



*South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association's Evaluator Competencies
framework*

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The competency framework is not a static document. We hope that members will continue to engage with it, use it as it applies to their context and needs. We invite SAMEA membership (government, academia, private sector, independent evaluators and those who are in the wider Monitoring and Learning sector) and partners to share their experience and reflections as they use the framework. This will help us in the future when we review the document.

Any comments/reflections can be sent to coordinator@samea.org.za

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Introduction

This document presents the 5th draft South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) evaluator competencies for practice in South Africa. Competencies are defined as:

Knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) that an individual must have to conduct high quality evaluation (Wilcox and King 2014 in Peersman and Rogers, 2017:25)

The 54 competencies are spread over 5 competency domains: a) Professional Practice, b) Technical Practice, c) Context (global, national, local and organisational), d) Managing an Evaluation and e) Interpersonal.

Rationale for defining evaluator competencies

South Africa is not ready to professionalise evaluation using gate keeping approaches such as certification. The country is also not ready to adopt approaches such as credentialing followed by CES (Podems, 2015). As such, SAMEA has committed rather, to ‘strengthening evaluation and evaluators’ in South Africa with a view to improve the quality of evaluations. In a roadmap presenting a number of possible pathways for South Africa, Podems (2015) states that regardless of the pathway SAMEA chooses, there is a need to define evaluator competencies.

When presenting the rationale behind define evaluator competencies, only CES, UKES, UNEG and EES identify competencies as part of their professionalisation efforts (CES, 2010; UKES, 2013; EES, 2013; UNEG, 2016). However, there are commonalities among reasons given by VOPEs for developing competency frameworks: a) improving professional accountability, b) improving ethical practice, c) providing guidance for self-assessment as a first step towards relevant professional development and d) providing guidance to training providers (Stevahn et al 2005; King and Podems 2015; Wilcocks 2012; Tarsilla 2014; CES, 2009; ANZEA, 2011; AES, 2013; AEA, 2018). All these are linked to increasing and improving the pool of credible evaluators and the quality of evaluations.

A competency framework could support SAMEA efforts to strengthen evaluators and evaluation in South Africa by fulfilling a number of purposes shown in the Theory of Change in Appendix A. The purposes are listed below:

- a. providing evaluators with a tool for self-reflection for professional development;
- b. providing training providers guidance for curriculum development;
- c. providing guidance to commissioners of evaluations when developing TORs or RFPs when appointing external evaluators for assignments and

- d. providing organisations with guidance when designing jobs or crafting job descriptions when recruiting internal expertise.

Process followed in establishing SAMEA competencies

The SAMEA draft list of competencies has been developed through research, consultation of evaluation experts and SAMEA membership through various platforms such as the Listserve, the biennial conference and Eval Cafés. This process began towards the end of 2016. Key processes thus far include:

- a. **2016-2017:** a literature review and crosswalk of 9 existing competency frameworks (South Africa Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), American Evaluation Association (AEA), the Australasia Evaluation Society (AES), the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA), the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), the European Evaluation Society (EES), the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL), United Kingdom Evaluation Society (UKES). The Malaysia Evaluation Society (MES) MES framework for evaluation policy and standards and the Japan Evaluation Society (JES) Hiroshima pilot test for school evaluators were also cross-walked;
- b. **2016-2017:** a survey of post graduate M&E students on the first draft list of competencies emanating from the literature review and cross walk. This was followed by collection of feedback on the competencies from the AfrEA conference held in Uganda in 2017;
- c. **2017:** feedback was collected from SAMEA Listserve members and from the SAMEA Eval Café;
- d. **2018:** feedback was collected from SAMEA Listserve members, from the Eval Café and from the BRIDGE community of practice;
- e. **2019:** feedback was collected from SAMEA members at the SAMEA biennial conference held in Johannesburg in October 2019.
- f. **2020:** feedback was collected from M&E practitioners in development agencies such as the United Nations World Food Programme and UNICEF, virtually and from the SAMEA Board.

Principles guiding the competencies development process

Key principles such as extensive stakeholder engagement, iterative consultation and a respect for the country's context, have guided VOPEs in the process of developing their competency frameworks. Culture and cultural values were key in the process of developing the ANZEA competency framework (Wehipeihana et al, 2014). AES also recognised that it was important for them to cover values and culture in the development of their competency framework (AES, 2013). The SAMEA process is guided by: a) ubuntu, b) being intentional about having a consultative process, c) being intentional

about having an inclusive process and d) being intentional about arriving at a set of contextualized competencies.

Ubuntu is a principle widely recognised in South Africa. We are connected as individuals in the reality that 'I am because of who we all are'. This underscores the work evaluators do. There are evaluators in different sectors, different fields and with varying levels of experience. There are also individuals who practice evaluation or conduct evaluation related work but do not identify their primary role as that of 'evaluator'. Guided by the principle of being intentional about an inclusive process, this project seeks to include perspectives of evaluators in various sectors and stages of their careers. Inclusion is one of the principles upheld by other VOPEs in their processes. Closely linked inclusion, SAMEA is also guided by the principle of being intentional about a consultative process. This is in keeping with other principles within the South African context such as the Batho Pele. The fourth principle guiding the development of the framework is being intentional about a framework suitable for the South African context. Interventions and evaluations are shaped the context in which they occur and the framework has to reflect this reality. Pathways into evaluation differ (Engle and Altschuld, 2014). As is the case for ANZEA, SAMEA is taking into consideration that within the South African context, there are many pathways by which people enter the evaluation profession (Wehipeihana et al 2014). The importance of context is further reflected in the existing competency frameworks where contextual understanding is one of the competency domains (DPME, AEA, AES, ANZEA, CES).

What evaluation is being referred to

AEA state that their competency framework is focused on programme evaluation only and does not include policy or personnel evaluation (AEA, 2018). This boundary is essential when determining which competencies are to be include or excluded. The SAMEA competency framework has been focused on competencies for evaluators without delineating what sort of evaluation is being referred to. However, from the domains and competencies, it can be deduced that the competencies are referring to evaluators conducting an evaluation of a project or a programme. At the same time, there is nothing that excludes policy as the evaluand. As such, the definition by OECD below could be used to set the boundary. The two key factors are that what is being evaluated is either 'ongoing' or 'completed'.

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program, or policy, including its design, implementation, and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability' (OECD, 2002:21).

Relevance of competency framework: what is the key target group?

Competency frameworks are meant to be used by various evaluation stakeholder e.g. evaluators, commissioners of evaluations, employers/organisations and service providers offering training or capacity building programmes or courses. As shown by the SAMEA competencies Theory of Change, evaluators are the targeted group for capacity building by training providers or for hiring or appointment by commissioners of evaluations and organisations. Although there are other factors that will affect the quality of an evaluation, the evaluators' competencies are one of the key ingredients for a quality product. The competency framework is about those skills, knowledge and attitudes that evaluators must have. However, evaluators or individuals that conduct evaluation related work in South Africa are not a homogenous group. There are a number of differences that can affect the extent to which an evaluator or individual may locate him or herself within the competency framework. These are listed below:

1. external evaluators contracted to conduct an evaluation of an intervention for a specific set period;
2. external evaluators with a long-term relationship with the organisation e.g. being involved at project design as well as mid-term review of the intervention;
3. internal evaluators who sometimes lead evaluations and sometimes provide technical support and act as manager of an evaluation when they have an oversight role. They are also likely to be responsible for learning and knowledge management in the organisation;
4. internal evaluators who are mostly involved in the implementation stage of the project lifecycle and play a key role in monitoring of interventions. They may also be highly involved in tracking and reporting on outputs of the organisation compared to participating in evaluations;
5. increasingly, there are programmes and implementation team members that have M&E responsibilities within their job descriptions. They carry out monitoring tasks and participate in evaluations but they are not the M&E focal persons in their organisations;
6. individuals who conduct evaluation related work e.g. auditors or some subject matter experts e.g. engineers in WASH, but they do not primarily identify themselves as evaluators; and
7. evaluators whose work crosses the borders e.g. evaluators who evaluate multi-country of regional programmes that go beyond the South African borders.

Distinction of competency levels

At this stage, the SAMEA competency framework does not distinguish between the various levels of competency e.g. from 'entry level through' to 'expert'. This is similar to UKES, EES, CES, AEA and AES. Only the UNEG distinguishes between, a) senior officer, b) intermediate officer, c) officer and junior

officer (UNEG 2016). The distinctions made by the DPME framework are not for levels of competency but rather different roles: a) the programme manager, b) the M&E advisor and c) the evaluator (DPME 2012). While the need for this differentiation is acknowledged by IDEAS (2011), it is likely to be another stage if the framework development process that also requires time and human resources:

The set of IDEAS competencies for evaluators and managers of evaluation have not been slotted into different competence levels. It is also possible that each competency could be written so as to have variations for entry, intermediate, and advanced levels. As part of next steps, this issue will be revisited. (IDEAS 2016:9)

Language

Generally, VOPEs have steered away from using normative adjectives when describing the competencies. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are presented without stating that the evaluator has to have 'sound' or 'good' levels of that competency. SAMEA has taken the same route.

Which competencies should an evaluator possess?

The SAMEA competency framework is being developed with the understanding that an evaluator cannot be expected to have all the competencies. In some cases, an evaluator will be part of an evaluation team with members bringing different competencies to the task. In addition, required competencies will vary from evaluation to evaluation e.g. a qualitative study will not require quantitative analysis skills. As such, like AES (2013), the competency framework is seen as a 'menu rather than a check list'.

Summary of competency domains

The SAMEA framework has five competency domains: a) Professional Practice, b) Technical Practice, c) Context (global, national, local and organisational), d) Managing an Evaluation and e) Interpersonal. These are shown in the table below.

Competency domain	Description	Number of competencies
Professional practice	The knowledge and skills (<i>and values and practices</i>) evaluators need to be reflective; practice evaluation in line with guidelines and ethical codes relevant to their context and pursue continuous professional development	8
Technical practice	The knowledge and skills evaluators need to conduct systematic inquiry during an evaluation	20
Context	The knowledge and skills evaluators need to understand the circumstances and settings of evaluations and their stakeholders at various levels the evaluation context	10
Managing an evaluation	Project management skills evaluators needed to effectively negotiate, scope, manage and complete an evaluation	8

Interpersonal	Knowledge, skills and attitude evaluators need in order to effectively engage and communicate with stakeholders taking into consideration their culture and diversity	8
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Like in most of the frameworks, the five competency domains in the SAMEA framework are interrelated. Similar to the experience of ANZEA (2011), they also overlap. This was expected as there is less variance than expected in domains across competency frameworks (Imas, 2017). The levels of importance given to each of the competency domains by SAMEA (and other VOPEs) is still under review for this project. However, AES (2013) explicitly state that all the competencies in the other six domains are influenced by competencies in the domain 'Evaluative Attitude and Professional Practice'.

Competency framework

1. Competency Domain: Professional Practice

Domain description: The knowledge and skills (<i>and values and practices</i>) evaluators need to be reflective; practice evaluation in line with guidelines and ethical codes relevant to their context and pursue continuous professional development
1. Integrates key principles of professional documents (standards, ethical codes and guiding principles e.g. AFREA Evaluation Guidelines) in evaluation
2. Acts ethically throughout the evaluation process
3. Carries out on-going reflection on practice (e.g. about own experience, biases and values)
4. Respects the cultures represented in the evaluation throughout the evaluation process
5. Seeks opportunities to build own competence by pursuing continuous professional development
6. Builds the capacity of others as is appropriate (e.g. participatory evaluation processes, mentoring)
7. Stays informed about new thinking and best practices in the field of evaluation
8. Stays informed about the policies and developments in national and international agencies that influence evaluation (DPME, OECD-DAC, IOCE)

2. Competency Domain: Technical Practice

Domain description: The knowledge and skills evaluators need to conduct systematic inquiry during an evaluation
1. Uses key evaluation concepts
2. Develops appropriate evaluation questions
3. Understands different evaluation designs (e.g. experimental, quasi experimental and non-experimental)
4. Understands different evaluation types (e.g. process, outcome and impact)
5. Applies different evaluation approaches (e.g. utilization, theory-based, empowerment, Blue Marble) where required
6. Applies appropriate models and tools in the evaluation process

7. Understands the M&E system within an organization
8. Uses monitoring data to improve monitoring processes in the organisation and to inform evaluation processes
9. Recommends an appropriate methodology for the evaluation
10. Identifies required primary and appropriate secondary data sources
11. Applies relevant selection and/or sampling strategies
12. Utilises culturally appropriate data collection methods
13. Assesses data quality in terms of relevance, validity, timeliness, integrity, precision, and completeness
14. Analyses data in a rigorous and credible manner (quantitative and quantitative data)
15. Utilises appropriate technology for data collection, management, analysis and reporting
16. Interprets findings in a fair and balanced manner
17. Draws appropriate evaluation conclusions
18. Makes appropriate recommendations
19. Writes clear and credible evaluation reports
20. Utilises different strategies to promote evaluation use and uptake

3. Competency Domain: Context

Domain description: The knowledge and skills evaluators need to understand the circumstances and settings of evaluations and their stakeholders at various levels the evaluation context
1. Knows policies and institutions that shape the international development context in which the evaluand operates (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, Africa Agenda 2063, main development agencies)
2. Is responsive to changes in the evaluation context (global, national, local, organisational)
3. Understands the linkages between local, national and global contexts
4. Knows national M&E policies and frameworks (e.g. GWME framework)
5. Knows national development policies and principles (e.g. Ubuntu, Batho Pele, NDP)
6. Understands the sector policies and strategies (e.g. Health or Education) in South Africa relevant to evaluations he or she usually conducts or participates in
7. Has subject specific content knowledge (e.g. health, education) relevant to the evaluations he or she usually conducts or participates in
8. Understands the local community, relationships, and the local protocols and practices /culture
9. Takes into consideration the organizational structure and culture of the program during an evaluation
10. Understands the philosophy and ethos of the client and/or donor/funder organisation when he or she conducts evaluations

4. Competency Domain: Managing an Evaluation

Domain description: Project management skills evaluators needed to effectively negotiate, scope, manage and complete an evaluation
1. Responds to Terms of Reference for evaluations where required
2. Puts together a culturally competent evaluation team that has the relevant knowledge, skills and experience
3. Plans evaluation studies (proper work plans, identification of milestone and deliverables)

4. Develops an appropriate evaluation budget
5. Supervises or co-ordinates evaluation team members where necessary
6. Uses technology as appropriate to plan and manage the evaluation e.g. internet, virtual meeting and real time document sharing platforms
7. Puts in place culturally sensitive strategies to provide feedback to stakeholders and respondents
8. Delivers the evaluation report on time

5. Competency Domain: Interpersonal

Domain descriptions: Knowledge, skills and attitude evaluators need in order to effectively engage and communicate with stakeholders taking into consideration their culture and diversity
1. Acknowledges issues of diversity that are relevant to the evaluation
2. Engages all relevant stakeholders throughout the evaluation
3. Considers stakeholders' different worldviews, norms and values
4. Develops collaborative and co-operative relationships with project team members
5. Communicates (verbally and non-verbally) in a culturally responsive manner with stakeholders
6. Involves stakeholders in shared decision making
7. Manages conflict that may arise as a result of the evaluation
8. Disseminates findings to stakeholders in appropriate and culturally sensitive formats