Abstract: The National Council of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) recognized a need to designate a professional status for the practice of evaluation for individuals who meet appropriate criteria. A consortium of experienced CES members developed an Action Plan with policy options based on (a) a literature review, (b) consultations with relevant professional organizations, (c) knowledge and experience brought by consortium members, and (d) the 2005 Survey of Evaluation Practice and Issues in Canada. The Action Plan recommended three successive levels of professional designation, each with progressively more demanding criteria. Out of this plan, the CES adopted the Credentialed Evaluator designation.

Keywords: accreditation, certified professional evaluator, credentialed evaluator, professionalization, professional designations, professional evaluation

Résumé : Le Conseil national de la Société canadienne d’évaluation (SCÉ) a reconnu le besoin de créer un statut professionnel pour la pratique de l’évaluation par ceux qui répondent aux critères appropriés d’admissibilité. Un consortium de membres experts de la SCÉ a développé un plan d’action comportant des options de politiques en se basant sur (a) une revue de la littérature, (b) les consultations avec les organisations professionnelles pertinentes, (c) la connaissance et l’expérience des membres du consortium, et (d) le sondage mené en 2005 sur la pratique et les enjeux en évaluation au Canada. Le plan d’action a recommandé trois niveaux successifs de titres professionnels comportant des critères d’admissibilité progressivement plus rigoureux. C’est à partir de ce plan que la SCÉ a adopté le titre d’Évaluateur accrédité.

Mots clés : accréditation, évaluateur professionnel certifié, évaluateur accrédité, professionnalisation, titres professionnels, évaluation professionnelle

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BACKGROUND

Circa 2006, the National Council of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), prompted in part by previous work done to survey CES members (Zorzi, Perrin, McGuire, Long, & Lee, 2002; Borys, Gauthier, Kishchuk, & Roy, 2005), recognized the increasing interest within the Canadian evaluation and client communities for options that would offer practicing evaluators opportunities to become designated professionals. In May 2006, the CES Member Services Committee issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for “Fact Finding Regarding Evaluator Credentialing” (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2006). The requirement was to develop a concrete Action Plan with policy options to be considered by the CES Board and members.

The CES was looking to establish a professional credentialing system for evaluators—a process by which an applicant’s educational and practical experiences and achievements would warrant the award of a professional evaluation credential. It was understood that the Action Plan could situate professional credentialing within a continuum of professional designations including professional certification and licensing.

The task of developing this Action Plan was awarded to the three authors of this article. In addition, two primary reviewers and six other reviewers were engaged. Together, these 11 experienced evaluators formed a consortium for the development of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan was developed using information from four sources:

1. findings from the literature review (Huse & McDavid, 2006);
2. findings from the consultation with organizations (Halpern & Long, 2007);
3. knowledge and experience of Consortium members; and
4. findings from the 2005 Survey of Evaluation Practice and Issues in Canada (Gauthier, Borys, Kishchuk, & Roy, 2006).

Key findings of the literature review (Huse & McDavid, 2006) and interviews with organizations (Halpern & Long, 2007) are presented in the next two sections.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CREDENTIALING, CERTIFICATION, AND LICENSING AS OPTIONS FOR PRACTICING PROFESSIONALS

The literature review (Huse & McDavid, 2006) summarized the definitions and applications of several categories/levels of professionalization, as well as the experiences of other selected professions. Altschuld’s (2005) definitions of the key categories (see Table 1) were adapted for the literature review. Altschuld noted, “There is a fairly sharp demarcation between certification and credentialing, especially in regard to legal ramifications” (p. 159), while acknowledging that distinctions among some of the terms “are not absolute, and for some, more a matter of degree than substance” (p. 159).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms/concepts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Credentialing</td>
<td>A set of courses, a program, or other experiences a person must go through to receive a credential. May be done by a professional society or sometimes by trainers as in a credential for having been trained.</td>
<td>Does not specify the skill set attained by the person credentialed, only that they have gone through delineated experiences and courses. Tests or certification exams may be, but generally are not, used for credentialing; instead it is the courses or training experiences that the individual has taken. There does not have to be agreement on a set of core competencies at this stage. The legal implications for credentialing are less than for certification—credentialing is voluntary so it does not exclude practitioners who are not credentialed.</td>
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<td>Certification</td>
<td>A process by which a person masters certain skills and competencies in a field as assessed by an external body (usually a professional society in the area of consideration).</td>
<td>Most often done through a formal test or set of tests (certification exams) as in law, medicine, engineering, etc. Certifying body may be legally liable for the skills that they designate as being attained by an individual. Certification may have to be periodically renewed, most frequently (but not always) via continuing education. Typically an agreed-upon set of core competencies exists.</td>
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<td>Licensure</td>
<td>Licenses are awarded by states/provinces, branches of government, and legal jurisdictions. One must have a license to perform services or undergo penalties if they are performed without a license. Many times the criteria for licensing are the same as certification and are determined by professional societies/groups.</td>
<td>One may be certified but not licensed as in the case of a physician who has passed the necessary medical examinations but is found to have defrauded patients or illegally used drugs. Licensure is a legal step that is recognized in law—it has the effect of excluding any practitioners who are not legally licenced. Licensing jurisdictions set up review panels in cases where there is malfeasance or unsafe practice. Control of licensure resides outside of the professional group but is almost always highly influenced by it.</td>
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<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>A mechanism whereby the educational program of an agency or educational institution is examined by an external panel against established criteria for programs. The program, if it passes review, receives a formal document indicating that it is accredited (usually for a fixed time period).</td>
<td>Accreditation is for a program, whereas certification, credentialing, and licensure relate to an individual. Accreditation reviews rely on the courses, experiences, and processes that constitute a program; the competencies that students are expected to achieve; and their proficiencies as determined by tests and other outcome measures.</td>
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For the CES Action Plan, we followed Altschuld’s (2005) approach and delineated among

- certification, as an individual-level assessment and, typically, testing of competencies;
- credentialing, as a set of courses or other experiences that a person must go through, which may or may not involve examinations; and
- licensure, as the legally more stringent form of individually tested certification, normally related to the protection of the public.

The following were critical points to an Action Plan for CES:

1. Credentialing is a process that takes into account formal education, training, and experience to designate practicing professionals as meeting agreed-upon professional standards. It may be used by a professional society without sanction from any other authority. The bearer of a credential has received an attestation from a professional body that the person has completed the requisite set of courses (or their equivalents) and/or other relevant experiences. The specification of the formal education component typically required for accreditation consists of the professional association setting the criteria for acceptance of designated education programs. (CES chose to not validate the content of training programs and replaced such validation with the acceptance of the evidence submitted as proof of adequate formal training or the equivalent.)

2. Certification sets formal educational and competency-related criteria for an individual. It may be established by a professional society without sanction from any other authority. The bearer of a certificate has received an attestation from a professional body that, in the judgement of the professional body, the person has mastered certain skills and competencies in a field.

3. Licensing requires authority from a political jurisdiction, typically with strong input from a professional association. Services that are licensed (e.g., medical, legal) can only be legally performed by the lawful holder of the licence.

Licensure is a category of certification, while credentialing is a separate category. This was acceptable for our purposes, as our key focus was the examination of credentialing. Licensure is a very specific and high-level form of certification, involving mandatory standards typically set in legislation for public protection reasons. Cousins and Aubry (2006) also consider licensure to be a form of individual certification, and distinguish credentialing from certification:

A credentialing system does not specify the skill set attained by the person who is credentialled, only that they have gone through delineated experiences and courses. This is consistent with Love’s (1994) distinction between a professional development
approach and a licensure approach to certification. Credentialing aligns with the professional development approach. (p. 18)

The Action Plan proposed for the CES primarily addressed two categories of professional designation for evaluators: credentialing and certification. The main emphasis was on credentialing because the CES had requested this focus and most of the momentum at that time seemed to favour the institutionalization of this type of designation.

Based on the literature review and experiences of other professions reviewed, Huse and McDavid (2006) identified 14 steps typically required for a professional body to offer a credential. Four additional steps were identified for certification, while three additional steps were identified for licencing of practitioners. The credentialing steps played a role in how CES framed the process by which evaluators could achieve the CES-sanctioned professional designation.

Credentialing requires demonstration of the successful completion of specified education program(s) and/or designated experiences. Although accreditation has usually been associated with credentialing, they are distinct both conceptually and in practice. Accreditation simply refers to the assessment of a program within an educational institution to confirm that it is meeting established profession-relevant criteria. The literature review revealed that in almost all cases of a credentialing or certification system, the professional body undertakes an accreditation process with the institutions that offer courses or training programs.

The Action Plan also gave attention to certification from two perspectives: (a) a letters of support approach to the attestation of mastery of skills and competencies, and (b) requiring successful completion of a formal test or set of tests (i.e., certification exams). Licensure was not discussed in the Action Plan. It may be considered at a later stage in the development of the Society’s professionalization plans.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS: THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

In the RFP Terms of Reference for the Action Plan, CES asked that information on 11 issues be sought from other relevant organizations that had or could have had professional designations. The following is a summary of answers to those questions as provided by 16 professional associations. More detailed information is available in Halpern and Long (2007).

Knowledge Base

On what professional standards of practice is the system based?

Of the 16 organizations interviewed, 14 had established at least one professional designation and 2 had considered doing so. Of those 14 associations, 11 stated they had a body of knowledge or a set of “competencies” developed by teams of volunteer members, paid staff, and contractors.
As for knowledge verification, 11 of the 14 associations with a designation appeared to hold their own exams separate from any courses taken. Some also required university degrees (sometimes restricted to specific disciplines) or the completion of courses they sponsored themselves. Of the 3 associations with designations that did not require exams, 2 required the completion of their own courses and 1 required the completion of accredited academic programs. At least half of the associations with designations required several years of experience as a condition for the designation.

Training and Professional Development Options and Delivery

What training and professional development options are acknowledged? Are training programs accredited by the organization? Who delivers training?

Training and professional development options came in two forms: accredited academic courses and courses sponsored by the association. Of the 14 associations with designations, some required the accredited programs in addition to their own exams, while others accepted them as a substitute for those exams. Only 1 association relied solely on the completion of an accredited academic program. About half of these associations sponsored courses that met a portion of the designation requirements. In a few cases, an academic course could serve as a substitute for the association course.

Grandparenting

Is/was a “grandparenting” system invoked for existing members at the time of system installation? How was grandparenting structured?

Most of the associations adopted some form of grandparenting at the introduction of their designation. However, it appeared that usually the grandparented award was then subject to the same maintenance requirements (e.g., continuing education, fee payment, etc.) as other designation holders.

Only one association expressed regrets at grandparenting existing practitioners. It had been created to unify several similar associations. Some of them had awarded their designations on rather easy terms. Nonetheless, all holders of any of those designations were automatically given the new association’s designation. After several years, there was still a “distinct difference in general between those who have written vs. not written the exam.” Part of the difficulty faced by the new association was that “there were no criteria for bringing members up to single standard.”

Experience Requirements—Credentialing

Are professional experience parameters acknowledged and incorporated into the credentialing system? How?

The sole association that relied completely on credentialing had no experience requirement. The other 13 associations were only partially credentialed, with designations that required various mixes of accredited academic courses, in-house
course work, and association-sponsored exams. Of these, at least 7 had some experience requirement, typically two to three years. A couple of these associations allowed experience and academic work to be partial substitutes for each other. In most cases, claimed experience had to be verified by, for example, the candidate’s employers or sponsor.

**Differential Levels of Professional Credentials**

Are differential levels of professional credential identified and maintained? On what basis are distinctions made?

Of the 14 associations with a designation, 5 had more than one professional designation and some had as many as 4. The designations were distinguished by seniority and/or specialty. Although complete numbers were unavailable, it appeared that, in general, neither the more senior designations nor the specialized ones were held by many people.

**Continuous Learning**

Is demonstration of continuous learning required of members to maintain credentials? What sorts of learning experiences qualify?

Of the 14 associations with designations, at least 8 required a certain number of hours of ongoing professional development/continuing education. A typical example would be 80 hours every two years. A variety of activities qualified as professional development, such as courses of study, attendance at seminars or conferences, and voluntary work for the association.

**Set-up Costs**

What are the major set-up costs?

Few respondents could provide estimates of set-up costs, often because the work was carried out many years earlier. There were no estimates for the original accreditation of academic programs and courses, although respondents said that the task required much volunteer and staff time.

For the original exam development, one association placed the cost at about $200,000. About half of this was in volunteer time. Another association estimated that the costs of reviewing both its competencies and designation exam questions was about $50,000, including contracts and staff time, as well as numerous volunteer hours.

**Maintenance Costs**

What are the ongoing maintenance costs?

Few respondents could provide approximate estimates of the ongoing maintenance costs of the designation. Several categories of concerns were highlighted by respondents, as follows.
Dealing with the concerns of, or legal action taken by, clients of the profession because of their dissatisfaction with designation holders. This appeared to be a minor problem for all associations that commented.

Dealing with complaints, possibly coupled with legal action, from people who have tried but failed to obtain the designation. Only a few associations had received such complaints, and none faced legal action.

Dealing with people who have falsely claimed to hold the designation. For the large majority of associations, this had not been a problem.

**System Finance**

*How is the system financed?*

Three organizations reported that they charged academic institutions no fees for the original selection and periodic review of their programs and courses. Two organizations charged accredited institutions $100 per year.

There are complex variations from association to association in the structure of the designation fees paid by individual candidates. They depend in part on whether certain courses are mandatory and whether the association holds its own exams. The total bill for the designation process typically falls in the range of $500–1,000.

Fees for the designation are in addition to the annual membership fee. This is usually within the $300–600 range, with outliers as low as about $150 and as high as almost $1,000.

**Benefits**

*Are tangible benefits of the credentialing system in evidence? What are they?*

Generally, respondents felt that the major benefit of the designation was to identify and implement qualification standards and improve the supply and quality of trained professionals.

Several informants reported that employers valued the quality assurance provided by the designation, gave credentialed candidates preference when recruiting employees, and may encourage or require that current employees obtain the designation. Most respondents reported greater demand for the services of those with the designation. None of the respondents could identify any negative impacts that the designation had on the organization or its members. Mostly, respondents reported that nonholders of the designation have continued to work in the field.

**Legal Status**

Within Canada, there are three levels of legal status for professional designations, and any decision to establish a designation would have to include the selection of the level appropriate to the CES. The consortium thought it unlikely at this stage that the “first” level, “licensing,” would be selected. Only one of the organizations consulted had acquired this status.

The second level of legal status is identical in all important ways to the first, with the major exception that “nonholders” of the designation may practice in
In the field. In this case, the only “offence” is to falsely claim the possession of the designation. Five of the 14 associations interviewed held this status. The third level is provided by “Certification Marks” under the Federal Trademark Act. It is available to either a provincial or national association. In contrast to the first and second level, it is not an “offence” for a person to falsely claim to hold the designation; rather, the association holding the Certification Marks must seek damages in a civil court.

THE PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan made several recommendations for action by the Society. Acceptance of the recommendations would result in a sequence of professional designations to be maintained and controlled by the Society on behalf of professional evaluation in Canada.

Three successive levels of professional designation were recommended:

1. Member

   Any person who applies for membership in the Canadian Evaluation Society and who commits to adhere to the CES: (i) objectives, (ii) Program Evaluation Standards (CES, n.d.-b) and (iii) Guidelines for Ethical Conduct (CES, n.d.-a), will become a Member upon acceptance of their application.

2. Credentialed Evaluator

   2a. A CES Accreditation Board will be responsible for the determination of which programs of study will be accredited and which professional experience will be accepted as at least equivalent preparation.

   2b. The designation, Credentialed Evaluator, will be awarded upon application by a Member who has successfully completed an accredited program or its equivalent.

3. Certified Professional Evaluator (CPE):

   3a. CES should name a Board of Examiners (CESBE) to manage the CPE designation process.

   3b. The CESBE should develop operational definitions and procedures for each of the requirements of a CPE. This includes both the procedures to be used for letters of support (initial/interim approach) and the process leading to the development of standardized examinations (longer-term/targeted approach) to test core knowledge and competencies. Both the interim and the later routes to certification are valid. The interim route has the advantage of providing direct measurement of mastery as well as becoming available after a relatively short period of preparation. The longer-term route of examinations has the advantages of standardization and may be more cost-effective.

   3c. The designation, CPE, will be awarded upon application by a Member who meets all of the prescribed requirements.
4. Promotion and Publicity
   4a. CES should advocate on behalf of the value and benefits of the professional designations.
   4b. CES should maintain a publicly accessible directory of Members with their level of professional designation.
   4c. CES should engage in advocacy and promote the unique competencies of those of its members who have been awarded a professional designation.

MINORITY REPORT
One member of the consortium prepared a minority report (Long, 2006). His disagreement was based on two concerns:

1. To confirm that a person possesses the knowledge and skills required to perform functions competently, the organization must have a clear definition of the functions of the profession (including its “products”), a complete description of the core body of knowledge (including skills) required to perform those functions, and a valid means of testing for the possession of that knowledge.

2. The Consortium estimate of 5–8 years to develop a proper foundation to meet the criteria in (1) is much too high. With a different approach, the required time would be substantially less. The alternative approach would be to adopt a basic designation and a few advanced specialized ones to accommodate the diverse types of evaluation without requiring all evaluators to become competent in all of them.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ACTION PLAN: THE CONTEXT FOR PROFESSIONALIZING EVALUATION PRACTICE
The Action Plan recommendations submitted to the CES Board reflected a typical evaluative process: we started with terms of reference, parsed those into tasks, and gathered multiple lines of evidence to address the questions. Our consortium was a mix of practitioners and academics who shared the goal of advocating for the professionalization of evaluation practice in Canada, but held different views about what that would mean in practice. The Action Plan was a melding of these views.

The literature review conducted for this study indicated that the option of credentialing had been selected by comparatively few other professions. When credentialing was adopted, it was usually seen as one (initial) step in a multilevel system of professional designations. Many members of the CES lacked formal training as evaluators, and there was a wide range of views among members of the Society regarding the content and purposes of evaluation as a “profession.” The views encompassed different philosophical and methodological perspectives and the standards for practice they entailed.
We were also aware that the Society, as with any professional association, would wish to accommodate as many members as possible. Certification as an option would not be reachable for many members. It was also reasonable to argue that much of the work of an evaluator on an evaluation team did not require the highest level of training and experience—especially when the team had the benefit of access to an evaluator with senior levels of training and experience.

**ACTION PLAN EXPANDS CONSORTIUM VIEW OF CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL EVALUATOR (CPE)**

The Action Plan proposed three levels, including the Certified Professional Evaluator. The level of Credentialed Evaluator was intended to be accessible for larger numbers of evaluators who had completed a program of study accredited by the Society or the equivalent. It was expected that the criteria to define this level of training would be set to justify the ability to work on a wide range of evaluation tasks but would also require collaboration with a Certified Professional Evaluator for more complex work such as program design and attribution studies.

The level of Member was not intended to be evidence of the ability to independently conduct evaluations. It would be appropriate both for those who had competencies in any of a range of evaluation tasks and for those who wished to support the Society. In both cases, there was a need to formally accept the CES objectives, *Program Evaluation Standards*, and *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct*.

**REFERENCES**


**AUTHOR INFORMATION**

Gerald Halpern, PhD, CE, has practiced performance measurement/management and attribution-focused evaluation over four decades. In addition to being a consultant for all levels of government in Canada as well as for the nonprofit sector, his career has included research and evaluation-related appointments in both Canada and the United States. He has been active in CES since 1982 and has received awards for Contribution to Evaluation in Canada and for Service to the Canadian Evaluation Society (2006). He has been an Adjunct Professor at several universities where he has taught program evaluation-related courses.

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