

Fanie Cloete

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

Honestly Fanie, I have been a member of SAMEA for over a year now and I am not 100% sure of what the strategic goals of SAMEA are. I have a general idea of what I believe they would be but I have not seen any concrete actions that support this. From my experience logging onto the membership section I believe that SAMEA is a useful networking tool for people already working in the sector; consultants, available work opportunities are made available and there are some interesting discussions between academics etc. These have proven useful at times but to be brutally honest I do not find myself regularly checking the website. I do not really feel there is a need to.

There is the upcoming conference that has been advertised which I feel is focusing on a topical issue for the sector within SA currently which leads me to my next point and I do like the more interactive nature of these elections so definitely progress is being made however I am still not clear on what it was that SAMEA was aiming to achieve this past year and whether they achieved it or not – perhaps the general annual meeting will give clarity on this.

I think that the President Zuma through his constant references to M&E in his speeches has actually done more to promote (okay not promote – certainly bring attention to) M&E than SAMEA has. Certainly this has served to raise the profile of M&E; before when people asked me what I do and I said I worked in M&E they would stare blankly, now they nod and say I sure got into the industry at the right time! I think this type of response should, and has had alarm bells go off in many of our heads – hence the topic of the upcoming conference I believe.

I think that it is important to establish a strong working relationship with government, with the M&E department in the Presidency. We need to work on becoming a trusted and respected advisory body which can work alongside SAQA, the relevant SITA's and training institutions to build a set of best practices, standards and guidelines that the industry can be up against. We need to work with government to build capacity in M&E and data management throughout the country and to ensure that results are actually used to effect change. Okay so these might sound quite general too but I do feel that these wider goals should help to guide our yearly strategic and operational plans.

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?

I think that this is difficult answer without firstly knowing the specific portfolio in which one would be working or the nature of specific projects. I also have not been briefed of the protocols currently in place and how well that is working or whether there is a need for

more structured commitment from all members of the board. Certainly, I am of the opinion that if all members of the board do contribute equally of their time this does serve to prevent one or two members from having to shoulder most of the work load while others get away with minimal workloads. I do feel that it is equally important to ensure that when meetings are set, the agenda's are specific and that meetings end with clear action points assigned to specific members. These action points must then be reported back on and members must be held accountable to these.

The fact that you are asking this question, in my opinion, suggests that there may have been issues surrounding the commitment towards and the sharing of the workload involved in serving on an executive board in the past.

Certainly I do not have an issue to agreeing to a certain level of commitment once this has been discussed amongst the board and not knowing what commitment would be required can only speak to my past commitments and experience in serving on executive boards. The work was mostly conducted after hours and on weekends, board meetings were held monthly unless there was a big project on the horizon when this changed to fortnightly. Board members were held accountable and the constitutions were written in a manner than incorporated this. This meant that when one agreed to serve on the board there was clarity on what was involved and the actions available when board members did not comply.

With regards to meetings / board commitments being conducted during work time I find it hard to comment without being more clearly versed on the specifics. If the required is a monthly meeting for 2 hours, then I do believe that work context would be supportive of this. I am fortunate in that I do have relative flexibility and am more performance managed than time managed so the possibility is definitely there. Currently I am serving on technical task teams that are not specifically work orientated but which serve to address the larger objectives of the organization and as such are possible. When it comes to deadlines or a conflict of meeting times however, work has to be prioritized which I feel is only acceptable. This can however be countered by sufficient and advanced planning.

2. If a fellow board member consistently misses board meetings and does not deliver on commitments, what would you suggest to solve the problem?

As I hinted to above, this is easily taken care of by either ensuring that this issue is addressed in the constitution or that specific work plans are written for the portfolios and that these have some level of accountability worked into them. This allows for the rest of the board to have recourse if it becomes clear that certain members are after the title and not interested in actually contributing their time and skills. This also allows for board members to bow out of the commitment if their circumstances change expectantly and outside of their immediate control.

If these control measures have not been built in then the issue because a very difficult one to address as there is no redress or accountability and the issue is often made to become about politics and personalities.

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?

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.

I think that I can bring my extensive experience of having served on a number of boards internationally, I have served on boards of organizations that are already well established and running smoothly, I have joined the board of an organization that grew too fast and had not put the correct business practices in place (one of the board members had to be charged criminally for embezzlement of funds – but the organization had made it so easy for him) and I have served on the boards of organizations that are just starting out and I have seen the difference that good strong foundations and business practices can make in the long-run. Of course, taking into account the nature of the industry SAMEA is representing I would expect all of the correct practices and protocols, operational and strategic plans etc to be in place!

As highlighted in my intention of interest and I think in my answers to some of these questions it is important to have a level-headed, realistic view of what is achievable and then set out to achieve it. The only way to get to achieve the bid dreams is inevitably to out in the big work and the boring realistic business practices needed to run a successful, effective and efficient organization.

I have an understanding and a knowledge of the level of commitment and basic darn hard work that is involved in getting an organization up and running and then amount of dedication it takes to serve on any board, let alone the board of a relatively new association where the role is a voluntary one.

Judge Goldstone, one of the key people involved in the formation of the International Criminal Court, once spoke of ideals as being like the stars – while we may never touch them we must always allow them to guide our path. I guess the dreams of the bigger, more efficient and effective SAMEA could be synonymous with the stars and while these dreams can guide the board it is important that the board continues to plod along the pathway towards these dreams

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?

I feel that this is adequately addressed in my statement of intent.

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?).

I feel that I have partly addressed the various facets of the question you pose in my statement of intent and in some of the answers to other questions posed here. So I will try to be succinct here and hope that you can put together the pieces from my other answers. I do not want to repeat myself too often, or just copy and paste from other sections as this will be boring for all involved. Hopefully what I have answered in short to this question will be elaborated upon in another section

I feel that M&E is being pushed into the limelight and that this is both a positive and negative thing. Positive, in that I feel that M&E is an incredibly useful and beneficial discipline that if used correctly can ensure accountability and evidence-based practices: Negative in that there are a number of people out there who feel this is the new IT thing, there are firms that are suddenly putting M&E down as a service that they offer, being aware that there is a shortage of M&E professionals and a growing need for them. This is always a danger in a supply and demand situation especially when there is great demand and this is publicized.

I therefore would like to see SAMEA serving a role for government that is similar to SAMA and the HPCSA. I do feel that it is important to ensure that there are standards and best practices put in place with all areas of the M&E marketplace. I feel that ideally SAMEA should be consulted in the setting of these standards and would serve an important role through endorsing those individuals, consultancies, training institutions that adhere to the standards as well as taking an active role in ensure that there is capacity building within the sector within the lines set out by the standards and guidelines.

I do not feel that maintaining the integrity and professionalism of a sector or industry needs to, at the same time stifle it. In fact I would like to believe that it would serve to have the opposite effect.

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?

I am not sure if it is possible for SAMEA to initiate a certification similar to the one that you speak of within the field of project management. I would think that this would fall more in the realms of SAQA and perhaps a particular SITA, training institutions. I would see SAMEA's

role to be more of an advisory role, I would like to see SAMEA being able to take an active role in assisting these official bodies in developing certain key guidelines, training manuals, standards and best practices and then ensuring that our membership adheres to them.

SAMEA would then be able to assist as a watchdog within the organization by ensuring that consultants, training facilities, M&E consulting firms etc are accredited to these standards and best practice guidelines that we as an organization helped to set.

2. Any plans or suggestions to expand SAMEA our geographical coverage and also include professionals from other African countries outside South Africa?

As you can see in my answers to the questions posed in the statement of intent on the nomination board I definitely believe that SAMEA should work towards becoming the leading voice within M&E on the continent and globally. However, as I put forward in my answers on this page I do not think that this can happen overnight and I feel that it is important to strengthen SAMEA as a South African organization firstly. I believe that any expansion should occur from a position of strength and not as a means to try to strengthen. I have always believed in a bottoms up approach to something like this and I believe that by building up country specific networks which can then feed into a coalition one has a better chance of representing unique nuances which hopefully would lead to a more enriched regional voice in the long run.

While I appreciate the desire to strengthen M&E both regionally and continentally I feel that it is important to remain as the South Africa Monitoring and Evaluation Association. There are a number of reasons for this and this is my decision now at this point in time. Firstly I feel that we have much work to do within our own community and country and I feel it is fundamental to be unified and strong before embarking on any expansion policies. Certainly I feel that there is still plenty to achieve within South Africa itself before we try to tackle the entire region and beyond. I would like to get our own house in order and have a strong working model of standard-setting, capacity building and mentorship and professionalism before trying to impose our 'working model' on other countries.

That being said I am all for working with countries to assist them in developing their own country specific associations and I see no problem with trying to form regional coalitions of these associations. I also do not feel that there is any reason why people from other countries who are based in South Africa, or are just interested in joining SAMEA to be able to partake in trainings / workshops etc that we hold should not be allowed to, in fact I believe it should be encouraged. I feel that SAMEA members, especially the board, should be willing to assist these people, living outside of South Africa's borders with developing their own associations as well as learning from any lessons they are willing to share with us.

I guess what I am trying to say is that rather than see SAMEA take over the region I would rather see SAMEA working towards building the capacity of the individual countries within the region and empowering the M&E sectors within the countries NGO, academic and government sectors to become and then working together to develop a unified regional voice which can then feed into an umbrella organization such as AFrea.

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?

At the onset let me say that I do not think it is practical to suggest that a professional board does not have membership fees in place. My reasoning for this is quite two-fold;

- Firstly, I believe that having membership fees in place help to lend a level of commitment amongst members,
- Secondly, I believe that this also lends a level of 'elitism' to the association (I have used the wrong term here which is why it is parenthesis. I am not trying to use it in a negative way but in a positive way – in the same way that people want to belong to certain country-clubs because of the advantage and prestige it lends them I do feel that having some entry criteria into an association serves the same purpose,
- Thirdly, as a new organization (which I believe SAMEA to be) it is often more difficult to get external funding – donors will ask what you are doing to assist the industry etc and often it is difficult to show. Membership fees make it a little easier to get an organization started.

So I would definitely not do away with membership fees. In fact, if this is not already in place I would like to investigate the possibility of a tiered membership structure depending on whether one is a student, an individual, an academic institution etc.

Regarding the fund-raising; this is a difficult question to answer because I am not sure what funding SAMEA has in place, which donors have been approached or not, if we have been turned out and why. Is SAMEA solely dependent on its membership fees to fund any activities? All of these are important aspects to consider when planning an organization's fund-raising strategy.

One would need to look at what strategic and operational plans SAMEA already has in place and how well the goals set in these documents have been achieved or whether there are no such documents in place at all. I have found that one of the best ways to secure funding is to show that as an organization one is able to set goals and achieve these goals (however small initially) and it is important to be able to show that the organization has strong foundations and is set along the path to achieving its goals. It may sound a bit twee but I would think one of the first things would be to work on simple business practices such as having your mission / vision/ etc and having a business plan, with a strategic and operational plan. Once these are in place one often finds donors more open to give up their dollars.

So I guess I would start on those things and ensure they are in place after which I would brainstorm to try and find donors that would have a vested interest in seeing the goals of SAMEA being achieved.

Without that one can approach as many people as one likes; the odds of getting funding do not get much better with the more people one approaches (although of course that does play a role) the odds get better when you / your organization looks like a viable and workable proposition with a well structured plan and strategy and not just a list of jumbled big ideas.

