiring decisions, identifying organizational competencies, and forming evaluation teams.

Also in 2005, Jim Altschuld published a synthesis of his thoughts about professional designations in the *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. Altschuld voiced support for a conference or a specialized workshop that would “cross-walk” or forge the multiple listings of skills and competencies into a unified perspective about the evaluation field and what it means to be an evaluator. Altschuld also observed that his review of credentialing showed that there was not a single training program at a university or institute in Canada or the United States that could graduate an individual with all the skills, competency levels, and field experiences necessary to be a skilled evaluator. He suggested that it might be better to use the competencies as a guide to help novice evaluators choose relevant courses from multiple disciplines, such as an evaluation course in education, methodology courses in psychology and statistics, cost-benefit analyses in economics, and public policy courses from political science. Furthermore, Altschuld suggested that the list of competencies could be a helpful reference when assessing the relevance of university, professional development, and continuing education programs for the practice of evaluation at different levels of competence.

This part of the story of the CES PDP draws to a close in May 2006, when the Member Services Committee issued an RFP (request for proposal) to obtain assistance/research into professionalizing evaluation through options for professional designations. The story resumes in the next article ([Halpern, Gauthier, & McDavid, 2015](#)).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In his book *An Astronaut’s Guide to Life on Earth*, Chris Hadfield shares his advice to “focus on the journey, not on arriving at a certain destination.” Let’s apply his advice to the journey that laid the foundation for the CES PDP over a 50-year period from the mid 1960s until 2006. What have we learned from that journey?

The perfect is the enemy of the good. For many years, the evaluation field saw status as a full profession, such as medicine and law, as the Holy Grail. Not only did this pursuit divide the membership and raise the spectre of endless lawsuits, but also it resulted in a vicious cycle of highly polarized debates followed by periods of pessimism and inaction. On the other hand, framing evaluation as a new profession, one that is creative and dynamic, that guides rather than regulates, opens the possibility for more flexible ways of ensuring the quality of evaluations. It also opens the option that some evaluators, but not all, may choose to attain a professional designation.

Understand the key concepts regarding professional designation. Evaluation has had a long history of confusing terminology that can mislead or obscure. Any serious student of professional designations would benefit from carefully reviewing the language of professional designations and become a master of the key terms and concepts: credentialing, certification, licensure, accreditation, and a host of supporting ones (e.g., vocation, professional development, regulation).

Standards and competencies are two sides of the same coin. At the dawn of the modern era of evaluation, the nascent evaluation organizations understood

that standards for program evaluations and competencies for program evaluators were two sides of the same coin. That knowledge took a big sleep for decades, it seemed, but now it has emerged as one of the major lessons of the CES PDP.

Move forward by driving backwards. The history of the CES PDP is one of gradually building momentum, through a combination of fortuitous events and level thinking, leading to important breakthroughs. It didn't always look like progress, and sometimes it felt like failure. In many respects, the stuttering progress was reminiscent of the Mars rover *Opportunity* that was able to continue over 6 years on a mission originally planned for 6 months by driving slowly backwards on its damaged wheels. For example, as the professional designation deliberations continued over the years, suddenly there was a shift in sentiment, and a critical mass appeared in favour of professional designations. Suddenly the question became "How?" and not "Should we?" No longer was the PDP rover stuck in a crater; it had lurched free. Once a critical mass was attained, the lesson was to move ahead right away.

There is strength in collaboration. The early history of the CES PDP reads like an ode to collaboration. CES and its members became the long-term winners as a result of countless efforts by CES to build consensus, employ efficient task forces, and consult broadly. CES also benefitted from collaboration with AEA and its indefatigable members who would not let the dream of a professional designation vanish. Going back to the Mars rover example again, when *Opportunity* struggled with a massive failure of its main computer memory, it had to switch to its redundant back-up memory and eventually bootstrap its main memory into functioning. The CES "bootstrap" efforts were helped greatly by back-up support from and progress made by AEA and vice versa. Moreover, even if the CES PDP were to cease tomorrow, the benefits from careful attention to collaboration and consultative processes would continue to live.

As a final remark, in 2015, the International Year of Evaluation, we will celebrate the 50 years that have elapsed since program evaluation began to emerge as a distinct field of practice in Canada and the United States. Both the CES and AEA still see promoting evaluation as a profession and improving evaluation practices as key elements of their missions. Together these two evaluation societies serve nearly 10,000 members, and they have worked in close partnership over the decades in many ways, particularly in the development of evaluation standards and the drafting of competencies for evaluators. I hope that achieving a professional designation will endure as one of their proudest achievements, both now and in the future.

NOTES

- 1 In preparing this article, my recall of the historical context leading to the CES PDP benefitted greatly by reading articles and reports produced by many dedicated Canadian evaluators and having in-depth discussions with them. The following deserve special mention for their direct contributions to this article: Brad Cousins, Jim Cullen,

Paul Favaro, Benoît Gauthier, Gerald Halpern, Keiko Kuji-Shikatani, John Mayne, Jim McDavid, Martha McGuire, Robert Segsworth, and Rochelle Zorzi.

2 Because the evolution of thinking about professional designations for evaluators in Canada was closely intertwined with similar efforts in the United States, the views, writings, and sheer persistence of the following American evaluators were crucial in shaping my thinking over the decades: Jim Altschuld, Len Bickman, Jean King, Jim Sanders, Michael Scriven, Midge Smith, Laurie Stevahn, Dan Stufflebeam, Craig Russell, Joe Wholey, and Blaine Worthen.

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Arnold Love, PhD, CE, began his career as a professional evaluator at the start of the modern era of evaluation in the 1960s and he continues to this day as an evaluation consultant working across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors in Canada and internationally. Arnold brings an eyewitness perspective over a 50-year period to the events, debates, and controversies that set the stage for the CES Professional Designation initiative. First as President of the CES Ontario chapter and Chair of the CES Professional Development Committee, and then as CES National President, Arnold contributed to the *CES Essential Skills Series* and supported its national rollout, participated in the drafting of the *CES Guidelines for Ethical Conduct* and the *Program Evaluation Standards*, spoke in the many debates sponsored by CES and AEA about professional designations for evaluators, and wrote the seminal article, “Should evaluators be certified?” More recently, Arnold was a member of the consortium that wrote the *Action Plan for the CES PDP*. He is currently serving his second term on the CES Credentialing Board.