Australian Government
The Treasury

Australian Centre for Evaluation

How the UK and Australia are improving evaluation in government

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evaluation.treasury.gov.au

Acknowledgment of Country



Question

What percentage of government's largest programmes do you believe should be rigorously evaluated to ensure value for taxpayer money?

Governments make decisions about extraordinary sums of money



A$1.2 trillion per year ($42,000 per person per year)



£1.3 trillion per year (£19,000 per person per year)

(a trillion is one million millions!)

We need more evaluation

We don’t have good data on the volume/quality/use of evaluation but…

Statistic	Indicator	Source
 **222 (24/25) 305 (25/26)**	Number of evaluations in the APS (likely underestimate)	Australian Centre for Evaluation State of Evaluation
 **$64m (21/22) (0.007% of total gov expenditure)**	Total value of procured evaluations (where data was public) (likely underestimate)	Australian Evaluation Society State of Evaluation 2023
 **8% (2019) 35% (2025)**	% of gov major projects with robust evaluation plans in place	UK Cabinet Office review

We need more evaluation…



"…the use of evaluation continues to be variable and inconsistent…[so] **government cannot have confidence its spending in many policy areas is making a difference**"

UK National Audit Office, Evaluation Government Spending (2021)

We need more evaluation…



Recommendation 26

Embed a culture of evaluation and learning from experience to underpin evidence-based policy and delivery.

Independent Review of the Australian Public Service (2019)

Improving evaluation in government

Evaluation Task Force

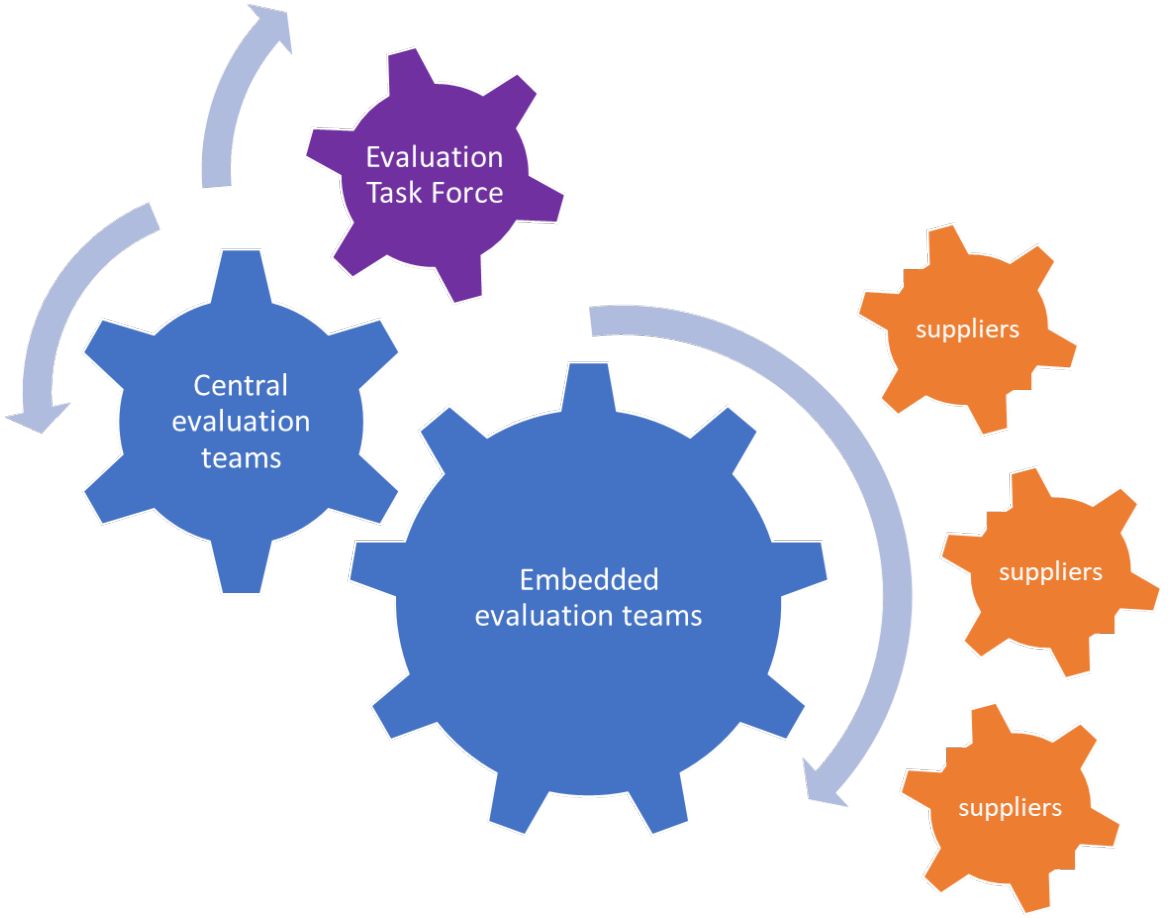
From 2021

Australian Centre for Evaluation

From 2023

Both teams are working to improve the quality, quantity, and use of evaluation evidence in government

ACE / the ETF are one part of the wider evaluation system in government



What does it take to build an effective evaluation system in government?



Incentives



Capability



Resources

The UK

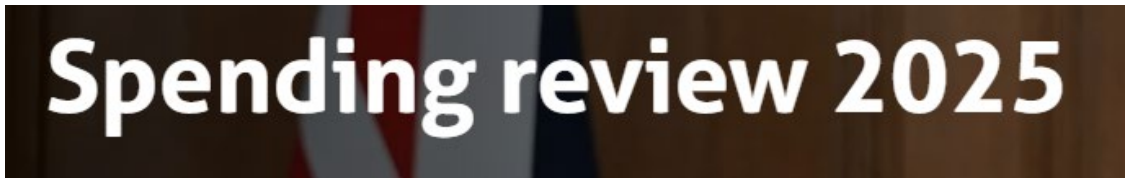
Incentives to do evaluation in the UK



- Linking evaluation to spending and investment decisions.
- Asking departments to think earlier about how they will know whether major programmes have succeeded.
- Encouraging transparency about the strength of existing evidence.

*"Business cases are **unlikely to receive approval** without a **robust and proportionate** evaluation plan, properly aligned with the delivery context of the specific project or programme."*

Treasury Approvals Process
For projects and programmes



Incentives to do evaluation: transparency

GOV.UK Evaluation Registry

BETA This is a new service - your feedback will help us to improve it.

Evaluation Registry

The Evaluation Registry is a service owned by the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury Evaluation Task Force (opens in new tab).

This is where planned, ongoing and complete government evaluations from all departments and the Scottish Government are registered.

For further information on guidance on government use of the registry go to Guidance on using the Evaluation Registry (opens in new tab) and frequently asked questions (opens in new tab).

Search Evaluation Registry

enter a keyword or search term here

Search all evaluations

Search keywords

Apply filters

Clear all filters

Show all sections

Organisations

Show

Evaluation types

Show

Evaluation stages

Show

Evaluation methods

Show

Government major projects

Show

Showing **1 - 25** of **2076** results

Local Growth Fund and Getting Building Fund: Place-based case studies

Organisation(s)	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG)
Evaluation type(s)	Other
Evaluation stage	Complete

Updated review of the Evidence of Legacy of Major Sporting Events: July 2015

Organisation(s)	The Scottish Government
Evaluation type(s)	Other
Evaluation stage	Complete

Community agency, control and wellbeing

Organisation(s)	Cabinet Office
Evaluation type(s)	Impact evaluation
Evaluation stage	Complete

Capability to do evaluation in the UK

17,000 **accredited** government analysts

Analysis Function



Government Social Research



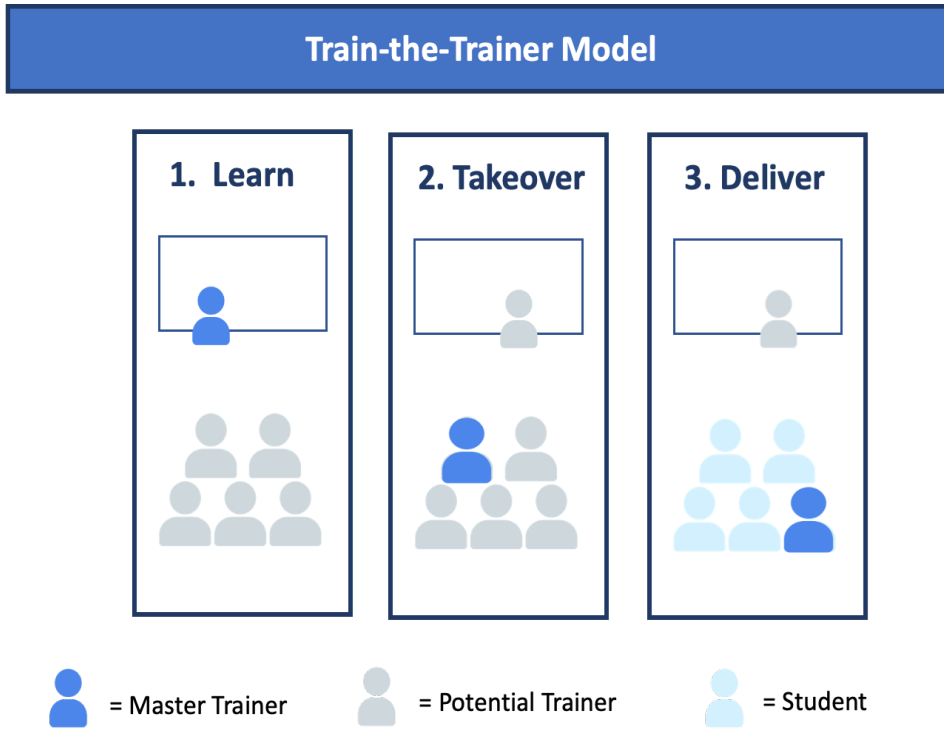
Government Statistical Service



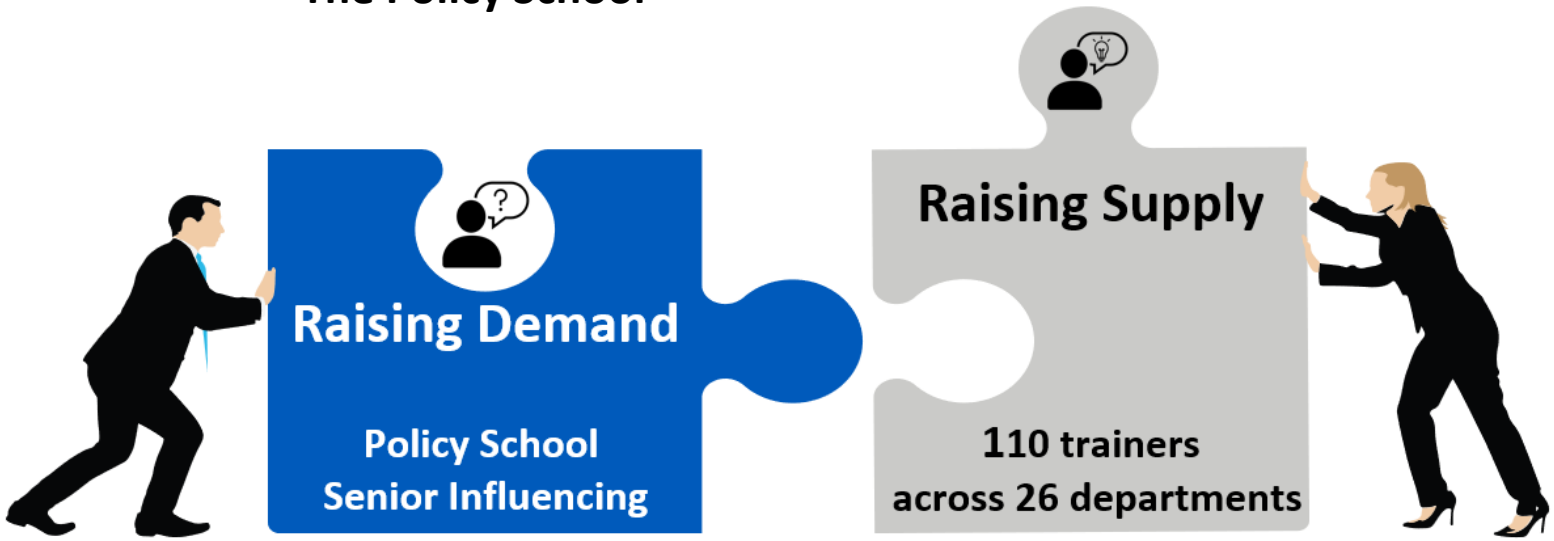
Government Economic Service

Building capability to do evaluation

The Evaluation Academy



The Policy School



Capability to do evaluation: The What Works Network



Education Endowment Foundation

College of Policing

TASO

Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru

Money & Pensions Service

what works centre for local economic growth

NICE National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

YOUTH FUTURES FOUNDATION

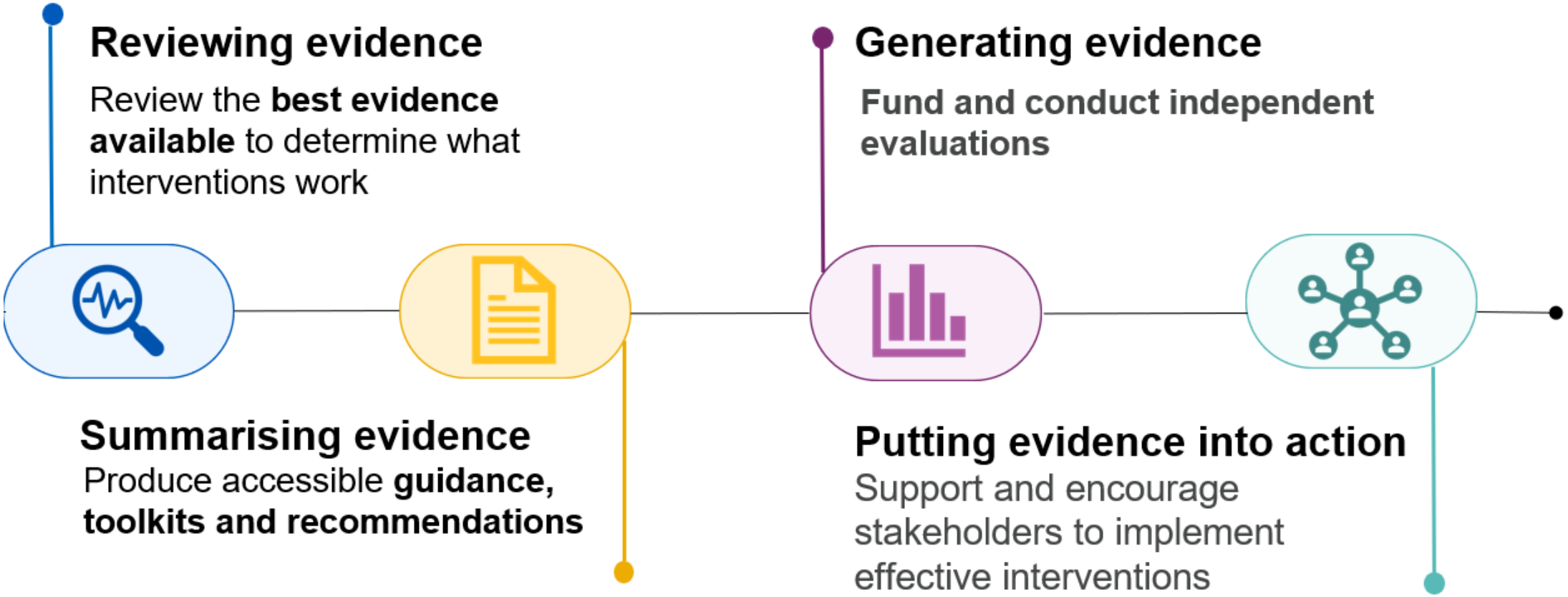
Centre for Ageing Better

Foundations
What Works Centre for Children & Families

YOUTH ENDOWMENT FUND

Centre Homelessness Impact

Capability to do evaluation: the What Works Network



Capability to do evaluation

Evaluation & Trial Advice Panel (ETAP)

65 PANEL MEMBERS

23 FROM ACADEMIA

23 FROM RESEARCH INDUSTRY

13 FROM GOVERNMENT

6 FROM WHAT WORKS CENTRES



Wide range of methodological expertise….

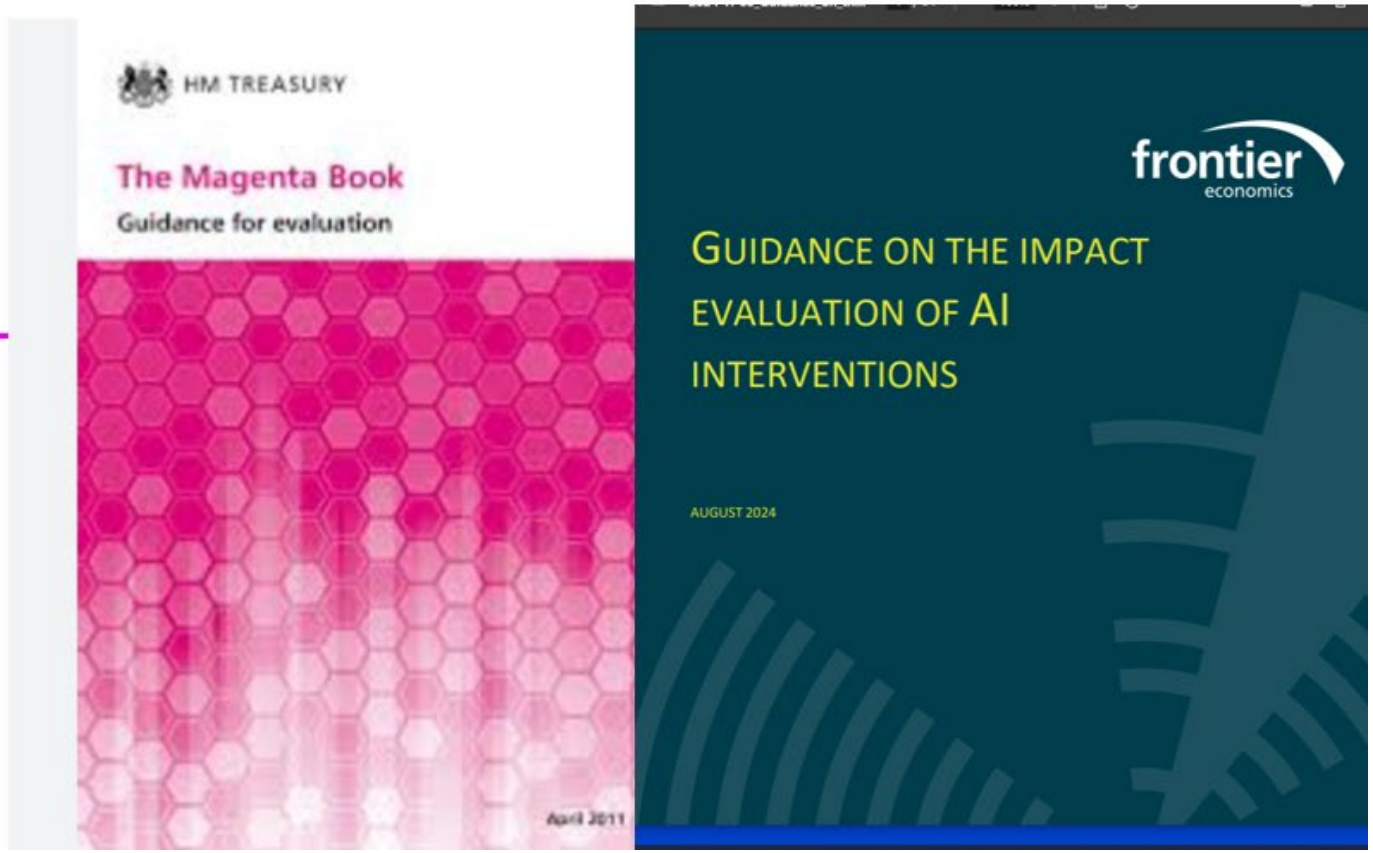
EXPERIMENTAL
QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL
THEORY-BASED
ECONOMIC



Capability to do evaluation

Magenta Book

Central Government guidance on evaluation



Resources to do evaluation

Evaluation Accelerator Fund (£22m)

The Evaluation Accelerator Fund (EAF) supports evaluation across government to transform our understanding of the impact of activity in priority policy areas.

Figure 1: There is a sustained increase in the probability of being a paid employee from two to seven years after first therapy

Changes in monthly employee pay and the probability of being a paid employee, compared with one year before first therapy, 25- to 60-year-olds who completed NHS Talking Therapies treatment between 1 April 2014 and 31 December 2022, England

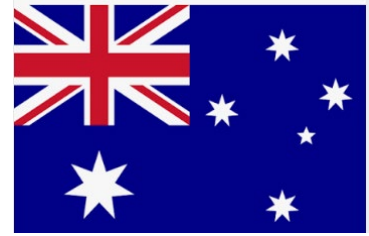


Labour Market Evaluation and Pilots Fund (£37.5m)

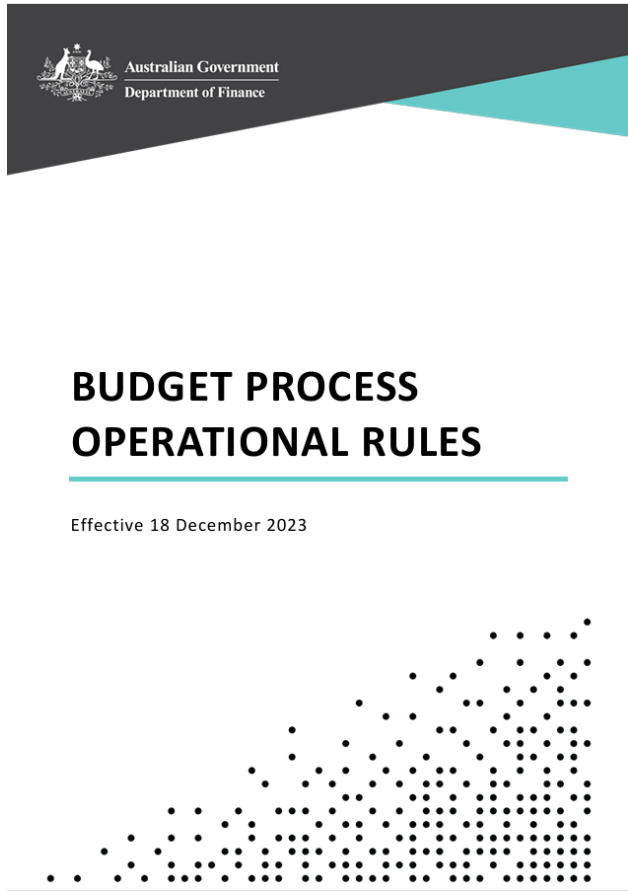


Australia

Incentives to do evaluation



- Entities are to
  - develop evidence based New Policy Proposals
  - Provide sufficient detail to demonstrate that an evaluation plan will be established in the early stages of policy implementation, taking into account the Commonwealth Evaluation Principles to allow the effectiveness and efficiency of programs to be measured and assessed over time, consistent with the Commonwealth Evaluation policy



Incentives to do evaluation in Aus: transparency

Stocktake of Evaluations

- In 2024-25, at least 847 evaluations were planned, in progress or completed across the APS
  - 222 completed in 2024-25
  - 217 completed in 2023-24

Evaluation leadership

- The number of agency in-house evaluation units has increased from 18 in 2021 to 34 in 2025
- 43% of responding entities had a Senior Executive leader responsible for evaluation

Evaluation evidence use

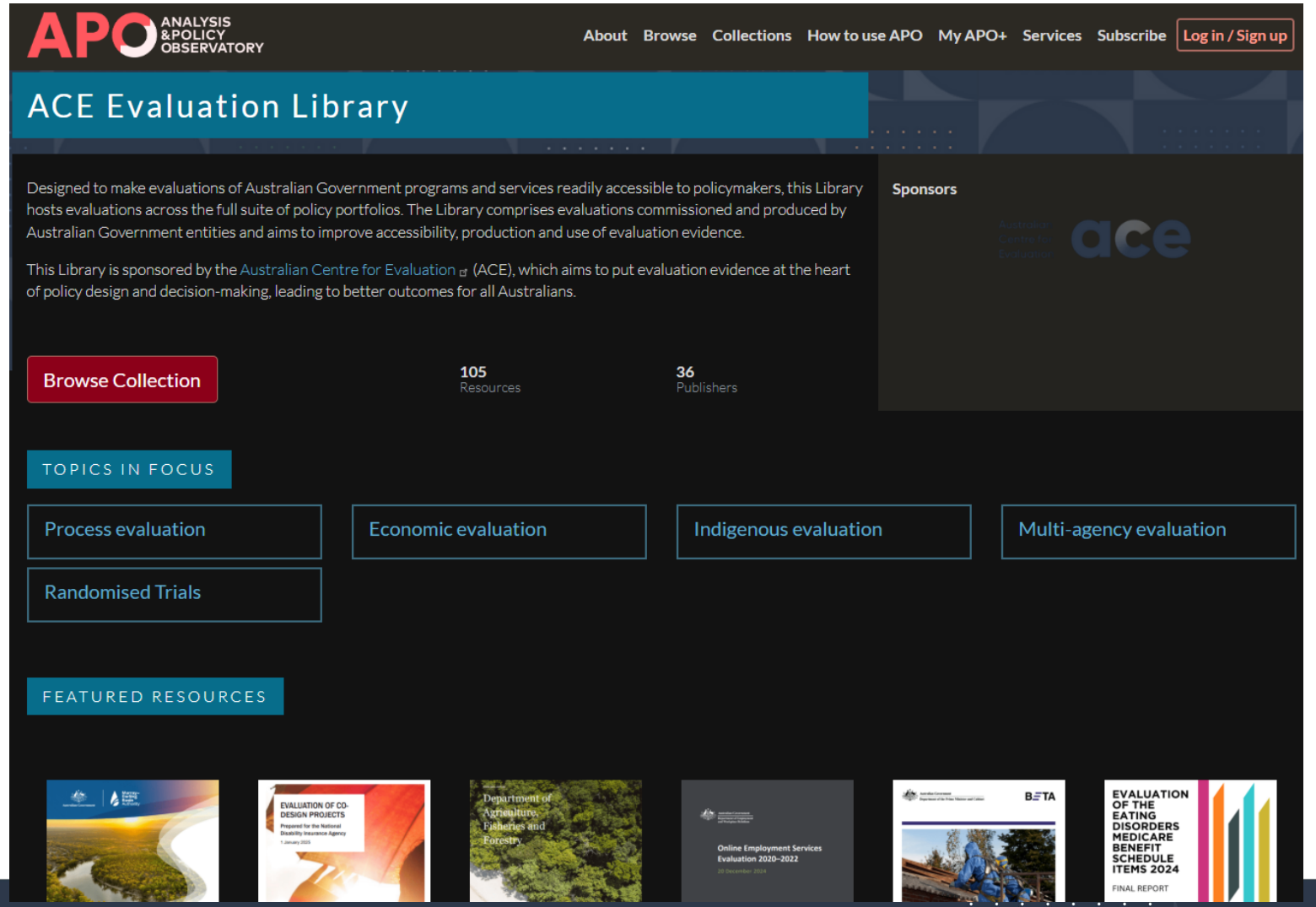
- Only 32% of responding entities routinely publish evaluation findings

Evaluation capability

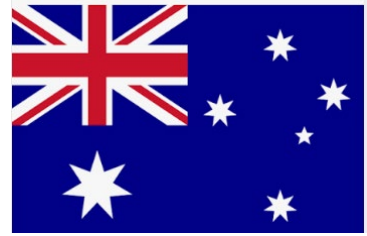
- 71% of responding entities reported undertaking some form of capability building activity



Incentives to do evaluation: transparency



Capability to do evaluation



Evaluation toolkit

What is evaluation

Assess the design, implementation or results of programs and activities to support continuous improvement, accountability and decision-making

Why evaluate

Plan how to evaluate programs and activities early to meet relevant policy and legislative requirements

When to evaluate

Identify and prioritise the timing and type of evaluation needed at different stages of the policy cycle using risk-based approaches

Who evaluates

Identify evaluation roles and responsibilities based on the design and purpose of an evaluation and the capabilities within Commonwealth entities

How to evaluate

Steps involved in planning and conducting an evaluation and key questions to consider

Impact evaluation

Determine if a program or policy achieves its intended outcomes

Templates, tools and resources

Comprehensive set of templates, tools and resources to help you plan and conduct an evaluation

Evaluation planning for new policy proposals

Consider and determine fit for purpose evaluation, monitoring and learning plans for New Policy Proposals (NPPs)

Capability to do evaluation

Evaluation Profession

Ensure evaluation evidence is at the heart of policy design and decision-making by joining the Evaluation Profession. Learn from the experts, grow your network and gain access to learning resources.

Join | Login

Home » Evaluation Profession

About the Evaluation Profession

The Evaluation Profession will help to build an APS workforce that uses evaluation, evidence and continuous improvement to drive outcomes. This positively impacts our policies and programs.

The Evaluation Profession brings together people who assess the effectiveness and efficiency of government policies, programs and initiatives. The Evaluation Profession aims to champion evaluative thinking and evaluation – in all its forms – across the APS.

It will help build evaluation capability, support diversity and mobility in evaluation roles, and foster innovation.

Hear from the co-Heads of the Evaluation Profession:

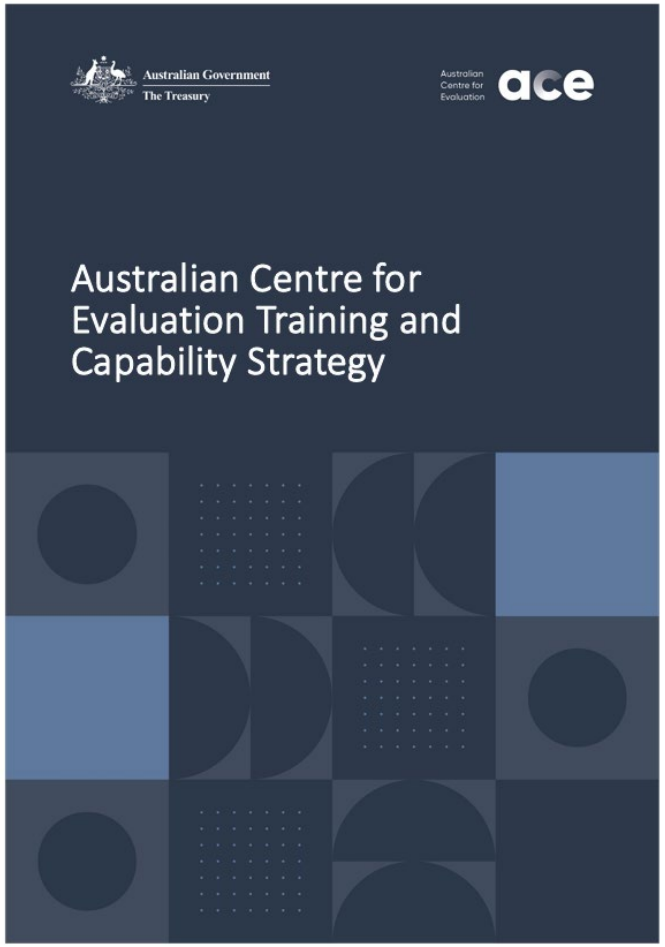
- Dr Shane Johnson, First Assistant Secretary, Macroeconomic Analysis and Policy Division, Department of Treasury
- Danielle Wood, Chair, Productivity Commission



Capability to do evaluation

Table 1: Evaluation knowledge pyramid: knowledge needs for different audiences

Role	Area of knowledge
All APS	Understanding of evaluative thinking, evaluation approaches, concepts and the role that evaluation evidence plays in informing policy design and delivery.
Commissioning and use of findings	Scoping an evaluation, developing program logics and evaluation questions, commissioning evaluation, managing contracts, responding to findings and using evaluation evidence.
Champions	Understanding and advocacy of the key components of robust evaluation planning, delivery and use.
Delivery	Designing a robust evaluation, collecting credible and reliable data, analysing and interpreting results, communicating findings and recommendations.



Capability to do evaluation: evaluation trainer network

Training the Trainer

Stage 1a



ACE delivers training to evaluation staff in line agencies, to learn to deliver APS Evaluation Foundations modules.

Stage 1b



Participants apply evaluation training skills through practice with their fellow learners.

Stage 2



Participants in Stage 1 return to their agency, where they deliver APS Evaluation Foundation Modules to their colleagues.



ACE Staff

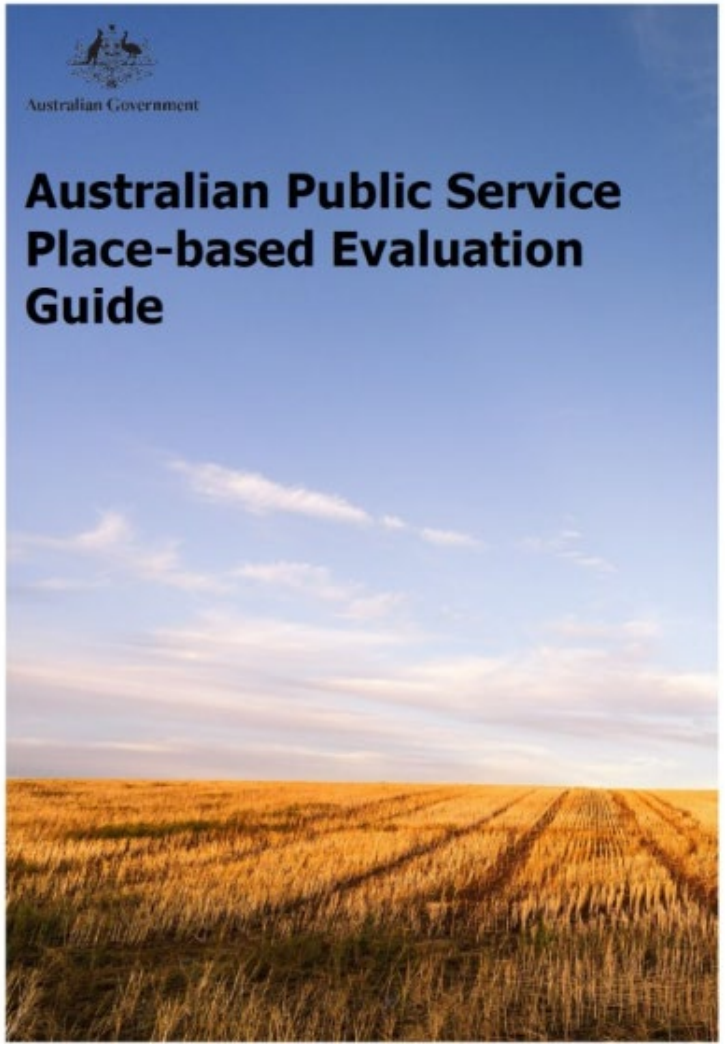


Line agency evaluation staff

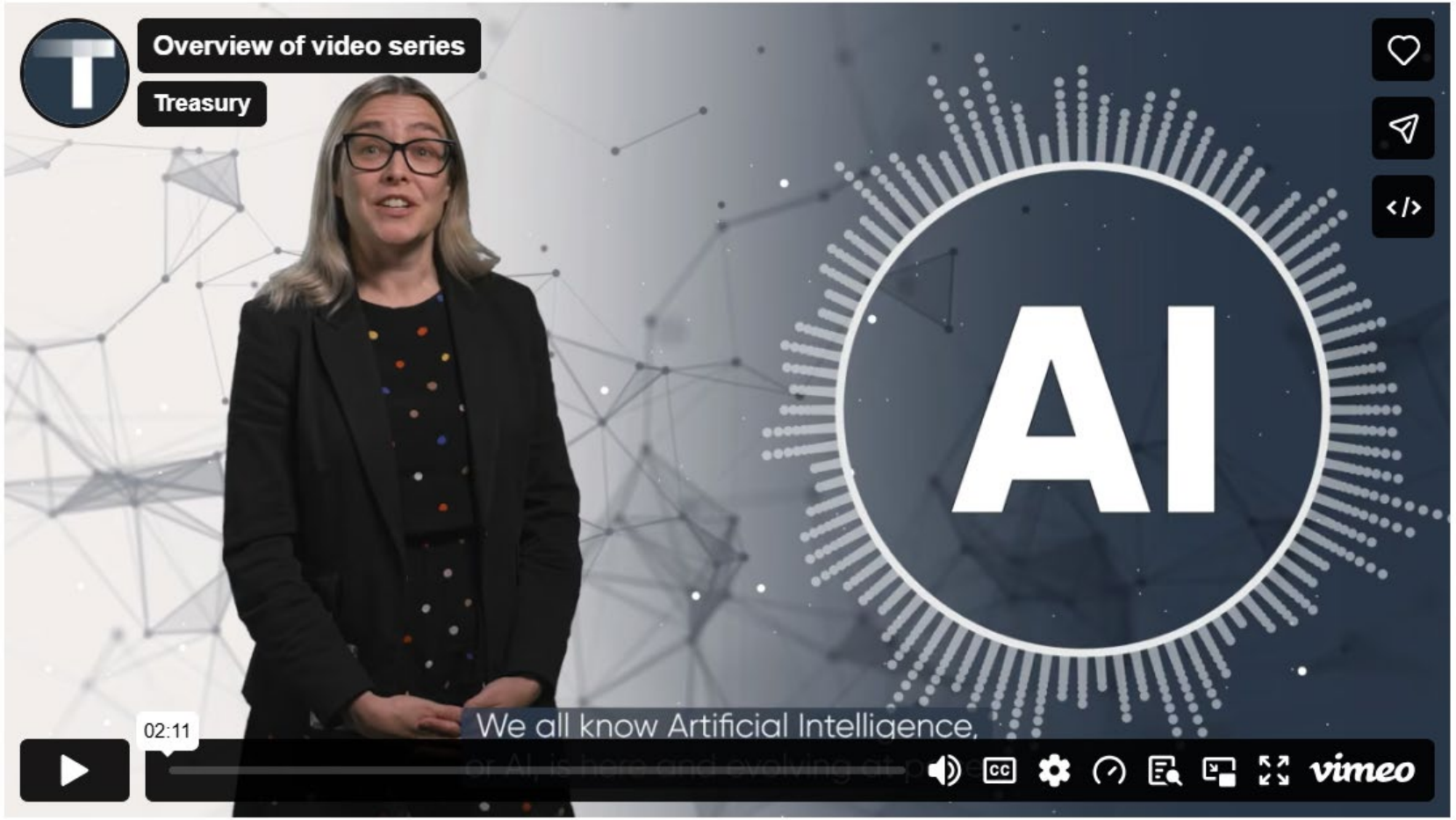


Line agency analysts

Capability to do evaluation

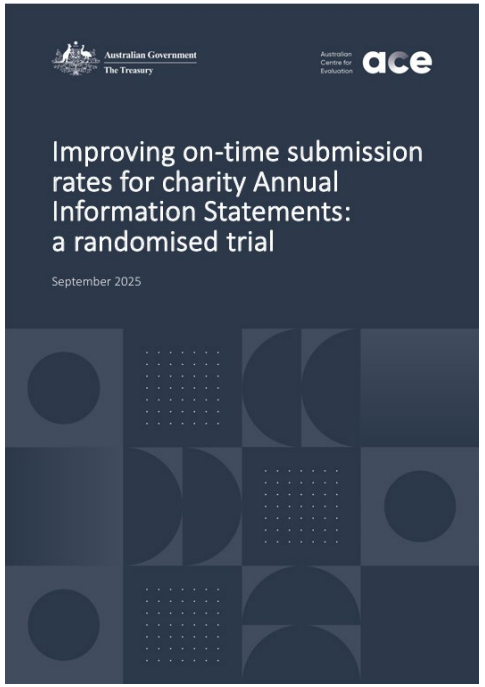


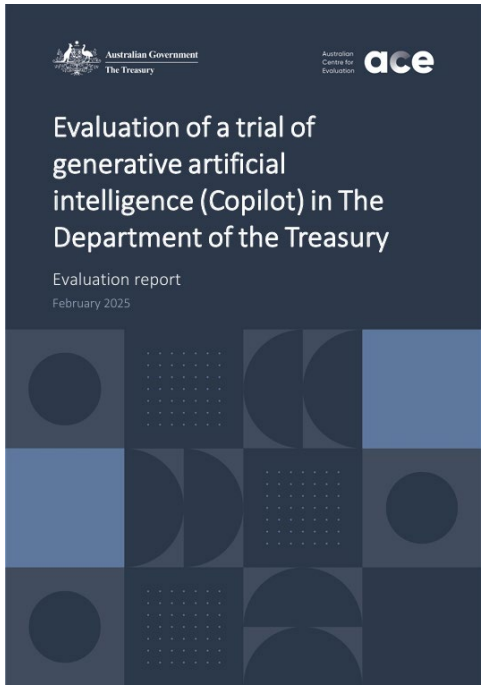
Using Artificial Intelligence tools to support evaluation in the Australian Government

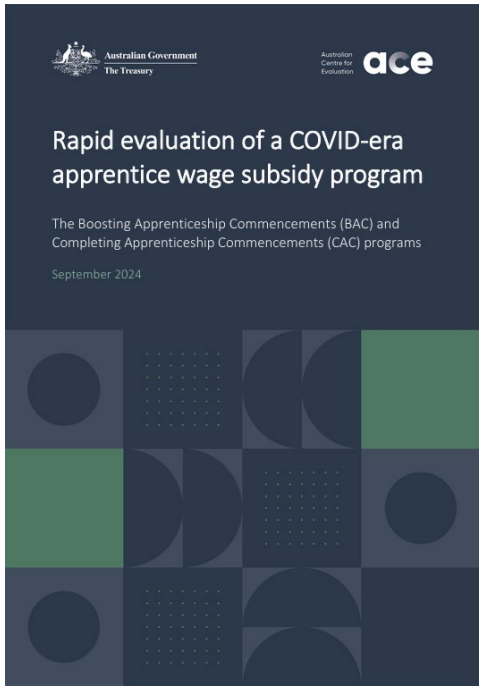


Capability and resources to do evaluation





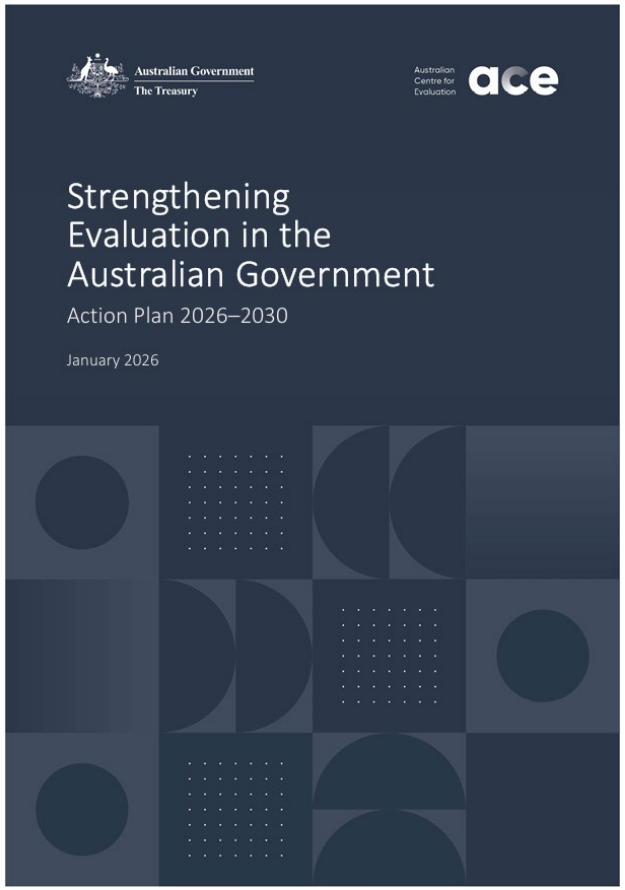


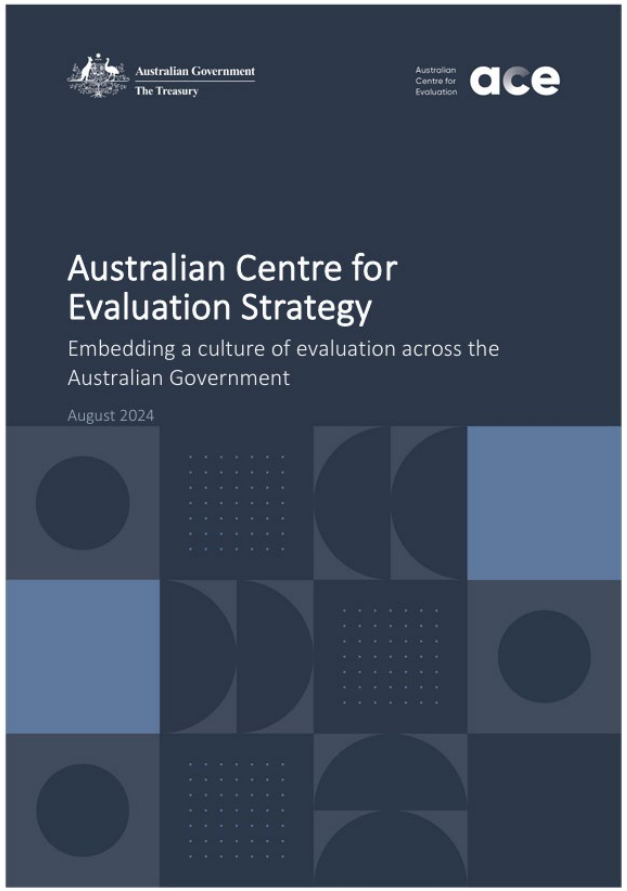


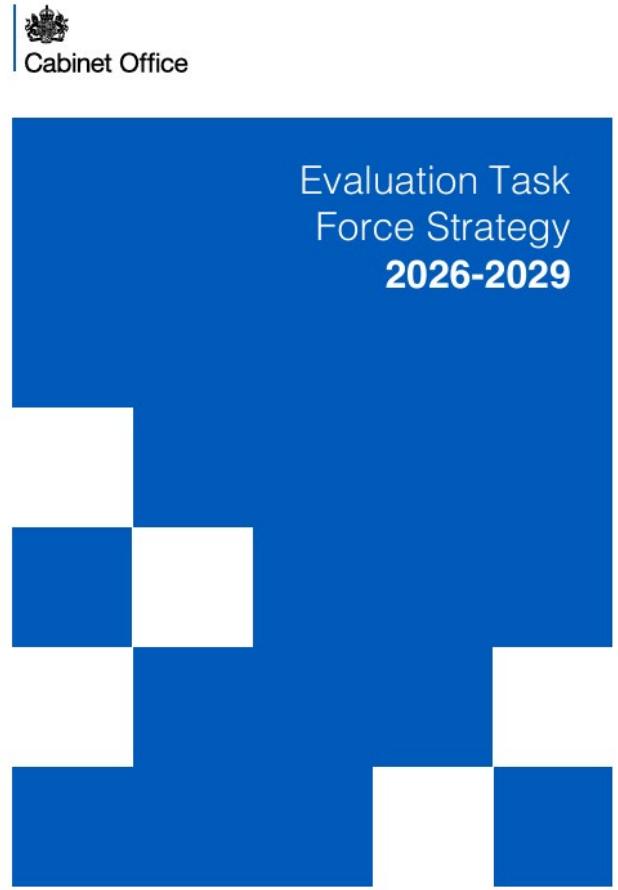
Reflections on my time in the ACE and the ETF

- No single intervention is enough
- Incentives is the hardest nut to crack
- Evaluation reform is fundamentally organisational / system change
- Consider transparency over mandates
- Leadership matters – need senior to leaders visibly support evaluation

Further reading







Thank you! Questions?

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Commonwealth Evaluation Policy

Principles-based evaluation approach

The Policy provides a principles-based approach for the conduct of evaluations across the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth entities and companies are expected to deliver support and services for Australians by setting clear objectives for major policies, projects and programs, and consistently measuring progress towards achieving these objectives.

Where an evaluation is undertaken to support this, it should be conducted to a standard that ensures the information is credible and evidence-based. Data collection, evaluation practices and public use of evaluation findings should also take into account relevant ethical, cultural and privacy considerations.

Commonwealth evaluation principles

The key principles, which taken together, should guide evaluation activity across the Commonwealth to support learning, accountability and decision-making are detailed below.

Evaluations need to be:

Fit for purpose

- The choice to evaluate and the scale of effort and resources allocated to an evaluation should be proportional to the value, impact, strategic importance and risk profile of the program or activity.
- Methods should differentiate between evaluations to inform program administration and evaluations to inform policy decisions.

Useful

- Evaluations to inform program delivery should be designed for the purposes of continuous improvement and accountability against objectives, while evaluation for decision-making should be designed for the purpose of defining achievable outcomes, taking account of any pilots, prototyping or experience from other jurisdictions.
- A strong understanding of Government policy intent is required, both when evaluation is used as a monitoring tool and when it is an input to new program design.

Robust, ethical and culturally appropriate

- Evaluations should be well-designed, identify potential evaluator bias and take account of the impact of programs and evaluations on stakeholders.
- Robust data and evidence should provide performance insights and drive continuous improvement for programs in the delivery stage.
- Ethical and culturally appropriate approaches should be considered in all evaluation activities, including for the collection, assessment and use of information.

Credible

- Evaluations should be conducted by people who are technically and culturally capable.
- The collection and analysis of evidence should be undertaken in an impartial and systematic way, having regard to the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders.
- Evaluations should adhere to appropriate standards of integrity and independence.

Transparent where appropriate

- To be useful, evaluation findings should be transparent by default unless there are appropriate reasons for not releasing information publicly.
- To support continuous improvement, accountability and decision-making, evaluation findings should be provided to appropriate stakeholders.

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO)

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IN-PROGRESS PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Evaluation of Indigenous programs – follow-on

OPEN FOR CONTRIBUTION Due to table: March, 2027



Portfolio
Prime Minister and Cabinet; Treasury; Social Services; Health, Disability and Ageing; Employment and Workplace Relations; Education; Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts; Attorney-General's

Entity
See page for details

Contact
Please direct enquiries through our contact page.

Activity Policy development

Sector
Indigenous | Prime Minister & Cabinet | Treasury | Social Services | Health | Ageing | Employment | Infrastructure | Education | Attorney-General's

Quality assessment framework developed with Ipsos

Review dimensions

1. **Aims** - clarity of evaluation rationale, research questions, audience.
2. **Methods** - quality of overall evaluation and individual components (impact, process and VfM)
3. **Management** - suitability of management plans

Scoring

0 = substantial missing information to judge this criteria

1 = limited info to assess quality, and/ or significant improvement required

2 = substantial and satisfactory info included. Some improvement possible

N/A = criterion doesn't apply.

Components of a ‘typical’ high quality evaluation for a major project

1. **Clear aims**: well articulated evaluations questions and objectives
2. **Mixed methods**:
    a. Strong emphasis on theory of change - reflecting complexity
    b. Components of quantitative experimental/QED designs e.g. diff-in-diff, A/B testing for digital programmes
3. **Iterative**:
    a. Early evaluation planning, baseline and data collection
    b. Phases of process/impact/VfM evaluation - learning
4. **Embedded into the wider programme**:
    a. Alignment with monitoring and benefits realisation
    b. Clear governance and senior buy-in for use of evaluation findings
    c. Suitably resourced

Barriers to eval

- Designing evaluation early enough
  - Many programs are already underway before evaluation is considered.
- Data access and quality
  - Administrative data may not be available or may be underutilised.
- Competing priorities
  - Evaluation competes with delivery pressures.
- Capability gaps
  - Not every agency has the same level of evaluation expertise.

Barriers to evaluation identified by the UK NAO - 2021

- Lack of political interest in, or support for, evaluation
  - mismatch between political timetables and the timelines of evaluation producers;
  - electoral cycle;
  - political decisions being driven by values rather than outcomes;
  - project owners disinclined to evaluate due to negative exposure if harmful or neutral impact is detected.
- Project owners seeing evaluations as an imposed process or hurdle rather than as necessary Research & Development (R&D) to ensure good value for money and optimal design of future interventions.
- Weak integration of people and processes to join policy and analysis effectively. Policy not designed with testing and evaluation in mind and analysts involved too late in the policy-making process. Evaluation plans not built into standard project approval processes at a sufficiently early stage.
- Lack of resources to manage evaluation effectively.
- Shortage of evaluation specialists