

Report from the IDEAS Survey on an International Evaluation Academy

SUMMARY:

IDEAS, the International Development Evaluation Association, conducted a survey largely of those affiliated with IDEAS and IPDET on the IDEAS initiative to explore support for an International Evaluation Academy. The survey found strong support for the concept. About 87 percent of the 454 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that an International Evaluation Academy should be set up to complement the work of associations. In fact, *strongly agree* was the mode with close to a 56 percent response rate. About 6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Extensive comments—about half of the respondents took the time to write comments—will be of great assistance in further planning and designing the Academy.

Background: The Prague Declaration, an outcome of the IDEAS Global Assembly on Evaluation for Transformative Change and Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development held 2 - 4 October 2019, endorsed exploration of the feasibility of an International Evaluation Academy initiative (IEAc) (item 5 of the Declaration). Such an Academy would complement the efforts of evaluation associations and act as a platform for innovation, creativity, and collaboration in pursuit of evaluation professionalism, influence and transformative impact. Set up as a non-profit voluntary association, the core assets of the Academy would be its Fellows who would be expected to commit to the Academy's mission, values, and guiding principles. They would drive the choice of its programs and help deliver their activities.

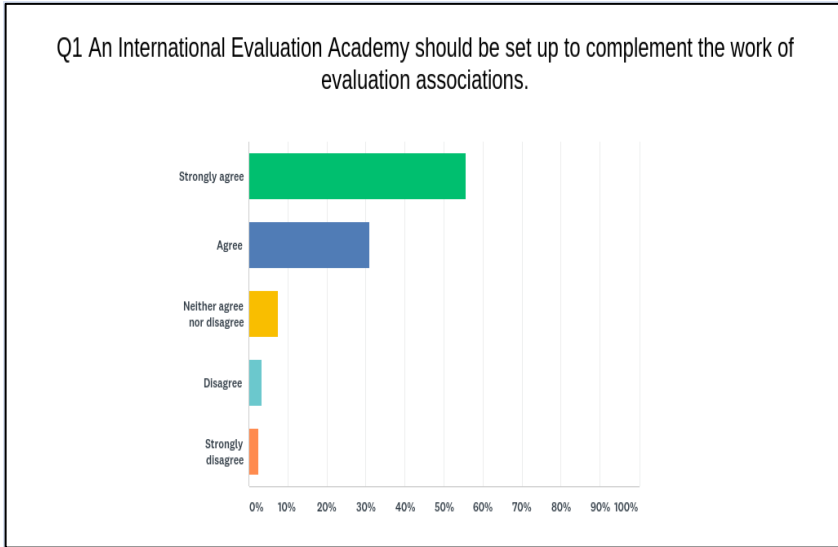
Although the Prague Declaration reflected the consensus of the discussions and interactions held in Prague during the conference, reactions to the proposal on an International Evaluation Academy and its potential policy directions varied. IDEAS members Linda Morra Imas and Bob Picciotto designed a brief survey to explore the views of the broader evaluation community about the justification of setting up an International Evaluation Academy and its key design parameters. For the Academy to go forward, it is important that the IEAc holds the same global spirit that marked the creation, design, and history of IDEAS.

IDEAS launched the brief 5 question survey on 1, February 2020. It was sent to IDEAS members and other attendees of the Global Assembly on Evaluation for Transformative Change and third International Conference on Evaluating for Environment and Development, as well as members of the IPDET (International Program for Development Evaluation Training) listserv and Facebook and LinkedIn IDEAS and IPDET web members. IDEAS estimates that the survey went to about 3500 individuals. Responses were received from 458 individuals for about a 13 percent response rate. The survey findings are likely to have a bias as those who feel strongly either for the initiative or against it are more likely to respond than those who do not.

Findings: As shown in Figure 1, the response was overwhelmingly positive to the first question of whether an International Evaluation Academy should be set up to complement the work of evaluation associations. Of the 454 respondents, about 87 percent strongly agreed or agreed that such an entity

should be set up, and only about 6 percent strongly disagreed or disagreed. Over half of the respondents strongly agreed that the Academy should be set up.

FIGURE 1: Strong Support for an IEAc



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	55.75% 252
Agree	30.97% 140
Neither agree nor disagree	7.52% 34
Disagree	3.32% 15
Strongly disagree	2.43% 11
TOTAL	452

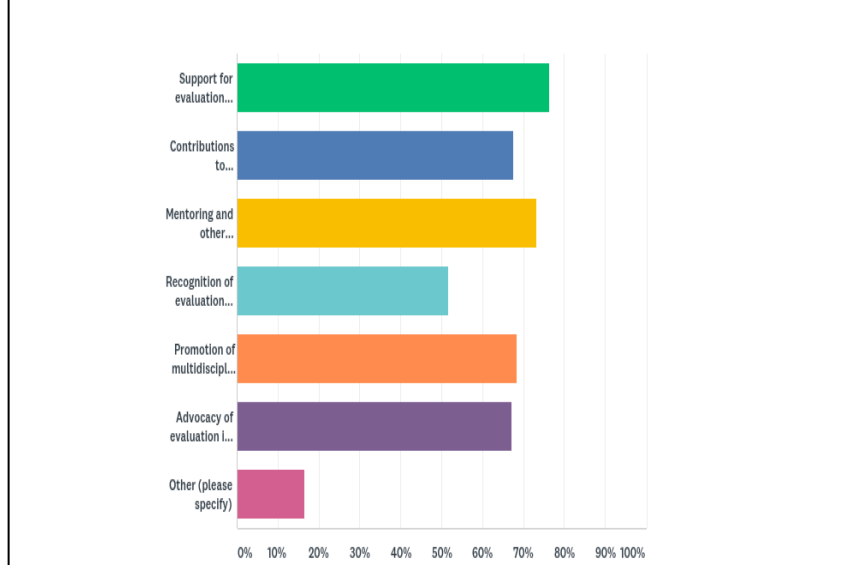
Question 2 asked about what functions the Academy should have if it were set up. Choices were *Support for evaluation professionalism initiatives; Contributions to harmonization of evaluation principles, guidelines and norms across countries and regions; Mentoring and other professional development support activities; Recognition of evaluation excellence, distinctive contributions to the discipline, etc.; Promotion of multidisciplinary evaluation research, approaches and methods, including physical and natural sciences; and Other (to be specified)*. Respondents were to indicate which functions they would support. Figure 2 shows that a majority of the 451 respondents supported each listed function. Most highly supported were the functions of *Support for evaluation professionalism initiatives* with 76 percent of respondents indicating it should be included and also *Contributions to harmonization of evaluation principles, guidelines and norms across countries and regions and support activities*, with 73 percent of respondents agreeing. Responses to the *Mentoring role and Advocacy role* were also strong. The lowest support, at 52 percent of respondents, was for *Promotion of multidisciplinary evaluation research, approaches and methods*.

Respondents frequently checked the *Other* category. Responses were free-ranging. Some, for example, called for the Academy to be located in Africa or for scholarships to be awarded to Fellows. Comments will be discussed further in response to Q5.

Question 3 asked *If you were an Academy Fellow, how much volunteer time would you be prepared to devote annually to one or more of the above proposed functions?* The mode was 5-10 days with 43 percent of the 451 respondents choosing it. There was some spread, however, with 21 percent of the respondents ready to volunteer 11 – 20 days and 15 percent who would donate 21 – 30 days annually.

FIGURE 2: Multiple Functions endorsed for an IEAc

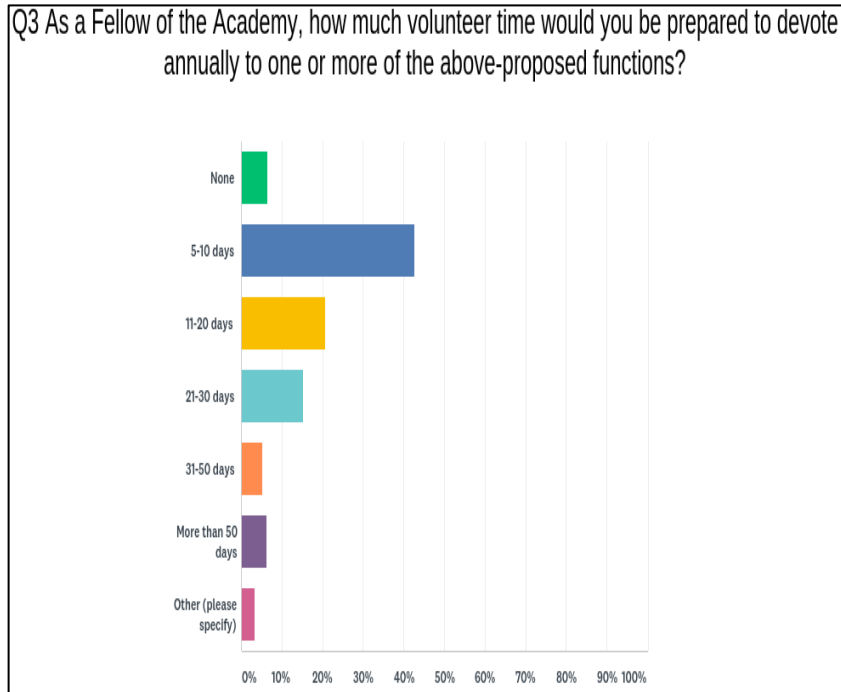
Q2 Should an Academy be set up it should carry out one or more of the following functions:



ANSWER CHOICES RESPONSES	
Support for evaluation professionalization initiatives	76.27% 344
Contributions to harmonization of evaluation principles, guidelines and norms across countries and regions	67.63% 305
Mentoring and other professional development support services	73.17% 330
Recognition of evaluation excellence, distinctive contributions to the discipline, etc.	51.66% 233
Promotion of multidisciplinary evaluation research, approaches and methods, including physical and natural sciences	68.51% 309
Advocacy of evaluation in government, the private sector and the civil society	67.18% 303
Other (please specify)	16.63% 75
Total Respondents: 451	

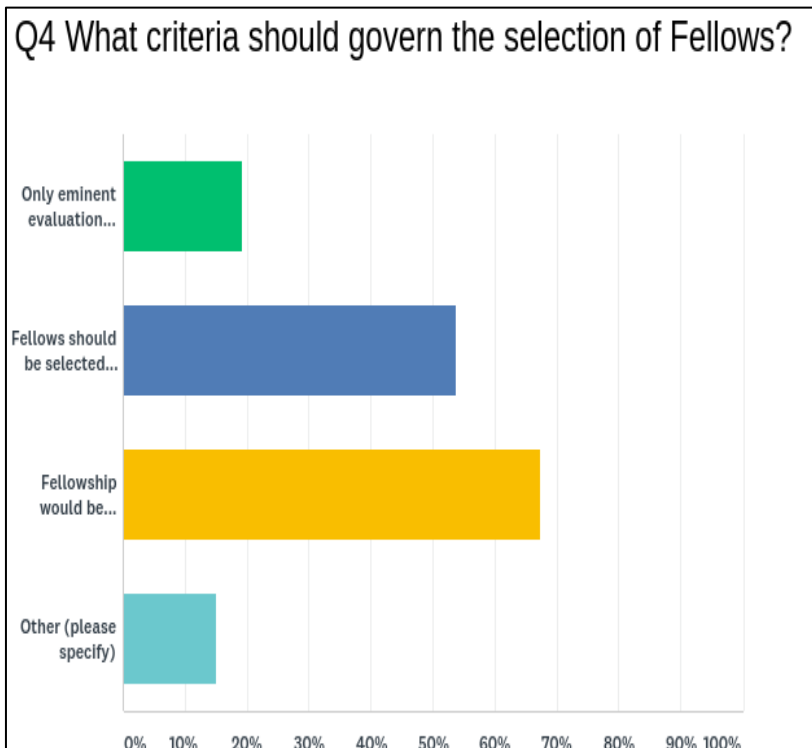
Question 4 asked about the criteria that should govern the selection of Fellows. Respondents could check as many of the criteria as they believed should apply. As shown in Figure 4, the distribution was bi-modal with two of the criteria dominating. A high 67 percent wanted Fellowships to be inclusive and embrace early career evaluation practitioners, in particular. A substantial 54 percent of the respondents indicated that Fellows should be selected based on peer reviews of their knowledge, skills and dispositions. These are potentially compatible responses. The message might be to include early career evaluators but select them based on peer reviews.

FIGURE 3: Most Participants Would Volunteer 5-10 Days Annually



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None	6.44% 29
5-10 days	42.67% 192
11-20 days	20.67% 93
21-30 days	15.33% 69
31-50 days	5.33% 24
More than 50 days	6.22% 28
Other (please specify)	3.33% 15
TOTAL	450

FIGURE 4: Strong Call to Embrace Early Career Evaluators



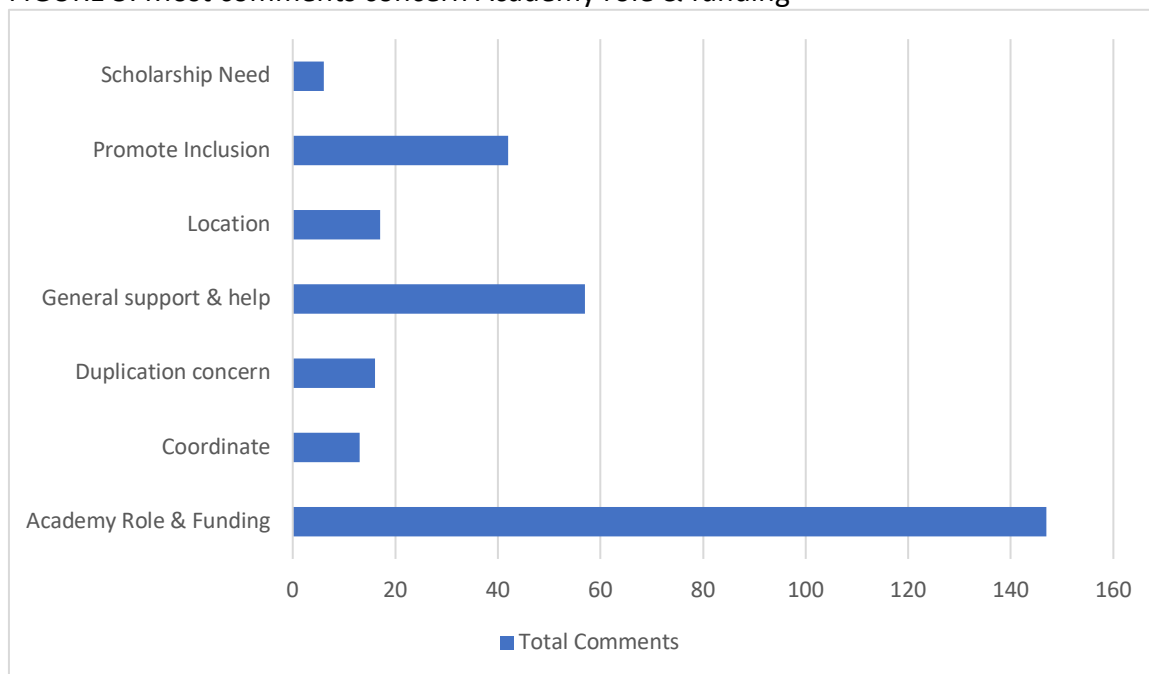
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Only eminent evaluation practitioners and/or thinkers should be selected as Fellows	19.15% 86
Fellows should be selected based on peer reviews of their knowledge, skills and dispositions	53.67% 241
Fellowship would be inclusive and embrace early career evaluation practitioners	67.26% 302
Other (please specify)	15.14% 68
Total Respondents:	449

Question 5, the last question, asked for other comments or suggestions regarding the proposed setup of an International Evaluation Academy. Over half of the survey respondents (N=256) availed themselves of the opportunity to comment, with some providing extensive comment. A content analysis was performed with responses coded into one or more of 7 categories:

- Expression of general support/offers to help
- Promote inclusiveness
- Academy role and funding
- Academy location
- Coordination
- Possible overlap/duplication
- Need for scholarships

The multiple coding yielded 298 categorized comments.

FIGURE 5: Most comments concern Academy role & funding



By far the largest number of comments, at 147, concerned the *role of the Academy* and how it would obtain needed funding and financial stability. Suggestions on roles for the Academy were plentiful, including this sample of comments:

- Offer internships/learning opportunities in selected organizations
- Promote research on evaluation
- Give opportunities to those from the global south
- Be a multidisciplinary capacity building institution
- Have on-line and campus activities
- Organize face-to-face meetings at designated locations
- Recognize best practice in the field and share it

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- Focus on the professionalization of evaluation, provide mentoring services and support opportunities for peer learning
- It should be the primary source of academic research, practical learning and innovation in evaluation
- The academy should be accessible online and face to face
- Enhance the culture of evaluation, develop clear and suggested mechanisms for ways to use results in the development process
- Recognize evaluation excellence, conduct advocacy and promote evaluation culture
- It should highly encourage young evaluation practitioners from developing countries
- Help develop materials in various languages
- Provide international professional certification in evaluation
- Focus on professional standardization
- Lead and support evaluation of the SDGs and provide policy support to member countries to monitor the progress of SDGs
- The Academy should look into the possibilities of certifying professional evaluators
- Support the delivery of apprenticeships
- The Academy could provide quality assurance certificates to the various online courses so that development and evaluation practitioners would know better what they are getting when they pay for a course. Or at least expert reviews.
- It should also run professional courses and certification for the evaluation professional
- Provide opportunity for the global south to exchange their experience and context and validate western ideas of evaluation theories. Serve as a bridge between the two.
- Offer a well-recognized M&E degree and offer evaluation services and capacity building
- Work on capacity building by organizing different workshops and forums

And a sample of comments on *funding*:

- Who will fund it? Not only in the short term. This is probably the most important question.
- The development partners, community, and governments should support the Academy. It has to be free of influence from any entity and should therefore secure its independence and professional integrity
- It should be funded by contributions—cash or in kind from the national evaluation associations
- Find INGO sponsors or other large international organizations to support the cost of the Academy.
- It is a good initiative that deserves the technical and financial support of the United Nations, donors committed to evaluation, and the main development partners

On *location* of the Academy, many argued that it should be in the global south, particularly Africa, with one voice for set up in the Caribbean. Some noted that it should be in a country where entry is less restricted and systems are functional, as well as in a geographically central location with low costs.

Many comments stressed the need for the Academy to promote *inclusion*. For example:

- Need opportunities for those from the global south

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- If the Academy is to be exclusionist, serving the interests of some and not the good of all, it would do more harm than good
- Make it affordable and be inclusive
- Strengthen involvement of early career professionals or young Fellows in monitoring & evaluation
- Trainers/Fellows should be inclusive of the diverse field of evaluation practice and diverse range of evaluation experts/practitioners
- I think it's a great idea and should be as inclusive of all regional and national VOPEs as possible
- Mostly evaluators from underdeveloped and developing countries are marginalized despite the fact that they would have contributed to the sector. Generally, preference to academics is given, not practitioners. The Academy should have a rich blend of academics and practitioners

Another part of the comments on *Inclusiveness* had to do with language. One commenter, for example, stated:

- To make the Academy readily accessible to evaluation practitioners on a global basis, focus on virtual structures in a multilingual environment, using at least the six official UN languages

These comments also flowed into comments on the *need for scholarships*, especially for those from the south as well as young and emerging evaluators, and to make and keep the Academy affordable and accessible.

Finally, some commented on the need to *coordinate*. Suggestions included mapping all existing initiatives first and seeking to integrate, connecting to different university institutions, working with various networks including regional and national evaluation associations, and collaborating with all institutions that undertake evaluation training.

Naysayers to the proposed Academy were relatively few, but concerns were reflected in comments about *possible overlap and duplication*:

- Prevent overlap with other organizations and initiatives such as IPDET
- Is it really necessary? How would it link with other evaluation centers? Would it just replicate other things that are being done?
- I'm concerned that this can turn into another association
- This is not the right way for the professionalization of evaluation. We should have more academic master programs worldwide
- I do not see the need for such an institution—isn't that what the IOCE does/tries to do?

Comments in *support of the Academy* were more numerous than concerns. Some offering support provided email addresses for follow up contact. Most comments were similar to the below:

- It is a good initiative to start the academy as it offers unique opportunities and space for advancing evaluation professionalism and practice
- Seems an excellent idea and would contribute to significantly increasing credibility and professionalization of the function
- Excellent initiative to establish evaluation as a profession

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- It is filling a gap in the existing scenario and is timely.

The complete set of comments will be made available on the IDEAS website (<https://ideas-global.org>) We will reach out to those providing email addresses with offers to help plan and design the Academy. IDEAS thanks those that responded to the survey. There is much 'food for thought' in the comments for planning and designing the Academy, but overall the strong endorsement of the proposed Academy calls for proceeding with these activities.