Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Evaluation Strategy 2024–27

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Executive summary

The work of the department touches the lives of every Australian, every day – connecting and enriching every Australian community, underpinning our economy and society, and empowering our regions.

Evaluation supports the department to achieve this vision and measure our impacts. It builds on performance measurement to provide an information base from which to demonstrate the benefits of our programs and policies. Evaluation supports us to understand if outcomes are being achieved, to learn from our experiences, and in doing so, inform and deliver better outcomes for all Australians.

The department's Capability Review, released in September 2023, rated our capability to use review and evaluation activities to maintain performance and drive improvement as 'emerging'. The Strategy aims to improve how we plan and do evaluations, to develop our evaluation capabilities, and to learn from, share and use evaluation findings to inform and improve policy decisions.

Improving the department's evaluation practices will strengthen our strategic policy and delivery capabilities. It can also focus us to improve how we collaborate with our partners and stakeholders, to ensure policies better reflect the needs of communities. Evaluation done well, and in partnership with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations can help us to deliver our commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and help to deliver better outcomes.

Developing and embedding a culture of evaluation takes time and commitment. It needs leadership, capability building and support to enhance and embed our practices. The Strategy outlines our three evaluation strategic objectives, which are to:

- **Improve evaluation leadership and governance** – support and promote a culture of evaluation and the use of evaluation findings to support continuous improvement, learning, and policy and program design.
- **Strengthen evaluation capabilities** – strengthen capabilities to plan and deliver high-quality, ethical and culturally safe evaluations that produce robust, meaningful and credible findings.
- **Embed evaluation into program planning and the policy cycle** – establish systems and processes to ensure evaluation is considered early, funded, and embedded within departmental processes and the policy cycle.

The Strategy is the department's roadmap to improve and embed evaluation practices and capabilities, with a focus on both new and existing externally facing policies and programs. Our objectives are underpinned by 14 key actions.

The Strategy has been shaped by whole of Government initiatives on evaluation including the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and work with the Australian Centre for Evaluation at the Treasury. It is not a comprehensive guide to evaluation, and is supported by a range of resources.

For further information on planning, commissioning or undertaking an evaluation contact the Evaluation Unit on Evaluation.Unit@infrastructure.gov.au

What is program and policy evaluation and why is it important?

Program and policy evaluation in the department is defined as:

"The systematic and objective assessment of the design, implementation or results of a government program or activity for the purposes of continuous improvement, accountability and decision making."[1]

Evaluation of departmental policies and programs is key to ensuring the effective and efficient use of government funding. Evaluation can help us to:

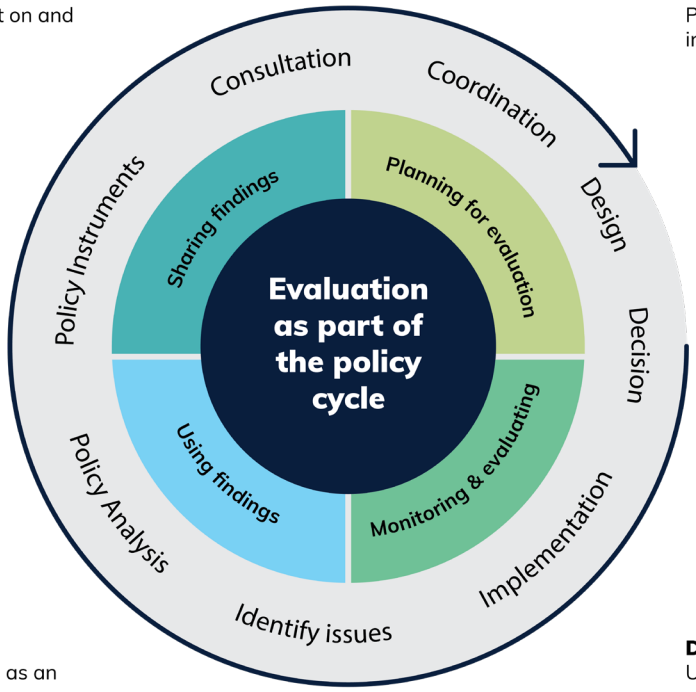
- "Better understand what policies and programs work, why, when and for whom – to support **evidence-informed policy** development, program design and implementation
- Inform improvements in policies and programs – to support **learning by doing**
- Support **accountability** to funders and the community – shedding light on how best to use taxpayers' money, including whether policy and program funds are properly spent, delivering value for money and meeting recipients' needs."[2]

Evaluation plays a critical role throughout the policy cycle, helping to link policy learnings to policy development. Early planning for evaluation, as part of program or policy design, also helps to clarify objectives and support development of measurable program targets.

Figure 1: Evaluation as a critical part of the policy cycle[3]

Sharing
Sharing findings to reflect on and inform policy design

Planning
Planning for evaluation integrated into policy and program design



Using
Using evaluation findings as an evidence base to inform improvements or decision making

Doing
Undertaking monitoring and evaluation activities before, during or after implementation

1 Department of the Treasury (2023) *Commonwealth Evaluation Policy* and *Toolkit* (Resource Management Guide 130).
2 Productivity Commission (2020a) *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, October 2020.*
3 Adapted from Althaus C., Bridgman P., Davis G. (2020) *The Australian Policy Handbook, 6th Edition (eBook version)*, Routledge, London.

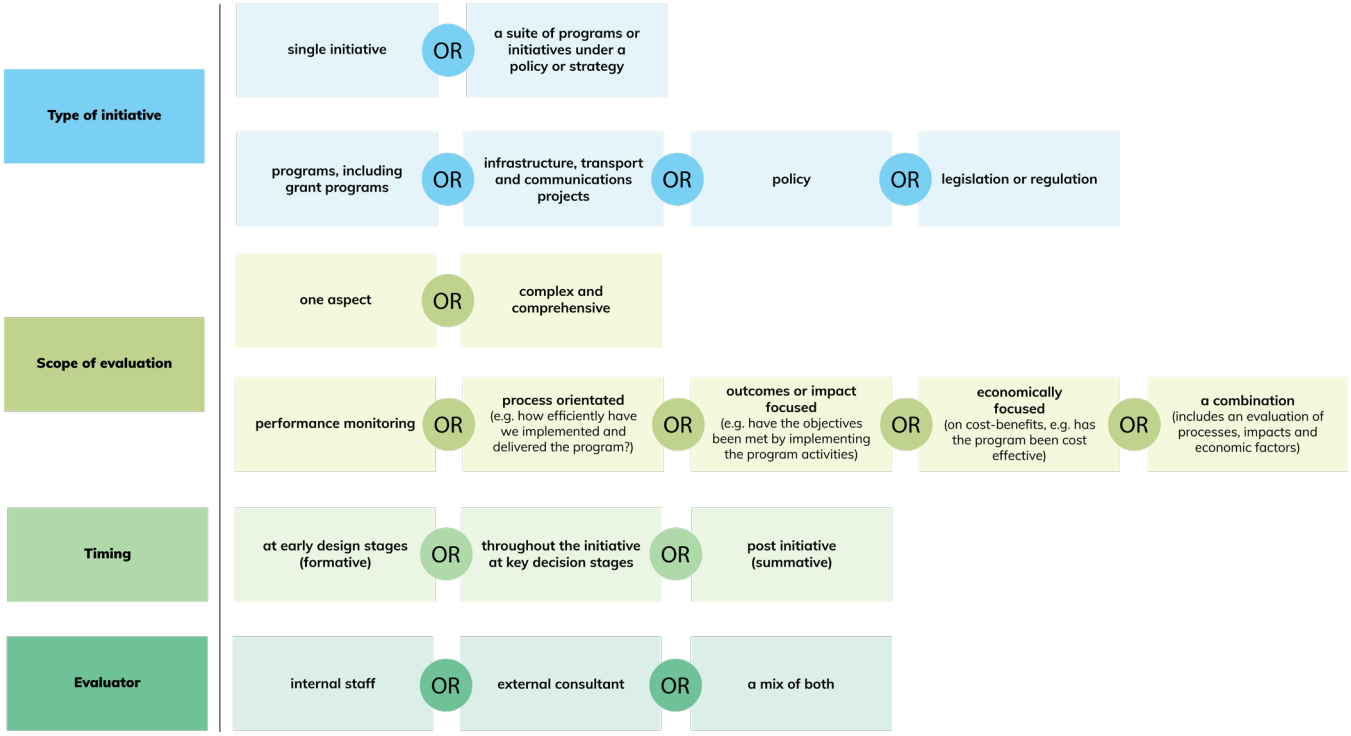
Evaluation across the department

Different policies, programs and contexts call for different types and methods of evaluation, depending on the type of initiative and the questions the evaluation is seeking to answer. While all initiatives should have clear objectives, outcomes and establish performance measures, not all programs or polices will require detailed evaluation. In some cases, robust performance monitoring may be sufficient for program assurance.[4]

Divisions should prioritise their evaluation effort based on the scale, complexity and risk of their investments, or where there are identified gaps in the evidence to support ongoing or future program or policy development.

Figure 2 below outlines the breadth of potential evaluation activities that may be undertaken across the department.

Figure 2: Potential forms and types of evaluation within the department



The Evaluation Unit can help you work out the type of evaluation that may be suitable for your program or policy. For further information on planning an evaluation contact the Evaluation Unit on Evaluation.Unit@infrastructure.gov.au

4 Department of the Treasury (2023) *Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and Toolkit* (Resource Management Guide 130).

Growing our evaluation maturity

We are a large department with one of the most diverse portfolios in the Australian Public Service (APS), covering infrastructure, transport, regional development, cities, local government, territories, communications, arts and culture. As a result, there are differing levels of awareness, understanding and use of evaluation methods across the department, and our evaluation maturity reflects this diversity.

In 2022, the department commissioned a review of the department's evaluation activities[5]. The review found that while many of the program managers interviewed had a genuine commitment to evaluation, outcomes monitoring and improvement, support was needed to overcome implementation challenges and build evaluation skills.

Key challenges identified included:

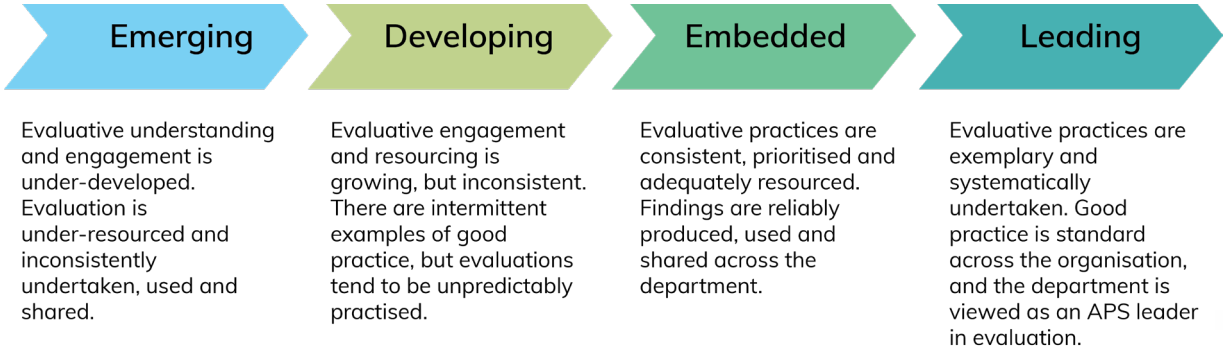
- program managers often struggle to give evaluation priority when faced with competing priorities
- a lack of resources for evaluation, meaning costs need to be absorbed by the department
- challenges in obtaining data that is relevant to program objectives in a timely way
- a lack of expertise in data collection and analysis.

Additional challenges and barriers to evaluation were also identified through the consultation process for the Strategy. These include: staff turnover; a lack of understanding of program objectives; and difficulties in accessing and using evaluation findings.

The department's Capability Review, released in September 2023[6], rated our capability to use review and evaluation activities to maintain performance and drive improvement as 'emerging'. The department acknowledged in the review, that evaluation of policy outcomes is often treated as a 'secondary focus' in many parts of the department, and is not typically factored into the costing of new policies or projects. The review also identified related areas for improvement, including the need to improve our capabilities in strategic policy, leverage available data, and provide evidence-based advice to ministers.

The department's Evaluation Maturity Model will help to measure and track the department's evaluation maturity as it develops as part of this strategy.

Figure 3: Evaluation maturity model



5 Dolman, G. (2022) *Improving Evaluation in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications*, March 2022.

6 Australian Public Service Commission (2023) *Capability Review: Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts*, September 2023.

Our strategic objectives and actions

The department's Evaluation Strategy 2024-27, will increase the use of evaluation evidence for decision making through improving evaluation leadership and governance, strengthening our evaluation competences and embedding evaluation into our practices and the policy cycle.

Table 1. Evaluation strategic objectives and actions[7]

Objectives	Actions
1. Improve evaluation leadership and governance *Support and promote a culture of evaluation and the use of evaluation findings to support continuous improvement, learning and policy and program design*	**1.** Promote evaluation and its benefits across the department, including through the appointment of an Evaluation Champion **2.** Develop and maintain a department-wide evaluation register to provide oversight and awareness of planned and ongoing evaluation activities **3.** Regularly discuss evaluation findings and responses in senior departmental governance groups (e.g. Executive Leadership Team) **4.** Externally publish evaluation reports, or where appropriate, summaries **5.** Evaluation Unit to report to Enabling Committee (EC) and /or Priority and Delivery Committee (PDC) every six months on the implementation of the Strategy and evaluation activity
2. Strengthen evaluation capabilities *Strengthen capabilities to plan and deliver high-quality, ethical and culturally safe evaluations that produce robust, meaningful and credible findings*	**6.** Develop and promote evaluation resources, tools and templates, including resources to make programs 'fit for evaluation', including a library of common evaluation questions, metrics and data sources **7.** Develop and deliver evaluation training and workshops **8.** Establish an Evaluation Community of Practice to share evaluation knowledge and expertise **9.** Evaluation Unit to provide tailored evaluation advice and support **10.** Work with related areas of the department to support skill and capability uplift in core evaluation principles[8], including how to undertake ethical and culturally safe evaluations
3. Embed evaluation into program planning and the policy cycle *Establish systems and processes to ensure evaluation is considered early, funded and embedded within departmental processes and the policy cycle*	**11.** Evaluation Unit to work with relevant enabling and divisional functions to integrate evaluation planning into guidance materials, frameworks and processes **12.** Develop and promote an approach to support divisions to identify what can be evaluated, and which evaluation activities should be prioritised **13.** Support the inclusion of evaluation planning in New Policy Proposals (NPPs) through tailored advice and, guidance on costing and training as part of the NPP training suite **14.** Share and retain evaluation findings through the establishment of a central repository of program logics, evaluation plans, completed evaluation reports and lessons learned

7 Implementation timeframes and measures are summarised at Appendix A.

8 Evaluation Principles can be found on page 14.

How will our strategic objectives deliver outcomes?

The department will enhance our evaluation practices, capabilities and culture through delivering on the following strategic objectives.

1. **Improve evaluation leadership and governance**
   Support and promote a culture of evaluation and the use of evaluation findings to support continuous improvement, learning and policy and program design

Embedding and sustaining a culture of evaluation and learning requires the championing and support for evaluation across all levels of our organisation. Everyone has a role to play in supporting and promoting evaluative thinking and practice as part of our work. The Evaluation Unit will work with divisions and an appointed Evaluation Champion to promote and increase understanding of evaluation and its benefits across the department.

Research has found that leadership is crucial in supporting cultural change. Senior Executive Service (SES) commitment and support for evaluation will help to increase the demand for evaluation and the use of evaluation findings to inform decision making. It will also help to support a culture of inquiry and learning, where staff are encouraged to see mistakes as an opportunity to learn and improve how we do things.

The Evaluation Unit will collaborate closely with the Australian Centre for Evaluation (ACE) in the Treasury to help understand and share best-practices about how evaluation culture and leadership can be strengthened. This includes, as outlined in the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy, the department publishing evaluation reports, or a summary of findings, unless there are appropriate reasons for not releasing information publicly.

To support broader oversight and governance, the Evaluation Unit will develop and maintain a register of current and planned evaluations, to be updated with support from divisions. As our evaluation maturity develops, divisions will be encouraged to present their evaluation findings and responses to senior departmental governance groups. The Evaluation Unit will also report to EC and PDC on a six-monthly basis to present the evaluation register and discuss progress on the implementation of the Evaluation Strategy.

2. **Strengthen evaluation capabilities**
   Strengthen capabilities to plan and deliver high-quality, ethical and culturally safe evaluations that produce robust, meaningful and credible findings

Staff require both general and specialised evaluation skills and capabilities to undertake evaluation activities that are fit-for-purpose and deliver credible and useful findings. This includes an understanding of evaluation planning, including the ability to develop program logics, evaluation questions and identify data sources. It also includes data skills involving the collection, storage, interpretation and analysis of data, and the ability to apply ethical and privacy considerations. Other capabilities include the ability to think with an evaluation mindset, to engage and partner effectively with stakeholders, including First Nations Peoples, communities and organisations, and to understand and apply cultural safety principles.

Even when consultants are engaged to undertake evaluations, staff still need evaluation skills to procure, manage and supervise contracts, and to integrate evaluative thinking and design into policy or program delivery. To increase evaluation capabilities, the Evaluation Unit will develop department-specific evaluation resources, tools and templates, drawing on best-practice approaches and existing resources, including from ACE in the Treasury. This will include resources to assist programs become 'evaluation ready', guidance on procuring and managing evaluations, and a library of common evaluation questions, metrics and data sources.

The Evaluation Unit will develop and deliver targeted evaluation training and workshops, including through the Evaluation Community of Practice. The Community of Practice will provide a network for staff with an interest or role in evaluation to share their knowledge and experience. The Evaluation Unit will work with related enabling functions and communities of practice where there is potential for cross-promotion and collaboration.

For program and policy areas needing more tailored advice and support, the Evaluation Unit will promote a clear service offering outlining how, and in what ways the Unit can assist.

3. Embed evaluation into program planning and the policy cycle
Establish systems and processes to ensure evaluation is considered early, funded, and embedded within departmental processes and the policy cycle

Embedding evaluation into our organisational policies, processes and practices will help to ensure evaluation is planned early, ideally during policy and program development, and adequate resources are available. The Evaluation Unit will work with relevant enabling and divisional functions to integrate evaluation planning into guidance materials, frameworks and processes, including:

- Budget strategy, external budgets and portfolio engagement teams to integrate evaluation planning into new funding proposals, including through tailored advice, guidance on costing and training as part of the NPP training suite.
- The performance measurement and reporting team to leverage and align evaluation activities with the department's strengthened Performance Framework.
- Data strategy and policy team, to align with initiatives to support data capabilities and management, as outlined in the department's Data Strategy.
- Enterprise Grants Management Office (EGMO) to support evaluation planning and the integration of evaluation into the grant lifecycle.
- Project Support Office (PSO) to integrate evaluation into project management tools.
- Relevant divisional areas to support the development of resources and processes that are tailored for the diversity of programs and policies across the department.

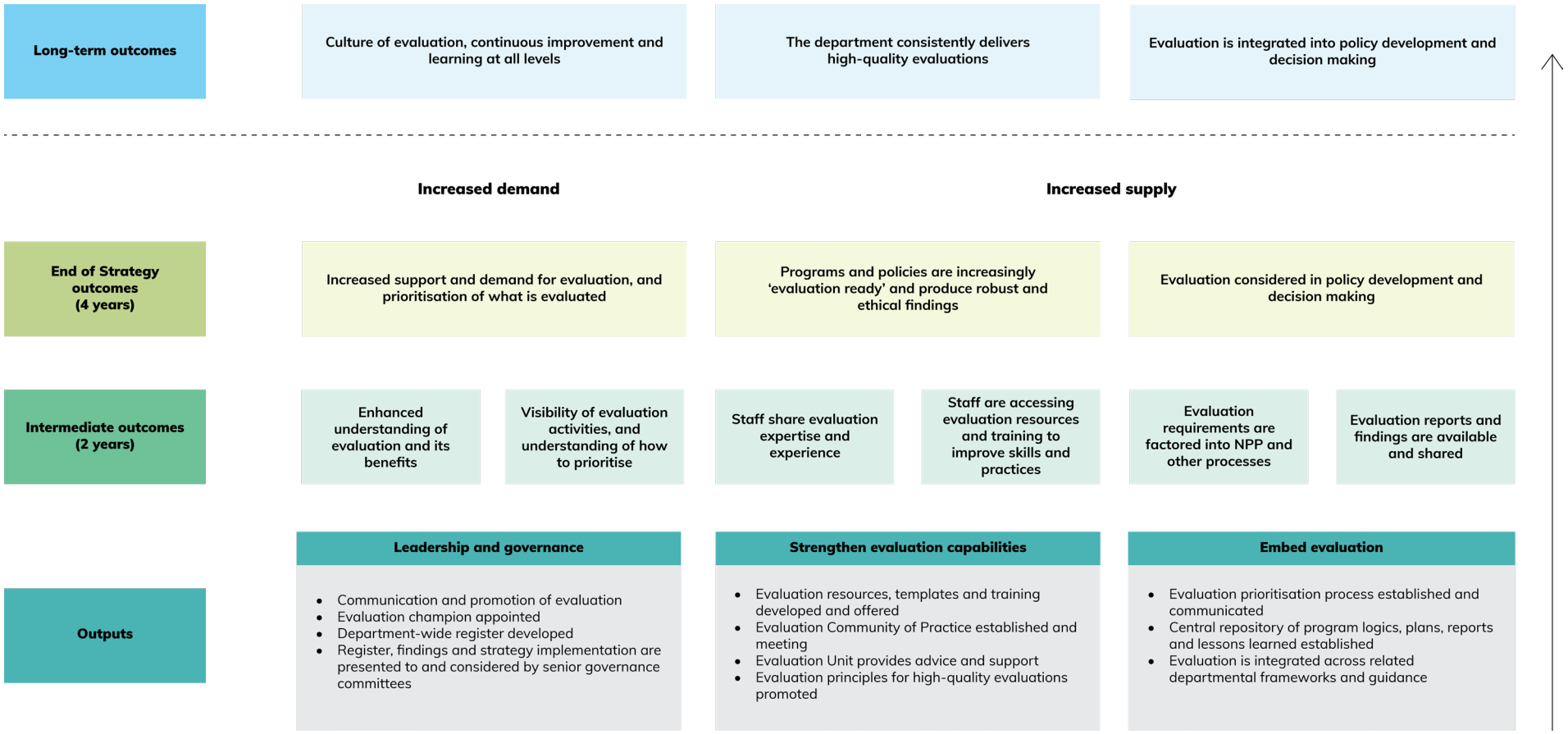
With feedback from divisions, the Evaluation Unit will develop a tool to assist line areas to assess what activities should be evaluated, and which evaluation activities should be prioritised. The Evaluation Unit will also establish a central repository of program logics, evaluation plans, completed reports and lessons learned. This will support evaluation planning and the retention and sharing of evaluation findings. This will in turn contribute to an evidence base that can be used to inform the development of NPPs and improve program design and implementation.

Program logic

Program logic models are commonly used to inform program design, evaluations and performance measures. They provide a visual representation that describes how a program, or initiative, is intended to work by linking activities and outputs with intermediate and longer-term outcomes. The program logic model at Figure 4 illustrates how outputs from our actions in the Evaluation Strategy will contribute to delivering on our strategic objectives and outcomes.

Figure 4: Evaluation Strategy 2024–27 program logic

Overall strategy objective: Increase the use of evaluation evidence for decision making through strengthening policy and program evaluation practice, capabilities and culture



The role of the Evaluation Unit

In 2023, the department established a dedicated Evaluation Unit within Strategy, Economic Policy and Evaluation Branch (SEPE), in the Research, Data and Strategy Division (RDS). Situating the Unit within SEPE aligns it to the Branch's existing functions of building the department's research and policy development capabilities, and supports the Unit operating as a "trusted critical friend." The focus of the unit is on supporting policy and program evaluations.

Initially, the Evaluation Unit will operate a 'Hub and Spoke model.' Its role includes:

- Supporting program areas to plan, commission or undertake evaluations, including through the provision of tailored advice, guidance materials and templates.
- Supporting the development of evaluation capabilities.
- Leveraging whole-of-government evaluation activities, including the Australian Centre for Evaluation in the Treasury and evaluations of programs undertaken by the Grants Hub.
- Guiding the implementation of the Evaluation Strategy 2024–27.

Responsibility for the planning, conducting or commissioning of evaluations will remain within line areas.

As the department's evaluation maturity develops, and following review, the role of the Evaluation Unit could evolve. This could include more centralised coordination and prioritisation of evaluation activities and, with additional resourcing, a more active role in commissioning or conducting evaluations.

The Evaluation Unit will coordinate its service offerings with related functions including the:

- Enterprise Grants Management Office (EGMO), which provides an advisory service on better-practice grants administration across the department.
- Project Support Office (PSO), which provides an advisory function to project managers, senior responsible officers and the Enabling Committee to support project managers to establish, deliver, monitor, report and close their projects.
- First Nations Partnerships Division, which provides an advisory function for First Nations-related policies and initiatives.

For further information contact the Evaluation Unit on Evaluation.Unit@infrastructure.gov.au

Background and context

Evaluation in the APS

There is renewed emphasis across the APS to strengthen evaluation capability and practice. In 2023, the Australian Government announced the establishment of ACE in the Treasury to support the uptake of evaluation across the APS. The department will work closely with ACE to implement best-practice approaches to evaluation that are consistent with the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and Toolkit and the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.

Whole-of-government legislative frameworks and policies that require us to plan for and undertake performance measurement and evaluation activities include:

- The Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act) and associated instruments and policies, outline requirements to measure, assess and report on performance.
- The Budget Process Operational Rules (BPORs)[9] outline that entities are to develop evidence-based policy proposals which articulate measurable outcomes and impact objectives. Entities should also provide sufficient detail to demonstrate that an evaluation plan will be established in the early stages of policy implementation.
- The Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines[10] outline the requirements for officials to establish performance and evaluation measures as a key part of grant administration. This includes that all grant programs should develop an evaluation strategy during the early design stages of the grant lifecycle.
- The Commonwealth Evaluation Policy[11] applies to all Commonwealth entities and companies subject to the PGPA Act and supports entities to improve evaluation practices and capability, including the quality of performance reporting.
- The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy[12] applies to all Australian Government agencies with responsibility for designing and/or implementing policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It aims to strengthen and support the centring of First Nations perspectives, priorities and knowledges.
- Through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap[13], the department is committed to Priority Reform 4, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally-relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.

Relationship with other enabling functions

Evaluation is not the only tool available that facilitates learning from experience and evidence-based policy and programs. Evaluation is closely connected to a number of other functions that together, contribute to improving public sector administration and accountability and provide an evidence base for decision making.[14]

Performance measurement and monitoring

Performance measurement, monitoring and reporting is the process of collecting and analysing data to compare how well a project, program, or policy is being implemented against expected results. All programs must develop a Program Performance Plan and establish appropriate performance measures to meet PGPA Act and PGPA Rule obligations, as outlined in the department's Performance Framework 2023–2024.

Good performance measurement and monitoring are foundations for evaluation. Both can assess the efficiency and effectiveness of policies and programs, include quantitative and qualitative measures and use tools such as program logics to assist in identifying measures of success. Both processes should also be supported by clearly identified data sources and methodologies, be planned before the program is implemented and collect data and evidence throughout and post implementation.[15]

9 Department of Finance (2022) *Budget Process Operational Rules effective December 2022.*
10 Department of Finance (2017) *Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines.*
11 Department of the Treasury (2023) *Commonwealth Evaluation Policy* and *Toolkit* (Resource Management Guide 130).
12 Productivity Commission (2020) *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.*
13 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2020) *National Agreement on Closing the Gap, July 2020.*
14 This section is adapted from Department of the Treasury (2023) *Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and Toolkit (Resource Management Guide 130).*
15 DITRDCA (2023) *Performance Framework 2023-2024.*

Evaluation builds on performance measurement to answer specific evaluation questions, such as why, when and for whom a program is achieving its outcomes. It can also assess the appropriateness of interventions, demonstrate impacts and unintended consequences, and identify lessons learned.

Audits

Audits typically involve an independent examination of the financial and non-financial performance information of a Commonwealth entity or company to provide assurance and identify areas where improvements can be made to aspects of public administration. The Australian National Audit Office performance audit activities are compliance based and focus on assessing the efficiency or administration of a program (or agency), rather than the policy merit. Evaluations generally seek to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of a program or activity.

Risk management

Risk management at the project level is the process of identifying potential risks, both threats and opportunities, through the project life-cycle and putting processes into place to manage and regularly check their status. Evaluation and risk management can support each other. Monitoring and review is also a core part of the risk management process and evaluation can help to identify emerging risks and changes to the operating environment. Both risk management and evaluation can promote continuous improvement and the sharing of lessons learned.

Other departmental strategies and frameworks

The Strategy complements and aligns with other departmental strategies, frameworks and resources to drive and improve the department's evidence building and governance capabilities. These are summarised in Figure 5 and include:

- The Data Strategy 2021–24: improving how the department collects, manages, uses and shares data.
- The Research Strategy 2021–24: supporting the development of high-quality, targeted, evidence-based research to inform and deliver better outcomes for all Australians.
- The Performance Framework 2023–24: outlining the department's process and standard for planning, measuring, monitoring and reporting on performance and ensuring the department meets the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (PGPA) Act 2013 and PGPA Rule obligations.
- The Risk Management Policy and Framework: providing the foundations and organisational arrangements for designing, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and improving risk management.
- The Project Management Framework: providing a set of processes, tools and techniques to ensure projects are delivered with a consistent approach and within time, budget and quality parameters.
- The Integrity Strategy 2022–2024: empowering staff through knowledge and accountability, to consider integrity and risk on a daily basis, while undertaking all departmental business activities.
- The First Nations Agreement: driving the department's contribution to First Nations outcomes (under development).

Figure 5: How the Evaluation Strategy relates to the department's other strategies, frameworks and enabling functions

Given their complementarity, these areas of the department will benefit from working in close partnership. Future updates to this Evaluation Strategy and associated actions will consider any changes to these strategies or frameworks, and vice versa.

Guiding principles for evaluation

The core values and principles guiding evaluation practice across the department are outlined below. These principles are consistent with the principles outlined in the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.[16] They aim to ensure evaluation is high-quality, ethical, culturally safe and useful.

Fit for purpose	The choice to evaluate and the scale of effort and resources allocated to an evaluation is proportional to the value, impact, strategic importance and risk profile of a program or activity.
Useful	Evaluations are planned and conducted with the purpose of generating useful and actionable findings that can be used to improve programs, support accountability and enhance decision making.
Robust	Evaluations are well designed and use appropriate and sound methodologies to suit a program's design, participants, size, significance and risk. Robust and high-quality data and evidence is sought to measure the effectiveness of programs and drive continuous improvement.
Credible	The collection and analysis of evidence is undertaken in an impartial and systematic way, considering the perspectives of relevant stakeholders. Evaluations adhere to appropriate standards of integrity and independence.
Ethically and culturally safe	All evaluation activities comply with ethical guidelines to minimise risk and harm, including through the collection and use of personal information. Evaluations consider cultural considerations and impacts on stakeholders, and are conducted in a culturally-safe environment.
In partnership with First Nations Peoples	Evaluations of policies and programs involving First Nations Peoples should draw on the perspectives, priorities and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in their design, implementation and use. Data from these evaluations should remain a source that is accessible by First Nations peoples.[17]
Transparent where appropriate	To be useful, evaluation findings are transparent by default unless there are appropriate reasons for not releasing information publicly. Findings are provided to relevant stakeholders to support continuous improvement, accountability and decision making.
Collaborative	Evaluations are co-designed, or developed in consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders. Where appropriate, this could include identifying relevant questions, selecting appropriate methods, reflecting on and using findings. Stakeholders are treated as equal collaborators in the design process.

16 For further guidance on these principles see the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and Toolkit, and Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.

17 See page 15 for further information.

Planning and undertaking evaluations with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations

The Australian Government is committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which embeds genuine partnerships with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations. As a department we need to continue to transform and strengthen how we engage and partner with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations through enhanced policy development, and bringing changes to the department's approach to working with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations. Planning and undertaking evaluations with First Nations peoples is a fundamental part of this.

When the department develops evaluation plans or undertakes evaluations that do not take First Nations expertise and experiences into account, we run the risk of not asking the right questions, using unethical methods and approaches and inadvertently causing further harm or over-burdening First Nations peoples.

Partnering with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations at the onset of an evaluation ensures First Nations peoples' perspectives, priorities and knowledges are at the centre of evaluation design and practice. It also supports the development of ethical, high-quality evaluations that provide meaningful and credible insights.

Key points to consider include:

- Use the department's Principles of Evaluation and the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy principles.
- Understand and apply principles of cultural safety.
- Understand your ethical obligations when planning or undertaking evaluations with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations.
- Engage with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations at the inception of the policy and/or program to ensure the voices and perspectives of First Nations peoples are included from beginning to end.
- Co-design all aspects of evaluation frameworks and plans with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations, including policy and program outcomes, evaluation questions, how evaluations will be conducted and how evaluation findings will be interpreted.
- Be guided by First Nations peoples, communities and organisations you engage with in relation to communications and messaging in evaluation plans and reports.
- Include Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) regarding the collection, use, access and ownership of data and information.

The First Nations Partnerships Division can provide guidance and advice on the best ways to engage with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations.

Collecting and using data

Data is crucial for evaluation because it provides the evidence and insights to answer key evaluation questions. Much of this data may already be being collected as part of program administration and performance monitoring. You may also require additional data to help you answer your key evaluation questions. This could include data from existing or new surveys, or data obtained through other methods such as interviews, focus groups or case studies.

Data requirements should be considered as part of initial program design and evaluation planning to ensure you have systems in place to collect the data you need. This planning should consider:

- the availability of existing data
- whether you have a baseline (data prior to your intervention), or need to establish one
- the robustness and quality of data
- ethics and privacy
- Priority Reform 4 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly around enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have access to, and the capability to use, locally-relevant data and information
- the potential need for data sharing agreements
- data governance and lifecycle management, including how data is collected, stored, accessed and destroyed
- funding you may require for the above data requirements.

Measuring our progress and success

Developing and embedding a culture of evaluation takes time and commitment. Over the life of the Strategy we will track our progress and measure our increasing evaluation maturity. Progress measures are outlined at **Appendix A** and our evaluation maturity will be assessed using the department's Evaluation Maturity Model.

What will success look like?

In the intermediate term (~2 years):

- SES and staff have an increased understanding of evaluation and its benefits.
- The department knows what evaluation activity is taking place and has a process for planning and prioritising future evaluations.
- Staff have access to evaluation resources, support and training to develop and build their evaluation and data skills.
- There are opportunities for staff to share their evaluation experience and expertise and learn from each other.
- Evaluation requirements are increasingly factored into the NPP development and other departmental processes.
- Evaluation reports and findings are available and shared amongst staff (where appropriate).
- The department's evaluation capability is at least 'developing'.

By the end of the Strategy (~4 years):

- There is increased support and demand from Senior Executives and management for evaluation.
- The department is planning and prioritising their evaluation efforts.
- Staff have strengthened skills, capabilities and support to design, undertake and procure evaluations.
- Evaluation is increasingly considered in program and policy development and costings.
- Programs and policies are increasingly 'evaluation ready,' and use ethical and robust methods to produce timely and credible findings.
- Program areas can more effectively reflect on and apply evaluation findings to support improvements and decision making.
- The department's evaluation capability is at least 'developing' and tracking towards being 'embedded'.

In the longer term (4+ years), as our evaluation maturity further develops:

- The department applies evaluation thinking and activities to a broader range of functions.
- The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), Treasury and other agencies recognise the quality of department evaluations.
- The department has a culture of evaluation and uses evaluation findings to support continuous improvement, learning and policy and program design.

Resources and links

The Strategy is the department's roadmap to improve and embed evaluation practices and capabilities, with a focus on externally facing policies and programs. It is not a comprehensive guide to evaluation. The Strategy is informed and supported by a range of internal and external resources including:

Related Commonwealth Resources

- Australian Centre for Evaluation – The Treasury
- Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Toolkit
- Indigenous Evaluation Strategy – Productivity Commission
- Commonwealth Performance Framework
- Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines
- Budget Process Operational Rules
- ANAO Best Practice Guide – Successful Implementation of Policy Initiatives
- Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis – The Office of Impact Analysis
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Other evaluation resources and guidance

- Planning an evaluation – Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Ethics in evaluation – Australian Institute of Family Studies
- New framework and toolkit for evaluating place-based delivery approaches – Department of Social Services
- First Nations Cultural Safety Framework – Australian Evaluation Society
- Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research – AIATSIS
- Better Evaluation website
- The Magenta Book – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Abbreviations

Term	Description
ACE	Australian Centre for Evaluation
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
BPORs	Budget Process Operational Rules
EC	Enabling Committee
EGMO	Enterprise Grants Management Office
ELT	Executive Leadership Team
ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
NPP	New Policy Proposal
PDC	Priority and Delivery Committee
PGPA Act	Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act
PSO	Project Support Office
RDS	Research, Data and Strategy Division
SEPE	Strategy, Economic Policy and Evaluation Branch
SES	Senior Executive Service

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Productivity Commission (2020c) *A Guide to Evaluation under the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy,* October 2020.

Appendix A: Progress measures

Table A.1 Evaluation Action Plan timing and progress measures

Improve evaluation leadership and governance		
Action	**Timing**	**Progress measures**[18]
1. Promote evaluation and its benefits across the department, including through the appointment of an Evaluation Champion	Q2 2024	**i.** Evaluation Champion appointed (y/n) **ii.** Volume of evaluation promotional material
2. Develop and maintain a department-wide evaluation register to provide oversight and awareness of planned and ongoing evaluation activities	Q3 2024 (then ongoing)	**i.** Evaluation register developed (y/n) **ii.** Number of items on register **iii.** Register update annually (y/n)
3. Regularly discuss evaluation findings and responses in senior departmental governance groups (e.g. Executive Leadership Team)	Ongoing	**i.** Evaluation included as a standing item on PDC, EC and/or ELT
4. Externally publish evaluation reports, or where appropriate, summaries	Q4 2024 (then ongoing)	**i.** Number of evaluation reports or summaries published
5. Evaluation Unit to report to PDC every six months on the implementation of the Strategy and evaluation activity	Q2 2024 (then ongoing)	Evaluation discussed at PDC (y/n) **i.** SES views on the implementation of the strategy **ii.** Reporting dashboard developed and used
Strengthen evaluation capabilities		
Action	**Timing**	**Progress measures**
6. Develop and promote evaluation guidance and templates, including resources to make programs 'fit for evaluation', including a library of common evaluation questions, metrics and data sources	Ongoing	**i.** Number of guidance material documents made available **ii.** Feedback on department available materials
7. Develop and deliver evaluation training and workshops	Ongoing	**i.** Number of training courses and workshops developed or delivered **ii.** Departmental participation rates in evaluation training and workshops
8. Establish an Evaluation Community of Practice to share evaluation knowledge and expertise	Complete established Q4 2023	**i.** Number of CoP members **ii.** Number of CoP meetings **iii.** Feedback on CoP

18 These may be refined over time through delivery of the Strategy.

Action	Timing	Progress measures
9. Evaluation Unit to provide tailored evaluation advice and support	Ongoing	**i.** Volume and type of support provided **ii.** Number of divisions supported **iii.** Quality and suitability of advice provided
10. Work with related areas of the department to support skill and capability uplift in core evaluation principles, including how to undertake ethical and culturally safe evaluations	Ongoing	See Action 6 measures

Embed evaluation into program planning and the policy cycle

Action	Timing	Progress measures
11. Evaluation Unit to work with relevant enabling and divisional functions to integrate evaluation planning into guidance materials and frameworks and processes	Ongoing	**i.** Number of functions engaged **ii.** Relevant communication mechanism established and utilised
12. Develop and promote an approach to support divisions identify what can be evaluated, and which evaluation activities should be prioritised	Q2 2024	**i.** Tool developed (y/n) **ii.** Feedback on tool
13. Support the inclusion of evaluation planning in NPPs through tailored advice, guidance on costing and training as part of the NPP training suite	Q1 2024	**i.** Training developed (y/n) **ii.** Volume of tailored advice provided by Evaluation Unit **iii.** Proportion of submitted NPPs that include evaluation planning requirements (e.g. outline objectives and request funding for an evaluation)
14. Share and retain evaluation findings through the establishment of a central repository of program logics, evaluation plans, completed evaluations reports and lessons learned	Q2 2024	**i.** Central repository established and made available (y/n) **ii.** Number of program logics, plans and reports available