In 2010, after many years of discussion, planning, and consultation, the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) launched a voluntary program to provide members with a professional designation—the Credentialed Evaluator (CE) designation. This special issue of the Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation aims to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of issues surrounding the inspiration, development, implementation, and continuous improvement of the professional designation program. As guest editors we hope the issue will serve three purposes.

First, the issue provides a formal record of the initiative for the benefit of others who may consider developing a professional designation for evaluators. The issue shares the experience of the Canadian evaluation community in its quest for an identity, a clear demarcation of what is required to successfully undertake evaluation work. It is a public record of this journey to the voluntary Credentialed Evaluator designation, including the twists and turns along the way. The roadmap is designed to inform similar initiatives contemplated by other national, regional, or international evaluation organizations.

Next, we celebrate the efforts and honour the debates that were integral to the success of this initiative in Canada. The importance of voluntary contributions from the CES membership needs to be recognized and applauded. Contributors to this special edition also played significant roles in the journey taken, and, although the authors worked on making the CE a reality, we did not always agree. In fact, some were opposed to a professional designation of any type and others were not optimistic about the nature of the CE as developed. It is a testament to the evaluation community that behaviour and communications were professional and respectful, regardless of personal positions on the issue. Further, once the professional designation was adopted, many in the community who held differing opinions on the CE were quick to invest in its success and become part of the process.

Finally, the special issue is designed to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the evolution of our profession, including the future of this professional designations program in Canada. The articles provide a foundation for moving forward.
in Canada, refreshing and keeping vital the professional designations program now in effect. And, importantly, the issue is a work of reflection on the evolution of the evaluation profession in Canada.

The articles are organized sequentially, discussing the inspiration, research, development, implementation, and continuous improvement of Canadian efforts to professionalize evaluation. A summary of each of the nine articles in this issue follows.

- The issue begins with Love’s article on the early debates and initiatives that built the foundation for the CES professional designation initiative. In 1994 he presented the idea of a professional designation in an article, “Should evaluators be certified,” in *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 62 (pp. 29–40). He has since participated in many of the debates within the evaluation community on the professionalization of evaluation.

   From 2006 to 2010, the professionalization issue became a focus of attention within the CES. The events of that period, which culminated in the implementation of the Credentialed Evaluator designation, are covered in the next four articles.

- In the second article Halpern, Gauthier, and McDavid explain how they examined the issue of professionalization through a literature review, consultation with organizations, and a survey of evaluation practice. They describe the production of an Action Plan that suggested the CES develop a three-tiered system of professional designations for its membership: Member, Credentialed Evaluator, and, later, a higher-level Certified Professional Evaluator designation.

- The third article describes the development of the CE designation and how context and process importantly shaped this unique evaluation designation. Buchanan shares some of the thinking and discussions behind the development of the designation, which she describes as straddling conventional definitions of credentialing and certification. She comments on the development process, future opportunities, and challenges.

- In the fourth article Maicher and Frank cover the identification of Canadian competencies for evaluation practice and the process through which they were articulated, reviewed, and revised. Five broad themes or competency domains emerged. Specific competencies, each with associated descriptors, were developed and validated through a consultative process. The article also examines the usefulness of the competencies to evaluation educators, evaluation clients, and others.

- The fifth article, by Kuji-Shikatani, Thompson, and Matthew, examines and reflects on the resources, processes, and structures necessary to operationalize the professional designations program once it had been
defined. The article describes how the confluence of highly cooperative volunteers from the CES and the interdisciplinary nature of evaluation practice led to a sharing of expertise in system development, policy, governance, and management.

Further articles examine the professional designation program as it has operated over the past five years.

- In article six, Barrington, Frank, Gauthier, and Hicks discuss the decision-making body of the PDP—the Credentialing Board. They describe the demographics of the original Board, its evolution, and the work that it accomplished. The article examines the evolution of the Board members’ perspectives, their reasons for remaining on the Board or leaving it, and their views on the Board’s achievements and potential future directions.

- In the seventh article, Gauthier, Kischuk, Borys, and Roy report on a survey of individual CES members concerning the CE designation. They provide data on the motivations of those who applied for the designation, their experience with the application process, the benefits or drawbacks that they have seen from the CE designation, and the extent to which their expectations of the CE have been realized. The article also provides the views of respondents who did not pursue the designation, reporting on their perceptions of the program, the barriers to application, and their plans for future involvement.

- In the eighth article King provides an outside perspective on the CES Credentialed Evaluator Program. The author uses three theoretical models to analyze the program, positions it in terms of credentialing activities around the world, and offers advice to other voluntary organizations for program evaluation when drawing lessons from the Canadian experience.

- A summative piece by Dumaine speaks to the accomplishments and future of the professional designation program in the CES. He speculates on possible long-term impacts of the Professional Designations Program on the field of evaluation in Canada, and is of the view that the impact of the program will largely stem from the increased capacity of Credentialed Evaluators as they pursue professional development opportunities to meet the requirements for retaining the CES designation.

In this International Year of Evaluation we trust that the thoughts, analysis, and reflections of this special issue will contribute to improving the practice of evaluation and to the ongoing dialogue on professionalization. We hope, too, that it will serve as a celebration of the intense, united efforts of many volunteers that have enabled CES to develop its innovative credentialing program.