

Dear Sameatalkers,

I was hoping that there will be some easier questions that I could concentrate on, but it seems that the questions just keep getting more complex. Of course this is exactly the value of SAMEA: deepening discussions and understanding on complex issues to which there is no easy answers. Herewith my answers to the questions posed so far:

(Fanie Cloete) What they would suggest SAMEA do more to fulfil its mission to promote M&E in SA? le what concrete projects or new or changed activities should SAMEA engage in to achieve its strategic goals better

Current SAMEA operations are good for distributing information on key trends and opportunities in the M&E field both internationally and nationally. However, I see room for improvement for really engaging on these issues. More opportunity for face to face debates should be organised while we enhance the technology to allow for electronic debates that is accessible by everyone (even those stuck in 2003 J). The reality is that a virtual platform is critical to the success of the initiative, due to time, geographic and other constraints, so improving this platform must be priority. There is however value in in-person interaction that firstly cannot be replaced by the electronic interface and secondly is necessary given current technology constraints.

(Benita Williams) 1. How much time per week you anticipate spending on board activities? Is your work context supportive of this if this should happen during work time? 2. If a fellow board member consistently misses board meetings and does not deliver on commitments, what would you suggest to solve the problem?

1. Dedicated 'blocked' time I would probably need to restrict to a few hours per week due to other obligations. But ad hoc activities can be fulfilled readily between other obligations. The reality is that most of my day is already taken up with M&E, be that teaching or researching it. There is therefore synergy to be obtained by integrating SAMEA board responsibilities with current tasks, as there will be some degree of overlapping. My work context is supportive of this and this would become part of my day-time work, not an add on during the evening.

2. I would assume there is a code of conduct or agreement that is signed with new board member. If not, key deliverables and expectations should be formalised into such an agreement. If a board member consistently does not deliver, and the informal route of enquiry and support (if possible and necessary) does not work, there should be a formal route to get the member replaced. We are all passionate about M&E, and passion is great because it helps you to go the extra mile with pleasure, but passion alone does not bring results. Results also need dedication, commitment and sometimes sacrifices: especially when you are in leadership.

(Raymond Basson) 1. How do you envisage evaluation field building may happen to expand evaluation as field in SA? 2. Do you think evaluators in SA should be encouraged to reflect on their practice to formulate an indigenous conception of evaluation best suited to this country and thereby add to evaluation thinking internationally? 3. If these are important, how may SAMEA best promote both processes?

1. There is a great need for standardisation of the emerging evaluation profession in SA, which is also the topic for the upcoming conference and integral to Candice Morkel's question below. Evaluation has since its inception fought to differentiate itself from research. There is critical overlapping and critical differences between general social research and evaluation research. However, without clear standard practices (acknowledging that this may still be broad) we stand the danger of evaluation becoming everything to everybody, failing in the end and dying as just another fad.

2. Yes, I think Stephen Porter summarised it nicely: we need to contextualise locally. And SAMEA could assist with mediums to get our lessons learned back to the international community.

3. Let me not pre-empt the discussion in August, but leave it to those that are wiser to first give us direction and alternatives to debate on.

(Mark Abrahams) What is it that you can bring to the Board, given all the desires, demands, and 'dreams' of a bigger, better and more 'effective and efficient' SAMEA

Let me start my response with my statement as on the nominee page, as everyone may not have been able to download it, and it does capture some of the issues raised in the question. BABETTE RABIE is a lecturer at the School of Public Management and Planning, Stellenbosch University. Specialising in public sector monitoring and evaluation, performance management and policy evaluation, she holds a MA (Public and Development Management) cum laude from Stellenbosch University and is currently completing her PhD on "Outcome and Output Indicators to measure the success of Local Economic Development Strategies".

As a lecturer, I have extensive experience in designing, compiling, presenting and assessing course content for undergraduate and post-graduate programmes in programme and policy evaluation. I have presented and facilitated executive courses in public sector performance management, including introductory courses for public sector M&E, designing M&E systems, conducting evaluation studies and developing indicators, to more than 700 delegates from all spheres of government. As part of this process I have reviewed proposed M&E systems for departments, programmes and units from all spheres of government and suggested changes and improvements to these systems. Part of this knowledge has been published in peer-reviewed journals and includes an article on a proposed typology of M&E approaches and another on the exploration of the emerging M&E policy framework in South Africa.

Given the current focus on building capacity for M&E and professionalising evaluation practice in South Africa, my broad theoretical knowledge and divergent exposure to practice at different government entities may add value in this journey.

Specific to Mark's question, my strengths are excellent organisation and coordination skills, the ability to multitask (what mom does not need to!), to do things efficiently and quickly, and to reduce work by creating synergies between different interests and responsibilities that I pursue and commit to. I would say my weakness is innovation, although I can be very creative through my synergy skills.

(Errol Goetsch) What are the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing M&E practitioners in South Africa, and given each of these, how can or will SAMEA respond?

Strengths: New policies, new academic qualifications, new M&E positions and units

Weaknesses: Divergent practices, lack of standardisation

Opportunities: International and emerging local best practices and expertise

Threats: "flavour of the month" syndrome

SEMEA need to pull all of these together under a sustainable vision for M&E in South Africa through strategic direction and standard guidelines.

(Victor Madziakapita) What strategies will they bring to the Board for fund raising so that the Board can be able to organize activities that benefit the members without charging anything to the members?

I acknowledge that sponsorships are very helpful in reducing costs to ensure that access to activities are not restricted do to exorbitant costs, I do not think activities should be provided free of charge. My previous experience with managing member organisations is that if something is free, it is not valued, if it is not valued, it is not committed to. You end up with a lot of effort to organise a wonderful event, and no one shows up because they were not committed to the event. I think a nominal charge will ensure this commitment and the valuing of the event.

I think specific effort should be put in obtaining strategic sponsorships, e.g. from the new ministry, from key organisations regulating and steering the M&E field, both locally and internationally. These sponsorships add value far beyond their financial contribution.

(Candice Morkel) What are your thoughts on the current direction being taken in public sector M&E (as driven primarily by the National Dept of PME), and how can/should SAMEA add value to this? What is your opinion around how to maintain the integrity and professionalism of the discipline amongst practitioners and service providers, without stifling its growth and expansion? What role should SAMEA play in this regard (if any?).

1. I think it is still in children shoes. The policies range from vague principles (GWM&ES), to specific instructions (NT) to very detailed, but yet unattainable guidelines (SASQAF 1, but the just released SASQAF 2 is definitely better). I think SA has good ideas and policies (not perfect, but perhaps realistic given current capacity) but SAMEA has a role to help in raising awareness, creating capacity and providing a medium for sharing good implementation practices.

2. We need to provide general guidelines and start considering the implications of professionalization of the M&E field.

(Nomsa Dube) 1. It is evidently clear that there is a need for M&E to be recognised as a distinct profession. Is it possible for SAMEA to initiate a certification system similar to the one in the project management field where there are PMPs and the Six Sigma belt system? If so what strategies would you employ to put such systems in place? 2. Any plans or suggestions to expand SAMEA our geographical coverage and also include professionals from other African countries outside South Africa?

1. This is not a simple matter. There are advantages and disadvantages to consider. Given current capacity constraints and our political milieu, SAMEA should strive to promote inclusivity in the M&E field. However, as I've explained earlier on, without some guidelines we stand the danger of losing faith in M&E due to bad practices.

2. I think that is the mandate of AFREA, to which SAMEA have strong linkages already.

Babette Rabie