



Evaluation Reference Group

Terms of Reference

Context

The Australian Government has an ambitious and enduring plan for Australian Public Service (APS) Reform. In this context, **embedding a culture of evaluation** is a [key initiative](#) that aims to ensure the APS has the capability to do its job well (Priority 4, Outcome 8).

This APS reform priority reflects findings in the [2019 Independent Review of the APS](#) that evaluation practices across the APS had declined considerably over the past few decades, with recommendations aimed at building good practice (Recommendation 26 refers). Establishing a well-resourced central enabling evaluation function and increasing the resourcing and remit for in-house evaluation units across the APS are central pillars for achieving enduring cultural change.

Staged reforms to strengthen evaluation capabilities, practices and culture across the APS have been co-designed and implemented progressively since 2020, with key milestones including:

- Introduction of the [Commonwealth Evaluation Policy](#) and [Toolkit](#) (December 2021)
- Launch of the [Commonwealth Evaluation Community of Practice](#) (September 2022)
- New evaluation requirements in the [Budget Process Operational Rules](#) (December 2022)
- Establishment of the [Australian Centre for Evaluation](#) (July 2023)
- Embedding evaluation in Commissioner's Direction on Stewardship (2024)¹

In addition, a number of Commonwealth entities have taken their own steps to improve evaluation practices, capabilities, and culture within their organisation. This includes, for example: establishing a dedicated evaluation unit, developing an enterprise-level evaluation strategy and/or forward work plan, or introducing an evaluation oversight committee.

Moving forward, a collaborative, continuous and adaptive approach will continue to underpin the design and delivery of the evaluation aspects of the APS Reform Plan. Both centralised and devolved initiatives, implemented in a coordinated and sequenced way, are critical for success.

The Australian Centre for Evaluation (ACE) will work collaboratively with evaluation units from across the APS (and beyond) to leverage opportunities to develop system-wide approaches and targeted tools, while also ensuring there is flexibility and autonomy for individual entities to tailor and customise approaches to choose what works best for them.

¹ Pending amendments to the *Public Service Act 1999* taking effect (assented on 11 June 2024).

Purpose

The Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group's (ERG) primary purpose is to provide cross-government leadership and coordination to embed a culture of evaluation in the Australian Government.

The ERG will:

- work with the ACE to shape, prioritise, and implement staged APS evaluation reform initiatives that deliver on the scale and ambition of the APS Reform Plan.
- provide strategic advice and guidance to maximise alignment between whole-of-government reform initiatives and the tailored needs and objectives of individual entities.

Membership

The ERG consists of two levels of membership – senior leaders and technical experts – with representatives from a range of departments and agencies who can shape and implement evaluation practice through multiple channels.

Together, the ERG comprises a dedicated group of trusted advisers who have the authority, expertise, and influence to enhance evaluation practices, capabilities, and culture within their organisation.

Membership includes individuals who hold leadership roles (e.g., are responsible for managing dedicated in-house evaluation units) or have technical expertise in evaluation.

ERG members will act as change champions within their organisation, leading by example to raise awareness about the importance of evaluation, motivating and encouraging colleagues to embrace change, and helping to embed a culture of evaluation and learning across the APS.

Areas of Focus

The key areas of focus in the next stage of APS evaluation reforms include:

1. Providing leadership to embed the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and Toolkit
2. Championing high-quality impact evaluations
3. Promoting better evaluation planning and use in Budget and Cabinet processes
4. Overseeing evaluation capability building across the APS.

Priorities

The ERG's priorities will be agreed in consultation with members. An indicative schedule of activities will guide the ERG's engagement. Project plans (and teams) will be agreed with members, as appropriate.

Structure

The ERG consists of two levels of membership: senior leaders and technical experts. Project teams will also be established to work on agreed priorities.

The purpose of the different membership levels, and the relationship between the ERG and other whole-of-government engagement mechanisms related to evaluation, are detailed at **Attachment A**.

Participating entities are listed at **Attachment B**.

A current **Member List** is maintained by the ACE and is available to ERG members on request.

Authority

The ERG will primarily have an advisory role, helping to develop and refine the ACE's approach and activities.

Member contributions to project outputs will be agreed during the scoping phase for each individual project.

Meeting arrangements

ERG meetings will be scheduled quarterly, or as needed, to coincide with key milestones.

Meetings will involve one or both membership tier, as appropriate based on the agenda.

Reporting

Minutes of meetings will be maintained and distributed to Reference Group members by ACE.

Term

The ERG was established in December 2020 to help implement recommendation 26 of the Independent Review of the APS. Revised terms of reference and membership, refreshed in December 2023, are ongoing and will be reviewed as required.

Attachment A – ERG Structure and Other Engagement Mechanisms

ERG Structure – Membership Levels and Project Teams

<p>Tier 1: Senior leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically SES Bands 1 or 2 who are responsible for the oversight and management of dedicated evaluation units in a Commonwealth entity. • Senior leaders will help shape and endorse strategic directions for future evaluation reforms and, as appropriate, commit resources to contribute to ERG projects that support whole-of-government evaluation reforms, resources, and targeted tools. <p>Engagement Meetings and engagement quarterly, or as required.</p>
<p>Tier 2: Technical experts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically EL2 or EL1 officers with significant expertise in evaluation and/or direct responsibility for managing dedicated evaluation teams or providing evaluation support services to line areas. • Technical experts will be a key advisory group to test, develop and validate ideas, and help implement priority initiatives. <p>Engagement Meetings and engagement as required.</p>
<p>ERG Project teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequencing and scope of ERG projects will be developed by the ACE, in consultation with Senior Leaders and Technical Experts. • ERG Senior Leaders will determine preferred allocation of resources to specific projects based on timing, capacity, and alignment with entity-specific priorities and expertise. <p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project plans to be validated by ERG Senior Leaders prior to commencement, with updates provided throughout implementation. • Meetings and engagement with project teams conducted in accordance with agreed project parameters.

Relationship between ERG and other engagement mechanisms

Engagement mechanism	Purpose and Membership	Frequency
<p>Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group (ERG)</p>	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide cross-government leadership, strategic oversight, and coordination to embed a culture of evaluation in the Australian Government. • Work with the ACE to shape, prioritise, and implement staged APS evaluation reform initiatives • Maximise alignment between whole-of-government reform initiatives and the tailored needs and objectives of individual entities. <p>Membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leaders and technical experts who have the authority, expertise, and influence to enhance evaluation practices, capabilities, and culture within their organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly meetings, or on an as needed basis • Out of session consultation as required • Targeted engagement on projects in accordance with agreed project plans
<p>Commonwealth Evaluation Units Forums and Special Events</p>	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about the implementation of staged evaluation reform initiatives in the APS. <p>Membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff working in dedicated in-house evaluation units across the Australian Government and beyond. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – 2 events per annum
<p>Commonwealth Evaluation Community of Practice (CoP)</p>	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional network designed to bring together people to work collaboratively to learn, share and build the evaluation capability of its members. <p>Membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open to all Commonwealth officials with a role or an interest in evaluation (i.e., membership is not limited to staff working in dedicated evaluation roles/units). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community events – online, hybrid and face-to-face – including programs delivered in an intensive format and special events • Online discussion fora • Online collaborative workspace



Attachment B – Membership

Membership of the Reference Group will comprise of representatives of the following entities:

- Australian Centre for Evaluation (Department of the Treasury) – Chair
- Attorney General’s Department
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Australian Taxation Office
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Department of Defence
- Department of Education
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Foreign Affairs
- Department of Health and Aged Care
- Department of Home Affairs
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
- Department of Industry, Science and Resources
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Veterans’ Affairs
- Indigenous Business Australia
- National Emergency Management Agency
- National Indigenous Australian’s Agency
- Services Australia

Membership of the Reference Group is subject to change over time.

A detailed Member List for the Reference Group is maintained by the ACE.