

# The 15<sup>th</sup> European Evaluation Society Biennial Conference 2024

## Pre-Conference workshop proposal

**Course title:** Evaluation theories in action

**Level:** Intermediate to advanced

**Pre-requisites:** This course is targeted at evaluators who are seeking to challenge and extend their knowledge and skills in working collaboratively with stakeholders to select, combine and apply evaluation theories (aka models and approaches). There are two prerequisites: (1) Interest in the nature and application of evaluation theories and how they can inform practice; (2) Experience conducting evaluation in a range of contexts.

**Target number:** 20-25

**Technical support material:** No requirements beyond what is normally supplied at conference centres.

**Workshop description:** This workshop provides an overview of the origins and evolution of evaluation theory. Attention to theory in evaluation has focused predominantly on program theory and few evaluation practitioners have received formal training in evaluation theory. This workshop seeks to remedy this by introducing a framework for conceptualising different theories of evaluation and a set of criteria to support critical thinking about the practice-theory relationship in evaluation.

Emphasising the conference theme of *'Better together'* the workshop will focus on how evaluators can engage more collaboratively with commissioners, program staff, evaluation users, beneficiaries/consumers and other disciplines to include diverse values and perspectives about theory selection, methodology and its real-world application.

Participant will learn about:

- the nature and role of evaluation theory in supporting better evaluation practices
- major theoretical traditions, contemporary developments in evaluation theory and future directions
- old and new ways of classifying evaluation theories (e.g. generations, stages, trees, waves, gardens).
- key ways in which evaluation theories differ and what this means for practice in cross-cultural contexts
- dangers involved in relying too heavily on any one particular theory; and
- techniques for selecting and combining theories building on stakeholder values, experiences and situational analysis.

**Delivery methods/activities:** Case examples, role play, and group activities will be used to illustrate why evaluation theory matters and how different theoretical perspectives can inform, shape and guide the design and conduct of evaluations in different practice settings.

**Handout materials:** Participants will be provided with course notes and a reading pack three weeks prior to the workshop.

**History of versions of the workshop:** Prior versions of this workshop and content have been delivered to internal evaluators, evaluation consultants, evaluation students, commissioners, program staff and lived experience evaluators. This includes: Theories of

evaluation (4 times, ~20 participants at each); Debates in Evaluation (8-week course, 6 times, ~20 students at each) and through numerous evaluation capacity building initiatives delivered by the co-presenters over the past 15 years. A professional reference and evidence of positive feedback from past workshop evaluations can be provided upon request.

The presenters have over 40 years of combined experience in teaching evaluation, designing and conducting evaluations, evaluation capacity building and supporting evaluation use in a range of sectors and settings. They have extensive experience in delivering professional development workshops to evaluators, including at past European Evaluation Society conferences.

While the workshop focus is theoretical, as experienced teachers and evaluators we are adept at translating complex ideas and illustrating through practical examples how and why these ideas are useful and matter. We believe that applied, practical training in evaluation theory is an essential competency for all evaluators. As reflective practitioners we also need to continually update our knowledge of the discipline to reflect changes in society and advancements in the field. The workshop has been designed using principles of adult learning, will be interactive rather than didactic, and provide participants with confidence and skills to meaningfully engage stakeholders in conversations about theory and methodology selection and application.