



Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure and Transport



Departmental Evaluation Strategy

2012-16

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The Departmental Evaluation Schedule (Schedule 1) lists the Department's priority and planned evaluation activities over the next five years. As the Schedule is updated annually, subsequent versions will be available on [ENTR](#).

Foreword



The Department is committed to delivering improved infrastructure and an efficient, sustainable, competitive, safe and secure transport system for the people of Australia. At the same time, we are striving to be a leading Commonwealth agency for program and project delivery, investment strategy and planning, effective regulation and policy reform.

If we are to achieve this vision, we must keep our sights set firmly on these outcomes, while at the same time being on the front foot to anticipate and address challenges as they arise, and offer considered solutions to government. We need to continuously update our understanding of our operating environment, and have the information and tools to weigh up our role and policy options. We should ensure we have well developed policy rationale, be clear on what success will look like for our policy, program and regulatory activities, and be able to demonstrate it to our stakeholders.

I believe this is not something we do as a one off - we need to embed this active thinking in our management approach – with regular probing, reflecting and improvement.

We must systematically and objectively take a look at what we do, why we do it, what we have achieved and what could be done better. Review and evaluation must therefore be at the heart of everything we do.

This Departmental Evaluation Strategy formalises the Department's commitment to continuous improvement and accountability. As professional public servants, we are all accountable for our own performance and improvement, and I expect evaluation to be incorporated as a normal and necessary aspect of how we do our business.

Only through the honest examination of our activities, the courage to share our achievements and our experiences, the willingness to learn from our past, and the flexibility to adapt to new ideas and changing circumstances will our vision become reality.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes.

Mike Mrdak
Secretary

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of a project, program, regulation, policy, function or activity leading to well informed judgements about its impact, achievements and merit. In its simplest form, evaluation is about reflecting on what we do, why we do it, whether we achieved (or are achieving) what we set out to do, and whether there are better ways of doing it.

Evaluations facilitate improved decision making and organisational learning. Evaluations assist decision-makers at all levels to answer questions of:

- **Appropriateness** – Is the activity still relevant in light of the current operating environment and circumstances, including government policy changes?
- **Effectiveness** – Has the activity achieved its stated objectives?
- **Efficiency** – Are there better ways of achieving the objectives?

Evaluations may also include an assessment of:

- Is there a need to establish a new program, policy or regulation?
- Should the current activity be extended or modified?
- Should resourcing remain at current levels, be increased, decreased or discontinued?
- Is the activity producing unintended outcomes, positive or otherwise?
- Is the activity reaching its target audience?
- Are administrative, governance and reporting arrangements effective and efficient?

Evaluation can occur at a point in time, or be an ongoing process. 'Evaluation thinking' is about building in regular ongoing evaluation questions and critical analysis to service delivery, policy, program, and regulatory management.

Regular questioning, discussion and 'evaluation thinking' provides teams with the opportunity to fine tune and improve the effectiveness of activities, consider the operating environment, provide timely responses to stakeholder issues, examine interrelationships with other activities and agencies, and just as importantly, highlight achievements.

“ ‘Evaluation thinking’ is about building in regular ongoing evaluation questions and critical analysis to service delivery, policy, program, and regulatory management. ”



Why do we need an evaluation strategy?

Evaluation is one of many tools that we, as professional public servants have at our disposal to effectively implement government policies, programs, services and regulations. If used well, it can empower us individually and as a Department to foresee and lead innovative policy reforms, successfully deliver strategic priorities and demonstrate achievements and progress of our policies.

Making use of evaluations can help us be better program managers, regulators, service deliverers and policy designers by providing us with the evidence to inform and support our decision-making.

The Departmental Evaluation Strategy is aimed at ensuring that we get the best results from our evaluation activities – that resources are allocated to priority areas, results are reliable, useful and timely, and that findings are shared and used to support our decision making.

The Departmental Evaluation Strategy supports the Department’s Workforce Plan 2012. The Department requires several key skills to help build a more sustainable and liveable Australia, including strategic thinking, strategic planning, policy development, project management and analytical and critical thinking. All these skill areas can be enhanced through the use of evaluation processes, findings and thinking.

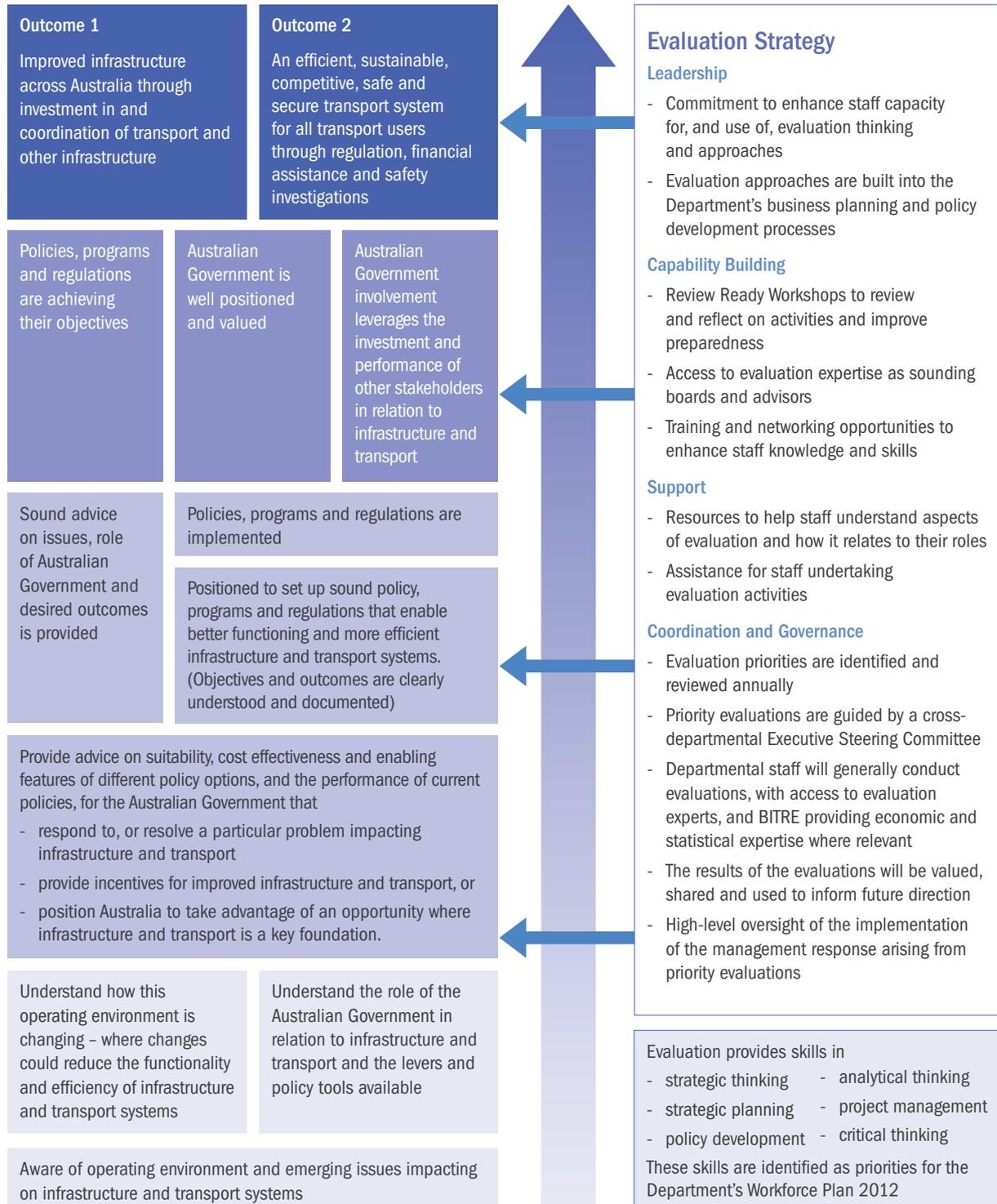
Most importantly, embracing and embedding a culture of evaluation and reflective thinking across the Department will provide us with the opportunity to shift from a compliance-orientation towards establishing ourselves as the leading agency for identifying and delivering pioneering, world class transport and infrastructure solutions.

Figure 1 illustrates how initiatives to strengthen evaluation under this strategy are linked to other corporate objectives and activities.

“Making use of evaluations can help us be better program managers, regulators, service deliverers and policy designers by providing us with the evidence to inform and support our decision-making.”



Figure 1: Evaluation – Providing skills and opportunities for achieving the Department’s outcomes





Objectives of the Departmental Evaluation Strategy

The Departmental Evaluation Strategy aims to underpin the achievement of the Vision for the Department by fostering:

- **A proactive attitude**
Evaluation is valued as an essential and constructive element of good program and regulatory management, policy design and service delivery.
- **Enhanced skills and knowledge**
We have the skills and knowledge we need to plan, conduct, manage and utilise evaluations.
- **Useful tools and resources**
Evaluation tools and resources are available to us to support us in our evaluation activities.
- **Productive working relationships**
We actively engage with internal and external stakeholders to discuss related policy, program and regulatory activities.
- **Effective structures and systems**
Evaluation activities are planned, prioritised, coordinated and supported by high level governance arrangements.
- **High quality evaluations**
Evaluation of policies, programs and regulations is widespread, fit for purpose and of high quality.
- **Informed decision making**
Evaluation findings are widely disseminated, valued, and used to deliver improved infrastructure and transport outcomes, drive policy reforms, effectively implement government projects, programs, and regulations, and develop investment strategies.

Strengthening Evaluation in Infrastructure and Transport

Through the implementation of the five year Departmental Evaluation Strategy, the Department is aiming to build evaluation capability and use in policy, program and regulatory teams to capitalise on the opportunities that evaluation processes and thinking provide to constantly improve our performance.

In addition, reviews and reports are increasingly being requested for initiatives mid-cycle. This Strategy provides us with the lead time we need to plan our evaluation activities in advance. It also supports us with tools, such as Review Ready Workshops, to ensure we are collecting the data we need so we are prepared to answer key questions when required.

The Evaluation Strategy has four key areas of action:

1. Leadership

For evaluation to be valued as an essential and constructive element of good program and regulatory management, policy design and service delivery, it must be championed by the Department's senior leaders.

2. Capability Building

A critical success factor in the effective conduct and use of evaluation is ensuring that we have the skills and knowledge we need to plan, conduct, manage and utilise evaluations. The enhancement of evaluation skills and knowledge within the Department will not only benefit the organisation as a whole, but provides opportunities for individuals to further develop a highly transferable skill set and to more effectively shape public policy in the future.

3. Support

To achieve a level of consistency in the Department's approach to evaluation, and assist in building evaluation capability, staff need access to targeted evaluation tools and resources to support them in their evaluation activities.

4. Coordination and Governance

Well planned, prioritised evaluations that are integrated with related activities across the Department and other agencies will enable us to leverage the greatest return from our evaluation investment. Evaluation activities will be reflected in divisional priorities and appropriately resourced. We must also have confidence in our evaluation activities, by ensuring they are properly conducted, monitored and implemented.

Table 1 provides an overview of the actions to be undertaken by the Department under each area of focus to facilitate the achievement of the short and medium term objectives of the Departmental Evaluation Strategy.



Table 1: Overview of Departmental Evaluation Capability Building Plan 2012 to 2016

Strategic Evaluation Objectives						
A proactive attitude	Enhanced skills and knowledge	Useful tools and resources	Productive working relationships	Effective structures and systems	High quality evaluations	Informed decision making
Medium Term Outcomes (5 Years)						
Evaluation is valued as an essential and constructive element of good program and regulatory management, policy design and service delivery.	We have the skills and knowledge we need to plan, conduct, manage and utilise evaluations.	Evaluation tools and resources are available to us to support us in our evaluation activities.	We actively engage with internal and external stakeholders to discuss related policy, program and regulatory activities.	Evaluation activities are planned, prioritised, coordinated and supported by high level governance arrangements.	Evaluation of policies, programs and regulations is widespread, fit for purpose and of high quality.	Evaluation findings are widely disseminated, valued, and used to deliver improved outcomes, drive policy reforms, effectively implement government initiatives, and develop investment strategies.
Short Term Outcomes (2 Years)						
A visible and regularly reinforced commitment by the Department's Executive Team to build evaluation capability and an evaluation culture within the Department. Widespread appreciation of the benefits of evaluation and how it can be used to support decision making.	Evaluation training, development and networking options that are relevant and valued by staff. Access to evaluation expertise to support rigorous and quality evaluation outcomes.	Evaluation tools and resources that are concise, relevant, helpful and accessible. Access to advice and assistance for staff undertaking evaluation activities.	Collaborative evaluations that engage and draw upon the knowledge, views and ideas of relevant areas of the Department, government agencies and stakeholders. Teams engage in regular ongoing evaluation questioning, discussion and critical analysis.	The strategic investment of evaluation resources to priority activities. High-level governance arrangements to oversee the conduct and implementation of evaluations.	Individual policies, programs and regulations have well defined objectives and performance indicators as a foundation for future evaluation. Regular, planned, adequately resourced evaluations that are relevant to the needs of managers and decision makers.	Evaluation results are valued and used to inform decision making and improve performance. Evaluation practices are embedded into routine business planning and policy development processes.
Actions						
Leadership	Capability Building	Support	Coordination and Governance			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Senior managers 'championing' evaluation through presentations, meetings and correspondence Encouraging program and regulatory areas to develop and regularly review evaluation plans Regularly communicating the benefits of evaluation through email, web material, presentations and workshops, and evaluation resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying, promoting and supporting evaluation training and networking opportunities for staff Providing teams with the opportunity to review activities through Review Ready Workshops Facilitating internal and external cooperation in the conduct of evaluations to promote on-the-job learning and skills development, while leveraging external expertise 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Developing web-based guidance material and tools for evaluation activities Incorporating evaluation considerations in New Policy Proposals Providing tailored support to staff conducting evaluations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a departmental wide, five year evaluation schedule of priority evaluation activities which is updated annually Establishing cross-departmental steering committees to oversee the conduct of priority evaluations, that report to the Finance, Reporting and Program Committee and the Audit Committee Monitoring the implementation of the management response and actions arising from the evaluations by the Finance, Reporting and Program Committee Disseminating evaluation findings across the Department to promote improved practices Evaluating the Departmental Evaluation Strategy to determine whether it has achieved its objectives, and identify areas for improvement 			

Departmental Evaluation Principles

Evaluation activities should be planned and undertaken in accordance with the following principles:

- ***Plan for success***

Evaluation frameworks should include clearly stated objectives, program logics and rationale, and performance indicators. Monitoring and evaluation plans should be developed during the design phase of a program, policy or regulation. This will improve the efficiency, timeliness and usefulness of evaluation activities by ensuring the required data is collected and resources are not wasted collecting irrelevant information.

- ***Allocate sufficient resources***

Useful evaluations require adequate financial and human resources. As evaluation is considered an integral component of good program and regulatory management, policy design and service delivery, all New Policy Proposals should include consideration of resources for evaluation activities.

- ***Learn by doing***

The Department is committed to the professional development of staff, and we are actively encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to participate in both formal and informal evaluation activities in the workplace.

- ***Strategically prioritise evaluations***

The evaluation process should be used strategically, reflecting departmental priorities and tailored to the nature, size and risk of each activity being examined, any requirement for external review and any past evaluation or review findings.

- ***Conduct objective, honest and ethical evaluations***

Evaluations should be objective and honest, and include both qualitative and quantitative methods to inform the findings. Evaluations should be conducted with due diligence, maintain privacy and confidentiality, and in accordance with the APS Code of Conduct.

- ***Examine the past and consider the future***

Evaluations that examine whether an activity achieved what it set out to achieve, while also providing information useful for improving initiatives will both enable the outcomes of an initiative to be determined, while ensuring that any future activities can capitalise on the lessons learned to improve future performance.

- ***Share and use findings to improve performance***

Communicating evaluation findings to policy developers, decision makers and stakeholders, and acting upon recommendations, will help ensure that best practice is recognised and widely adopted, and less successful approaches are corrected or avoided in the future.



Priority Evaluations

A stock take of recent, current and planned evaluation, audit and review activity has been undertaken in conjunction with divisions to provide a comprehensive picture of the range of review activity already occurring across the Department.

The stock take has informed the development of the Priority Evaluation schedule by assisting the Department's Executive Team to prioritise activities for formal evaluation over the next five years. Activities have been prioritised for evaluation based on risk; magnitude and duration of funding; and the particular operating environment of activities.

The Departmental Evaluation Schedule (Schedule 1) lists the Department's priority and planned evaluation activities over the next five years. A current version is available on [ENTR](#).

Priority evaluations will generally be undertaken internally by cross-department teams. Evaluation support and mentoring will be available to teams conducting the evaluations to both reduce the additional work load and encourage on-the-job evaluation capability building.

Expertise may be bought in if appropriate and feasible. For example, some evaluations might require specific economic or statistical expertise available in the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE). Others may focus largely on obtaining stakeholder views and feedback and require specialist skills in survey design, analysis and reporting.

Each evaluation will be overseen by a Departmental Steering Committee comprising the Deputy Secretary who does not normally have line responsibility for the activity being evaluated (Steering Committee Chair), the Executive Director, Policy and Research and the General Manager, Governance and Reporting.

The Steering Committee is responsible for developing the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. The Steering Committee will ensure that evaluations are conducted on time and within budget, and that the analysis, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report are accurate and constructively assist Government to improve programs and regulatory activities and inform future policy considerations.

The evaluation report will be provided to the Finance, Reporting and Program Committee for consideration and approval, and to the Audit Committee for information. The Finance, Reporting and Program Committee will also have responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the management response and actions arising from the evaluation findings.

Continuous Review

The Departmental Evaluation Strategy will be reviewed annually to assess whether progress has been achieved towards the intended outcomes, and whether strategies should be revised based on that progress and the Department's goals over the medium term.

Schedule 1 is current as at the date of its publication, and will operate on a rolling five year basis. At a minimum, the schedule will be reviewed and approved annually by the Secretary.

The annual forward plan for evaluation activity will be provided to the Audit Committee and the Minister for information. A standing item will also be included quarterly on the agenda of the Finance, Reporting and Program Committee meetings to monitor progress and enable discussion with relevant divisional representatives about their respective evaluations and management responses.

Further Information

For information about the Departmental Evaluation Strategy, email evaluation@infrastructure.gov.au or refer to the Evaluation and Program Management site of [ENTR](#).

Please refer to ENTR for the current
Departmental Evaluation Schedule (Schedule 1)

