



Australian Government
**Department of Infrastructure
and Regional Development**

Evaluation Strategy

2016–21



© Commonwealth of Australia, 2016
ISBN 978-1-925401-43-1
June 2016/INFRA2827

Ownership of intellectual property rights in this publication

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights, if any) in this publication is owned by the Commonwealth of Australia (referred to below as the Commonwealth).

Disclaimer

The material contained in this publication is made available on the understanding that the Commonwealth is not providing professional advice, and that users exercise their own skill and care with respect to its use, and seek independent advice if necessary.

The Commonwealth makes no representations or warranties as to the contents or accuracy of the information contained in this publication. To the extent permitted by law, the Commonwealth disclaims liability to any person or organisation in respect of anything done, or omitted to be done, in reliance upon information contained in this publication.

Creative Commons licence

With the exception of (a) the Coat of Arms; (b) the Department of Infrastructure's photos and graphics; copyright in this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia Licence.

Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia Licence is a standard form licence agreement that allows you to copy, communicate and adapt this publication provided that you attribute the work to the Commonwealth and abide by the other licence terms.

A summary of the licence terms is available from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/deed.en>. The full licence terms are available from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode>. This publication should be attributed in the following way:
© Commonwealth of Australia 2016, *Evaluation Strategy 2016–21*.

Use of the Coat of Arms

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet sets the terms under which the Coat of Arms is used. Please refer to the Department's Commonwealth Coat of Arms and Government Branding web page <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/index.cfm#brand> and in particular, the Guidelines on the use of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms publication.

Contact us

This publication is available in hard copy or PDF format. All other rights are reserved, including in relation to any Departmental logos or trademarks, which may exist. For enquiries regarding the licence and any use of this publication, please contact:

Director — Publishing and Communications Section
Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
GPO Box 594, Canberra ACT 2601 Australia

Email: publishing@infrastructure.gov.au
Website: www.infrastructure.gov.au



Australian Government

**Department of Infrastructure
and Regional Development**

Evaluation Strategy

2016–21



An effective intervention, but not necessarily the most efficient option



Contents

Purpose of this Strategy	4
Brief history of evaluation in the Department	4
What is evaluation and why should we do it?	5
Evaluation Strategy 2016–21	9

Purpose of this Strategy

Following the achievements under the Departmental Evaluation Strategy since its launch in 2012, we are now embarking on a further five-year Strategy, over 2016–2021.

The overall objective of the Strategy is to further embed a culture of reflective and evaluative thinking in the Department to ensure we get the best results from what we do. It outlines:

- what activities the Department has undertaken since 2012
- what the Review of the Departmental Evaluation Strategy found in 2015–16
- what evaluation is
- why it is important
- where we will take evaluation over 2016–21, and
- how we will measure the success of the Strategy.

This document is designed to be relevant and useful to Departmental staff, so that we all have a shared understanding and commitment to the Department's approaches on evaluation.

Brief history of evaluation in the Department

In 2010 our Department began to develop and strengthen its evaluation culture. This led to the implementation of the Departmental Evaluation Strategy that was launched in March 2012, which was focussed on building an in-house evaluation capability.

In its earliest days, the Department focussed on 'doing' evaluations. More recently, there has been a shift towards:

- training in policy, programme and regulatory logic diagrams
- monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, and
- an emphasis on the use of evaluation mentors.

This has contributed to in-house capability building and supported line areas engaged in evaluation activities.

A review of the Departmental Evaluation Strategy was undertaken in 2015-16. The review found there was a very high level of awareness about evaluation; an appreciation of the benefits of evaluation; and an understanding about applying evaluative thinking. The Department's response to these findings is detailed in Section 4.

What is evaluation and why should we do it?

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of a policy, programme, or regulatory activity. It normally addresses aspects of efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness. This leads to well-informed judgements about the impact, achievements and/or merit of that activity.

‘Evaluative thinking’ is about building evaluation questions and critical analysis into policy/programme/regulatory design and management and service delivery.

In a nutshell, evaluation helps identify the extent to which objectives have been achieved; what went well and what could be done better; contributes to continual improvement; and ensures that the Department designs, implements and monitors its policies/programmes/regulatory activities.

Evaluations come in a range of forms, shapes and sizes, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Forms, shapes and sizes of evaluation activities



A typical evaluation should have the following features¹:

Oversight and support from Executive Directors and branch heads	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • buy in from the top! 	
Resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who is the team of people who will be doing the evaluation work? 	
A purpose, scope and terms of reference	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is the evaluation going to examine? • what is in scope (what really needs focussing on) vs. what is out of scope (what might be unachievable or not as relevant)? • what is the evaluation going to be used for? 	
A budget	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how is the evaluation funded? 	
A timeframe	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when will the evaluation start and finish? 	
Data and information	Data collection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what supporting data and information needs to be collected to inform the evaluation? This will likely provide quantitative evidence.
	Consultation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who needs to be contacted to provide their views to inform the evaluation? This will likely provide qualitative evidence.
A final report	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what did the evaluation find? • are things on track, are changes needed, are there better/cheaper/easier ways of doing things? 	
A management response	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is the response to the recommendation(s)? • who will implement any required changes to address the recommendation(s) and by when? • who will then monitor implementation until completion? 	
A debrief or lessons learned	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what did the evaluation team learn that can be applied to other activities in the Department? • what did the evaluation team learn that might possibly help in their future evaluations, what might other staff doing evaluations in the Department need to know? 	

¹ NB: these features are not listed in order of priority or necessarily in the exact sequence

There are many references and resources on evaluation and related concepts. We have put together a list that is in the Department's *Evaluation Resource Booklet 2016–21* that accompanies this Strategy.

Evaluations provide information to assist in improving activities, support the shift of resources into other activities, or determine if an activity is indeed a good use of taxpayers' money. They also contribute to performance management and the analysis of policies/programmes/regulatory activities.

Evaluation can answer important questions such as:

Does the activity remain relevant and appropriate?
Has the activity achieved its stated objectives? i.e. is it effective?
Should the activity be modified, extended or ceased?
Are there better ways of achieving the objectives?..... i.e. is it efficient?
Are there any unintended outcomes? Are these effects positive or negative?

In recent years, greater attention has been given to whole-of-government initiatives to build capacity and capability among the Australian Public Service (APS). The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC)'s Leadership and Core Skills Strategy refresh in 2014–15, highlighted some gaps and opportunities for the APS in the areas of strategic thinking; strategic questioning; generation of options and possibilities; gathering of evidence; weighing up alternatives; and developing and implementing plans for strategic action.

The *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* also emphasises the importance of government agencies reporting on the achievement of purposes and objectives.

In 2012, the APSC undertook a Capability Review of our Department. The Review welcomed the recently released Departmental Evaluation Strategy and commented positively on the Department's 'mindset for improvement'.

The Department's Workforce Plan indicates that public servants must have the capabilities to make insightful, decisive and defensible decisions based on identifying and analysing multiple and competing issues, challenges and opportunities.

This need is reflected in the divisional priorities and business plans, which highlight the need to improve our capabilities in strategic and analytical thinking, to effectively use data and information and to develop and articulate sound evidence-based policies.

Participating in evaluation-related activities contributes to the development of good policy, programme and regulation. These activities offer staff professional development opportunities, particularly as most of our evaluation effort is focussed on in-house capability building.

Being involved in evaluation-related activities also provides staff the opportunity to engage with change management and innovation. This is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Change management and innovation can come from many directions and have many influences



Evaluation Strategy 2016–21

During the next five years, the Department will continue to build on evaluation capacity and capability.

The success of the Strategy relies on key actions. These actions were introduced in the 2012 Strategy and are just as relevant today.

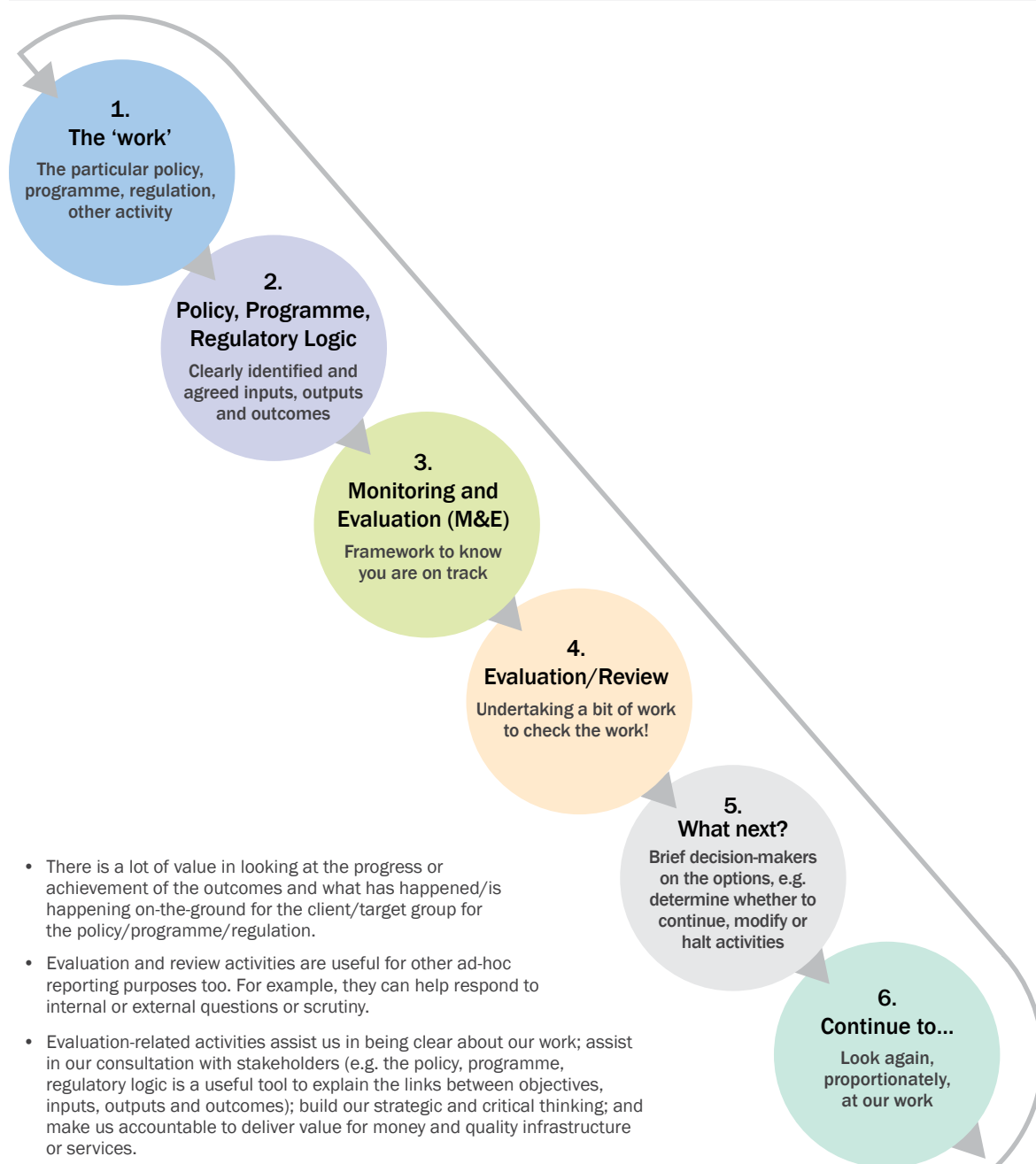
These actions are:

- 1. Leadership:** it is our aim for all Senior Executive Service (SES) to demonstrate commitment to evaluation-related activities. We also strive to find ‘champions’ who are willing to promote the benefits and use of evaluation across the Department.
 - The Department will continue to encourage leadership and discussion about evaluative thinking. The Secretary, Deputies and all SES become evaluation champions, supported by the Department’s Governance Unit.
 - Relevant links will be made to the SES Policy Lessons seminar series, and other related Departmental events.
- 2. Capacity and capability:** to ensure we have the right skills and knowledge to plan, conduct, manage and utilise evaluation.
 - The Department’s approach to evaluation is flexible and tailors assistance to line area needs.
 - Training activities provide a common understanding of key evaluation concepts and provide practical skills and examples.
 - Line area staff are involved in planning and conducting evaluations.
 - Mentoring assistance provides guidance and support to staff involved with evaluation-related activities, including building practical capability.
 - The aim is to make reflective and evaluative thinking part of each Departmental employee’s job, also creating a sense of ownership, autonomy and responsibility.
- 3. Development of resources and tools:** to enable staff to work on evaluation-related activities themselves.
 - Understanding the work we do, the policy/programme/regulatory objectives.
 - Policy/programme/regulatory logic: clearly identifying and agreeing on inputs, outputs and outcomes.
 - M&E: establishing a framework to know if we are on track.
 - Evaluation and review: what should it focus on? how will we undertake and manage it?
- 4. Coordination and governance of evaluation activities**
 - Evaluation-related activities are supported by a Steering Committee.
 - Staff are provided with advice and guidance on evaluation-related activities.
 - Roles and responsibilities during the evaluation process are clear.
 - Focus is on current priorities and integration of evaluation with other functions such as planning and risk.

Continual improvement involves looking again in future (proportionately) at the work we do. In this way, evaluative thinking is integral to the policy cycle, in how we ‘plan, do, check and act’. For example, after we undertake a policy/programme/regulatory logic, M&E, evaluation or review, we brief our decision-makers, providing them with options and discussing whether we continue, modify or halt an activity.

The Department's approach to evaluation over 2016–21 is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Summary of the Department's evaluation strategy and approach



The Department's evaluation schedule is updated annually, in consultation with Divisions and the Executive, and is available on the intranet/ENTR (under 'evaluation'). The schedule lists the evaluation-related activities to be undertaken each year. It also indicates the possible evaluations and reviews that will be undertaken in outyears.

Progress against this Strategy will be reviewed annually, with impact-focussed evaluations intended for 2018 and in 2020.

The success measures of the Strategy over 2016–17 to 2020–21:

- The Department's evaluation-related activities are seen as valuable; staff feedback indicates that they are seen as an essential and constructive element of good policy, programme and regulatory design and implementation.
- The Department's evaluation-related products (such as policy/programme/regulatory logics, M&E strategies and final evaluation reports) are being used to inform decision-making.
- Departmental staff are building skills and knowledge; they develop policy/programme/regulatory logics, M&E frameworks and evaluation documents (such as planning, conducting and managing evaluations, and writing evaluation reports) as a matter of course in normal business.
- The Department has made relevant links between evaluation-related activities, the SES Policy Lessons seminar series, and other related Departmental events.
- The Secretary, Deputy Secretaries and all SES are evaluation champions.
- Departmental staff view evaluation-related tools and resources as useful and relevant.
- The Department's governance arrangements are adequate and support staff undertaking evaluation-related activities.
- The Department's evaluation-related products are high quality.

For further background and practical information about evaluation in the Department, please refer to the *Evaluation Resource Booklet 2016–21*.

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development



