

Evidence Capacities CoP Guidelines



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Background

Founded in 2012, the [Africa Evidence Network \(AEN\)](#) has been at the forefront of coordinating regional efforts towards enhancing the practice of Evidence-Informed Decision-Making (EIDM). As a member-based organisation, the group has innovated its programming over the years to provide targeted support to niche professional services within this development-practitioner field. This led to the initiation of the Enhancing Evidence Capacities workstream, and particularly, its working group, in the design of the biennial event Evidence 2020 (Online).

On successful delivery of its assigned roles, including the co-development of a [Manifesto on Capacity Development for EIDM in Africa](#), a management decision was made to transition the group into a Community of Practice (CoP), being the first of its kind within the network. An initial group of 18 interested persons, with a largely African pool of practitioners, were invited to co-design an instrument that will provide guidance to the group, culminating in this guidance document. The group is appreciative of generous financial support from the University of Johannesburg¹, which made possible the initial facilitation processes led by Reboot.

Mission

To provide a platform for cross-collaboration, learning, and sharing among members wishing to enhance capacities in EIDM.

Vision

Transforming capacities for EIDM in Africa through diverse, inclusive, and shared learning.

Values

The following core values are applicable to all member representatives:

- **Respect:** treat everyone with respect and dignity, everyone brings value even if their ideas are different, and works for the greater good of the sector.
- **Engage:** be inclusive, participate fully (sharing and learning), break down silos - we are one team.

¹ The Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE) of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) was the host organisation for the Africa Evidence Network (AEN) from 2012 to 2022. Some funding for activities of the network was therefore secured through this relationship.

- **Efficient:** improve processes, increase agility, prioritise effectively.

Purpose

The purpose of the CoP is to enhance capacities and foster collaborations in the EIDM sector in Africa. This is to be done by providing EIDM practitioners a way (virtual or in-person) to meet other practitioners, extend networks, learn from each other, and share ideas and issues. Members build their skills and knowledge while supporting others.

Objectives

The objectives of this community of practice are to:

- Provide a system of support and ongoing professional development for individuals in the EIDM area of practice (if membership grows there may be sub-specialty CoP's)
- Support and encourage the development and extension of specialist knowledge
- Keep abreast of and participate in promising practices
- Identify potential areas for collaborative research and development
- Mentoring to build the capability of less experienced practitioners
- Provide opportunities to demonstrate good practices employed within individual organisations
- Provide a facilitated communication channel
- Provide a mutual support network for practitioners
- Create a link with other networks and Communities of Practice
- Provide the opportunity for participants to have exposure and an experience of a variety of EIDM-related practices

Methods and frequency of meetings

Synchronous: Schedule of quarterly meetings

Meetings will be scheduled for different times to cater for a variety of participants' availability, taking into consideration the time zone differences.

Asynchronous: Online platforms will be made available for asynchronous communication and collaboration.

CoP Leadership

Selection

The Evidence Capacities CoP shall select one member as co-chair to serve in tandem with a co-chair appointed from within the AEN secretariat. Special teams/committees will be created to address specific issues as they emerge.

The CoP co-chair may be selected in any of the following ways, subject to their feasibility:

- election by all CoP members
- election by specific CoP members
- expression of interest to, and selection by specific CoP members

The co-chair of the Community is responsible for:

- Chairing meetings;
- Facilitating communication within the group;
- Managing relationships with external stakeholders;
- Acting as the point of contact with the AEN Secretariat if needed;
- Introducing new members to the work of the group;
- Participating in annual learning events facilitated by the AEN, where possible;
- Identifying funding and learning opportunities that can help the CoP achieve its goals; and
- Managing risks associated with abiding by AEN standards.

Expression of Interest

Applicants for co-chair roles should provide the following:

- a current Curriculum Vitae
- a cover letter outlining the skills and attributes that would assist them in the position together with an explanation of why they would be a suitable co-chair for the CoP; ideally this would include:
 - demonstrated experience in participating in working parties/reference

- groups
 - demonstrated understanding of the role of the Executive
 - willingness and ability to commit to the time and workload associated with being a co-chair
 - demonstrated leadership skills and experience
- contact details for two current referees

Election

The type of election undertaken will depend on whether it is open to all network members, or to specific network members for a particular category (sub-regions, language groups, etc.). Whichever method is chosen, a few key practices are suggested as follows.

- The AEN-appointed co-chair sends an email to all relevant network members calling for nominations for the co-chair position
- There will be a clear closing date for nominations.
- If more than the required nominations are received, the AEN co-lead coordinates the election process.
- Voting is conducted at the 3rd meeting of the year.
- The AEN co-lead counts the nominations and declares the result of the nomination.
- Where the vote is tied, the AEN co-lead has the casting vote.
- The result of the vote is binding.

Tenure

Co-chairs are expected to lead for a term of two years. Former co-chairs are permitted to be re-elected; the maximum consecutive tenure is two terms.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or by-laws will be created to guide the selection of leadership for the CoP.

AEN Secretariat Role

The AEN secretariat will continue to support and engage the CoP in a number of ways.

Enable

AEN secretariat sees CoPs as a key part of AEN's architecture and is committed to enabling CoPs to function effectively through providing enabling infrastructure (Collaboration and teleconference facilities), building capacity, sharing lessons, and facilitating linkages.

Inform and Consult

AEN secretariat recognises that a lot of the sector's expertise in both policy and practice is located within the CoP and therefore will consult with CoPs on an as-needed basis.

Managing Risk

AEN secretariat encourages the CoP to communicate with AEN secretariat about their work, particularly where it may involve sensitive or controversial issues. In such cases, AEN secretariat may work with the CoP to institute communication protocols that are specific to that CoP or to specific pieces of that CoP's work.

Work with to deliver

The AEN secretariat may ask the CoP or some members of the CoP to undertake a specific piece of work on AEN secretariat's behalf. In such cases, AEN secretariat will provide additional support to the CoP.

Promote

The AEN secretariat can promote the work of CoPs through its public communication platforms. This can include posting a blog written by the CoP or any of its members, sharing tools and other resources developed by the CoP, and profiling and engaging expert practitioners from the CoP.

AEN secretariat will take partial responsibility for managing the CoP through its appointed co-chair.

- AEN secretariat's co-chair will take overall responsibility for the management of CoP as well as specific responsibility for the conceptual framework, guidelines for developing and maintaining CoP, Terms of References (ToRs) for co-chairs and participants, workshops for members, etc.
- The AEN secretariat co-chair will act as the first point of contact for the CoP and has the responsibility for maintaining an overview of the CoP, promoting the CoP to the wider membership and development community, registering/deregistering participants in the CoP on the platform, and acting as

the link (gatekeeper) for communication between the CoP and the AEN secretariat.

- The AEN secretariat co-chair will take responsibility for the enabling technology/functionality of the web-based platform and providing training to participants when relevant.

CoP Participants

An individual's level of participation and engagement in the CoP is self-selecting and self-managed and hence the CoP recognizes and accepts that participation will vary.

Individual participation is defined by the following characteristics;

- Membership is voluntary;
- Members can belong to more than one CoP;
- Members are accountable to themselves and the group;
- Members can vary their level of participation. Whilst some group members will drive group content and action, others may observe from the sideline. Other participants may choose to engage at different times or on initiatives or projects depending on their own workload/capacity.
- Members wishing to participate are asked to give permission for their contact details to be shared with other members.
- Materials (hard copy or electronic), not in the public domain, that are shared with members, remain the property of the originating member/organisation.
- Members providing material should include a document 'footer' indicating the member's name/ organisation and the date the documents were shared with the group. These shared materials are not to be:
 - used without appropriate acknowledgment of the originating member/organisation
 - altered without seeking permission from the originating member/organisation.
- Where applicable, materials shared may be used in the normal way for publication, with appropriate referencing.

Responsibilities

- Share knowledge and expertise

- Share values and principles around collaboration and peer support
- Share relevant resources
- Contribute to a body of knowledge and resources available to all members, for example, through written documents, concept notes, leading webinars, convening reflection meetings, etc.
- Generate and support positive culture and practice change
- Promote the CoP objectives in the community in a spirit of good faith
- Provide input and feedback to fellow CoP members
- Support innovation and creativity

Communication and Confidentiality

The Community of Practice will communicate primarily through an online communication platform. The AEN will provide a platform for the CoP to share information and resources, start discussions, organise meetings and events. All content that is stored within the platform will only be visible and accessible to the members of the CoP.

The platform will also allow users to create sub-groups within the larger CoP, to have side discussions on more specialised issues. The content posted in the sub-group will only be visible and accessible to its members.

The AEN will also continue to provide access to online meeting facilities that the CoP's leadership will manage.

Information not readily available in the public domain and any intelligence gathered through communication within the CoP, including agenda and minutes, is shared on a confidential basis. Information can be shared if permission is given by the relevant member(s).

Proposed Kick-off Activities

To achieve our primary goals of improving cross-collaboration learning and sharing among CoP members, as well as understanding in-depth members' expert areas and tapping into each other expertise, we propose the following activities:

1. **Interactive portal** - An integrated online platform consisting of features to

facilitate the interaction of members, and access to member projects, EIDM tools and resources. The portal will provide an opportunity to collaborate on capacity development initiatives and develop knowledge products through joint efforts (co-design / co-production). The portal will also be populated with key capacities others can draw on for collaborations and proposals. Members will get a chance to present their work and reflect on lessons learnt, including any implications for the future. Members can also have an opportunity to peer review each other's work, e.g., research papers and proposals, including mentorship of early career professionals by senior colleagues.

The portal must ensure the CoP's ability to function in multiple preferred member languages to adhere to AEN values and mission.

The portal will consist of the following elements:

- Membership database - This should contain institutional and individual members, including descriptions, for instance, institutional details, area of focus, sector, current projects etc., whilst personal details include contact information, members' research interests, skills, and projects they are working on etc.
- A dynamic platform where members can communicate and collaborate through discussion groups, posts, chats etc. We may deploy Slack/Telegram/WhatsApp for these kinds of interactions. Members will be able to converse and post freely about opportunities, learnings, and discussion topics.
- Resources Database - The database will provide access to EIDM Tools and Resources to assist members in implementing their projects, for instance, Guidelines, Toolkits, EIDM Courses, Training, essential publications etc.
- Mentorship.

2. Conferences/webinars/workshops

This will take various forms, including:

- presentations from members on their research, experiences, what has worked and what can be improved in EIDM capacity development,
- periodic and regular webinars in which one or more members present part of their work,
- case studies about experiences of capacity development in EIDM,

- including challenges they face,
- webinar talks with champions of EIDM in decision-making.

Conferences will convene a dedicated session for CoP members to meet and greet and network, where possible. Evidence conferences should be held in other regions of the African continent and include other languages. Specific capacity development workshops to strengthen individual skills e.g., training in systematic reviews.

3. Africa Evidence Journal

In the medium term, the CoP leadership will work towards establishing a journal for the practice, although preparations can begin in the short-term working with existing journals for the purpose of gaining experience. The journal will allow members access to a contextualised peer-reviewed publication to extensively share the knowledge generated by the community of practice without limitations associated with external journals.