



Australian Government
The Treasury

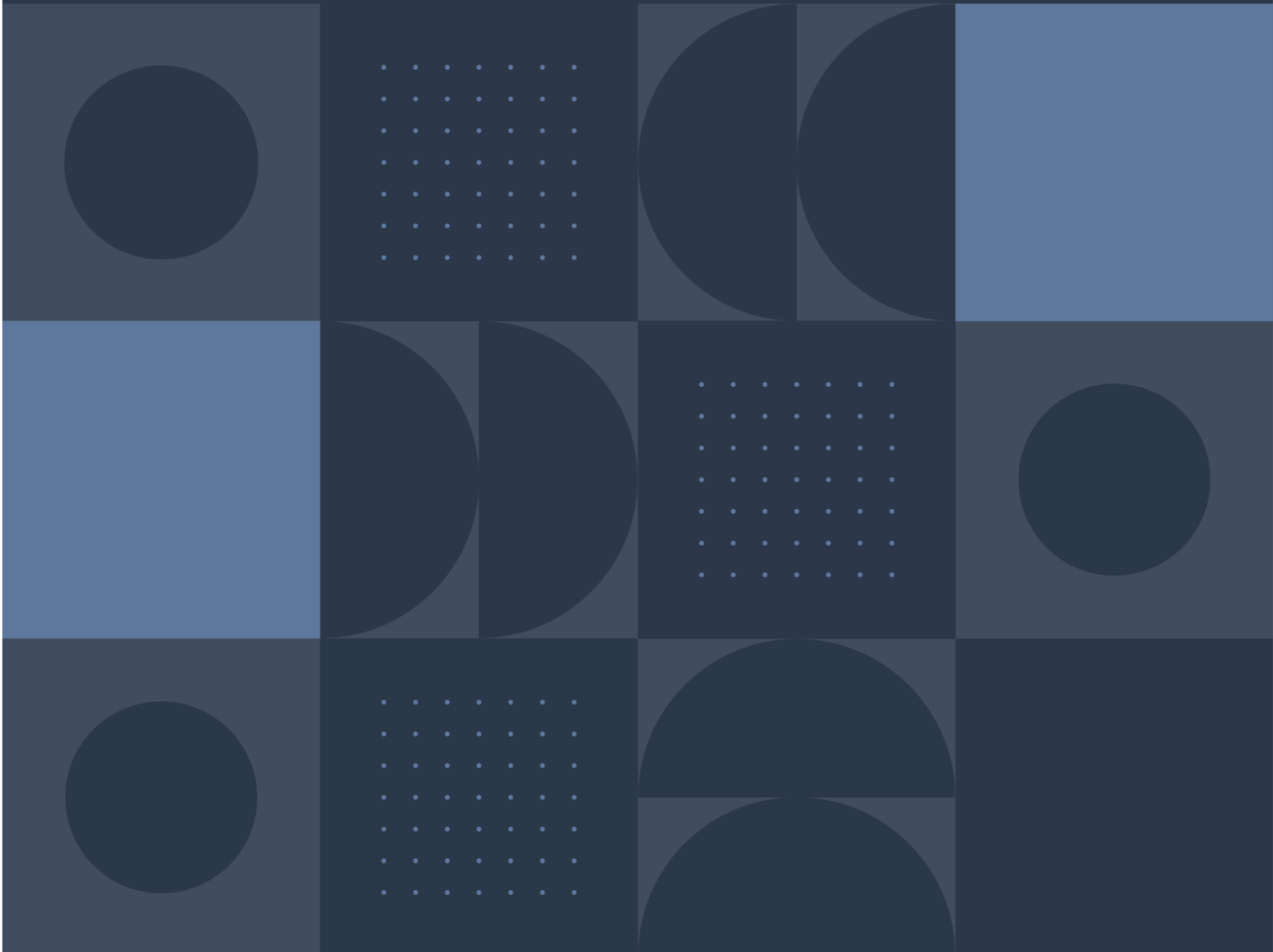
Australian
Centre for
Evaluation

ace

Impact evaluation: Assessing the effectiveness of Australian public policy

Workshop summary

17th June 2024



Background

Impact evaluation: assessing the effectiveness of Australian public policy was a public event held on 17 June 2024 in Canberra and hosted by the Australian Centre for Evaluation (ACE). The event aimed to promote the use of high-quality impact evaluation in Australian government.

This event was accompanied by a morning workshop that brought together more than 100 evaluation specialists from government, academia, not-for-profits and the private sector. The aim of the workshop was to generate ideas to improve the planning, conduct and use of high-quality impact evaluation in Australian public policy.

Workshop participants discussed four themes:

- **Facilitating collaboration** on impact evaluations and evidence among government, academia and practitioners
- **Increasing demand** for impact evaluations
- **Supporting capability building** in impact evaluation within the Australian Public Service (APS)
- **Improving access** to administrative data, research and evaluation findings.

Within each theme, workshop participants discussed the current state of evaluation, their vision of the ideal state, and concrete initiatives to achieve this vision. This report gives a short summary of the views and suggestions offered by workshop participants. Not all ideas are shared or endorsed by the Australian Centre for Evaluation.

Facilitating collaboration on impact evaluations

Workshop participants envisioned a more cohesive evaluation sector with deeper ties between government and non-government organisations. Government and academia would have shared goals and a shared language that create a common understanding of high-quality evaluation and how it can be achieved. There would be greater staff mobility between academia, government, not-for-profits and private industry and better career advancement opportunities for evaluation specialists within government.

Ideas to facilitate collaboration:

- Practical research centres that straddle academia and the public sector. Teams that produce academic quality research targeted at policy makers' needs and who can act as intermediaries between the two sectors.
- A public directory of senior academics with impact evaluation expertise, senior officials and the policy areas that they work on. This would make it easier for both parties to find cross sector collaborators who want to work on impact evaluations.
- Dedicated funding for government-academia partnerships, either by making better use of existing funding channels, or through new funding sources.
- More opportunities for academics to work within government through secondments or 'academic fellowships' (and vice versa).

Increasing demand for impact evaluations

Workshop participants envisioned a world where senior leaders and ministers are knowledgeable about impact evaluation and require it as a standard part of the policy development cycle. Policy teams have core skills in evaluation, including impact evaluation, and are given the support and resources to commission good-quality impact evaluations. Evaluation results are accepted, used to improve policy, and made public where appropriate.

Ideas to increase demand for impact evaluations:

- A publicly available register of published Australian impact evaluations, to help policy makers find evidence that already exists and allow evaluators to build on existing knowledge.
- Promote early engagement of senior public servants in impact evaluations. Senior officials should be briefed and asked to consider the action they will take when evaluation results are finalised.
- Prioritise funds for impact evaluation as part of every New Policy Proposal.

Supporting capability building

Workshop participants envisioned a broad-based understanding of evaluation and causal inference across the whole of the Australian Public Service and in the general public. The objective is a culture that values evaluation and knows how to use evaluation results effectively, resulting in the best possible evaluation method being used for every program. High quality data should be more easily accessible to support robust evaluation findings.

Ideas to improve capability:

- A mandate for all new policies to be subject to an impact evaluation within a specified period (for example, their first three years).
- Specialist roles at senior levels for expert evaluators, to retain impact evaluation experts in the APS and create a pathway that incentivises junior staff to specialise in impact evaluation.
- Establish a hub-and-spoke model where all policy teams have at least one person with evaluation experience, and every policy team is supported by a departmental evaluation team.

Improving access to data for impact evaluation

At the workshop, participants imagined a world where government data sets are easy to access, well documented and interoperable with standardised requirements for clearance and ethical approval. It should be standard practice for data to be used to inform policy decisions, and all public servants should know where they can access the data they need.

Ideas to improve access to data:

- Linkage of state government administrative data sets into the Australian Bureau of Statistics' major data assets, PLIDA and BLADE.
- A directory that details the administrative datasets that exists, what they contain and how to access them.

- Training for data custodians in the Australian Public Service on the five safes framework and the ways they can safely make their data available to researchers.

Next steps

Workshop participants brainstormed creative solutions to improve the planning, conduct and use of high-quality impact evaluation in Australian public policy. Some of those ideas could be delivered quickly, while others would require multiple years to achieve. These ideas are not the responsibility of any one individual or team. This report serves as an open invitation to use the ideas that were generated at the workshop in a spirit of collegiality.

For its part, the Australian Centre for Evaluation (ACE) will review the proposals arising from the workshop and will consider how to add the most promising to its work program. In particular, the ACE will work with the newly established Impact Evaluation Practitioners Network to foster stronger ties between impact evaluators in government, academia and beyond.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2024

This publication is available for your use under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode) licence, with the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, the Treasury logo, photographs, images, signatures and where otherwise stated. The full licence terms are available from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode>.



Use of Treasury material under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode) licence requires you to attribute the work (but not in any way that suggests that the Treasury endorses you or your use of the work).

Treasury material used ‘as supplied’

Provided you have not modified or transformed Treasury material in any way including, for example, by changing the Treasury text; calculating percentage changes; graphing or charting data; or deriving new statistics from published Treasury statistics — then Treasury prefers the following attribution:

Source: The Australian Government the Treasury.

Derivative material

If you have modified or transformed Treasury material, or derived new material from those of the Treasury in any way, then Treasury prefers the following attribution:

Based on The Australian Government the Treasury data.

Use of the Coat of Arms

The terms under which the Coat of Arms can be used are set out on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet website (see <https://www.pmc.gov.au/honours-and-symbols/commonwealth-coat-arms>).

Other uses

Enquiries regarding this licence and any other use of this document are welcome at:

Manager
Media Unit
The Treasury
Langton Crescent
Parkes ACT 2600
Email: media@treasury.gov.au