Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Cabinet Implementation Unit Toolkit

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Monitoring, review and evaluation

Track, measure and report your results

- Evaluation tells you if you are on the path to success and when you've arrived.

- Effective monitoring, review and evaluation provide information on emerging issues, improve performance and ensure accountability.

- Understand the difference between monitoring, review and evaluation.

- Plan from the start what will be measured, how it will be measured, for what purpose and who will receive the information.

- Start by asking good evaluation questions: Are we doing the right thing? Are we doing it the right way? Are there better ways of achieving results?

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The Cabinet Implementation Unit within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet provides whole-of-government advice on implementation and delivery, with a focus on capability building, implementation assessments and progress reporting.

Elements of effective monitoring, review and evaluation

As part of the planning process, clearly define the objectives and outcomes of the policy that is being implemented. It is essential to determine what successful outcomes will look like and what evidence will be needed to demonstrate success. As this has planning implications, thinking needs to occur from the outset and ensure activities are fit-for-purpose. Other important elements include:

- **Report to others:** There needs to be a clear purpose and demand for undertaking monitoring, review and evaluation activities. Information produced from this process must be targeted for specific audiences and be incorporated into the governance arrangements in order to enhance transparency and accountability. Activities that occur isolated from decision-making or commence after implementation is complete are of limited value to initiative participants.

- **Involve stakeholders:** All relevant stakeholders need to be engaged for monitoring, review and evaluation activities to be successful. Clearly communicating the benefits of activities and providing the necessary support creates opportunity for willing participation and ownership. An open process that allows stakeholders access to information increases credibility.

- **Monitor progress:** Successful monitoring delivers timely and relevant information that allows you to track progress towards outcomes and make adjustments to implementation arrangements as necessary. Track progress in a deliberate and systematic manner at regular intervals during implementation. Implementation planning must define the data to be collected and the method used for monitoring. Obtaining advice from experts in data collection during the planning process will contribute to a robust and credible methodology. Monitoring will inform other components of implementation such as risk management.

- **Review regularly:** Factor in reviews as part of your planning process to assess progress of implementation at critical milestones or in response to specific issues. Reviews are a 'snapshot' in the life of an initiative and tend to focus on operational issues, effectiveness of governance and project management structures, and may also include policy outcomes. Findings and recommendations from reviews should be used to improve implementation.

- **Evaluate the outcomes:** The success of an initiative is determined by the extent to which intended and unintended policy outcomes are achieved and how they have affected stakeholders. Planning for evaluation should identify and map baseline information as well as ensure that ongoing access to consistent data sources will be available through monitoring over the life of the initiative. Data can be quantitative (hard or numerical data) or qualitative (soft or categorical). Those managing an evaluation need to focus on asking good questions to assess the data collected. Credibility of an evaluation is enhanced through sound evidence, professional and ethical standards, and the degree of independence of the evaluator. Effective evaluation is the result of a planning process over the life of the initiative.

Hurdles to effective monitoring, review and evaluation

Specific hurdles that may adversely impact the effectiveness of monitoring, review and evaluation from the outset include:

Inadequate resourcing

Successful monitoring, review and evaluation activities require adequate resourcing and early planning. Resources to establish a methodology for collecting and maintaining data, conducting the reviews and evaluations and engaging stakeholders will need to be addressed in the implementation plan. The more complex and higher risk the initiative the more upfront planning will be required.

Resourcing must take into account the full costs of activities to all participants for the full duration of the initiative. Resist the temptation to use money set aside for review and evaluation to fill emerging resource gaps during implementation. While independent reviews and evaluations can enhance credibility, adequate resourcing must also be allocated to ensure correct and consistent data is collected to support quality findings.

Lack of a systematic planning approach

Without a systematic planning approach in place, it can be difficult to understand how processes and activities will contribute to intended outcomes, and how they will be measured along the way. An effective approach identifies all the main components of an initiative and plans out all the activities as a cause-and-effect chain and sets out what is to be monitored, reviewed and evaluated. It generally includes objectives, inputs, processes, activities, outputs and outcomes. When done thoroughly, a systematic planning approach can identify gaps and highlight the importance of particular activities.

Choose a planning methodology that best suits the initiative and draw on available resources and information that will be needed to conduct any analysis. There are a number of methods for systematic planning including program logic and the logical framework approach. It may be necessary to source training for staff or engage external expertise if the skills and capacity to conduct a planning process are not available internally. Include these costs as part of the implementation planning.

Irrelevant or insufficient data

Any number of problems can arise when the data collected as part of the monitoring activity is not relevant or able to measure the expected outcomes of the initiative. In turn, review and evaluation will be of little value if the available data cannot answer questions about actual delivery. Baseline data needs to be established as part of the early implementation phase so that monitoring data is comparable and collected consistently. Data may already exist or may need to be sourced to establish a baseline. Find out what data already exists, where it is available and if it is accessible. Be guided by professional and ethical standards when collecting and using data, and consider stakeholder sensitivities.

Strategies for success

Successful implementation is underpinned by effective monitoring, review and evaluation processes. To ensure success of your project you should:

Ask the right questions

Evaluation asks: *Are we doing the right thing*? It assesses an initiative's rationale in the context of the real world and looks at the outcomes for intended beneficiaries. Next it asks: *Are we doing it the right way*? It assesses all the components of how expected outcomes are being achieved. And finally it asks: *Are there better ways of achieving the results*? Evaluation identifies good practices, lessons learned and possible alternative options.

Evaluation plans should determine the purpose, the timing, the mechanism to be used, and how results will be shared and applied. Each review and evaluation activity should be designed specifically for the initiative, drawing on a range of resources.

Understand the objective

Sometimes it isn't clear what an initiative is trying to achieve because the aims were not established at the outset. Understanding the objective of the initiative is essential to defining why you need to do an evaluation, how it will be used and by whom. Monitoring reports should include substantive content with robust data to measure outcomes.

Involve participants

Create a culture where review and evaluation are seen as critical steps in implementation to gather evidence for informed decision-making about policy and next steps. The discussion about resource allocation is made easier once a genuine demand for an evaluation or review has been generated and a sense of ownership and collaboration has been fostered between the key participants. Review and evaluation show where an initiative is heading and highlights key achievements for celebration.

During planning, identify who will conduct the review or evaluation and who will receive the findings. Governance arrangements should take into consideration evaluation and review activities and be designed so decision-makers have a clear line of sight to the findings, in the same way as risk information is managed. The credibility of an evaluation is enhanced if all stakeholders can access the findings.

Apply the results

Make the best use of results. Findings and recommendations must be tailored for specific audiences, depending on how they are being applied for different contexts. The findings need to be applied to the decision-making process to ensure the original objective is achieved. They will inform any corrective actions that are required, including ending an initiative. Review and evaluation information can contribute to the evidence base for further policy development and provide justification for spending priorities or savings.

Evaluations include outcome and impact evidence: they give a more comprehensive indication of performance measurement than the presentation of output information collected by monitoring. Be strategic about the focus of the evaluation. What is the most important thing to evaluate across the whole initiative and what is the best method? Identify critical checkpoints to conduct reviews and evaluations as the initiative matures through implementation.

Integrating monitoring, review and evaluation

Consider the following questions when developing the monitoring, review and evaluation section of your implementation plan.

Planning

☐ Is there a clear understanding of the objective for the purpose of monitoring?

☐ Has a systematic planning approach been developed?

☐ Is data available and accessible to establishing a base line and will data collected through monitoring be relevant to demonstrate outcome achievement?

Governance

☐ Has the demand for reviews and evaluations been established with decision-makers?

☐ Have monitoring, review and evaluation activities been directly linked to decision-making?

☐ Will the activities provide useful information, in the correct format to decision-makers?

Engaging stakeholders

☐ Has a sense of ownership and collaboration been fostered with key participants and stakeholders?

☐ Are affected stakeholders aware of their role and the costs involved?

Risk management

☐ Will reviews and evaluations be planned strategically?

☐ How will findings from monitoring, review and evaluation inform risk and issue management?

Resource management

☐ Does the implementation plan identify adequate resources for monitoring, review and evaluation?

☐ Have you accounted for the cost of data collection and management?

☐ Have resources been allocated for systematic planning?

Management strategy

☐ Who is responsible for monitoring and gathering the data?

☐ How will findings of reviews and evaluations be given to decision-makers?

☐ If findings and recommendations require changes to the initiative, how will this be handled?

Resources and further help

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 1998, *Best practice guidelines for evaluation,* PUMA Policy Brief No. 5, Public Management Service, http://www.oecd.org/governance/budgeting/1902965.pdf.

These guidelines identify key issues and practices to consider when you are seeking to improve the use of evaluations. The focus is on management of evaluation activities in government and management of individual evaluations.

McPhee, I 2006, 'Evaluation and performance audit: close cousins or distant relatives?', address to the Canberra Evaluation Forum, Canberra, 16 February, http://www.anao.gov.au/~/media/Uploads/Documents/evaluation_and_performance_audit.pdf.

This speech explores the differences and similarities in audit and evaluation in the Australian Government context. It also explores the outputs–outcomes framework, performance information and the connection between evaluation and implementation.

Australian Government 1997, *Program evaluation in the Australian Public Service*, Australian National Audit Office, Canberra, http://www.anao.gov.au/Publications/Audit-Reports/1997-1998/Program-Evaluation-in-the-Australian-Public-Service.

An audit report from 1997 examining the effectiveness of the management and control of program evaluation in the Australian Public Service. The main issues examined were approaches to evaluation planning, the conduct of individual evaluations, the quality of evaluation reports and the impact of evaluations.

Government of Canada 2012, *Centre of Excellence for Evaluation (CEE)*, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Ottawa, http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/cee/index-eng.asp.

Based in the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, the CEE provides advice and guidance to conduct, use and promote evaluation practices across government. It holds databases on evaluation across every portfolio and has information on evaluation policy, standards and tools.

World Bank 2011, Evaluation Capacity Development, Independent Evaluation Group, http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTOED/EXTEVACAPDEV/0,,menuPK:4585748~pagePK:64829575~piPK:64829612~theSitePK:4585673,00.html.

While much of this material relates to whole-of-government performance monitoring systems, there are some useful how-to guides, such as on writing terms of reference for evaluation, and a results framework for achieving outcomes.

New Zealand Government 1999, *Looping the loop: evaluation outcomes and other risky feats*, Occasional Paper No. 7, State Services Commission, Wellington, http://www.ssc.govt.nz/Op7.

This paper explores some of the hurdles and challenges to evaluation, such as outputs or outcomes, evaluation evidence in policy advice and deciding what to evaluate.

Contact us

If you have any questions regarding implementation planning and delivery, please contact the Cabinet Implementation Unit:

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