



# Evaluation governance

## Contents

Introduction.....	2
Key functions .....	3
Fit-for-purpose evaluation governance .....	4
Step-by-step: setting up evaluation governance .....	8
Documentation requirements .....	10
Risk management .....	11
Enhancing evaluation impact.....	12
Conclusion .....	12
Resources .....	12

# Introduction

## Purpose and scope

This guide is for managers and staff who need to set up governance arrangements to evaluate policies and programs.

Good evaluation governance is important for stakeholder engagement, collaborative learning and improved evaluation quality. It ensures the right people contribute to the design and delivery of evaluation at the right time, helping to translate evaluation evidence into action.

## What is evaluation governance

Evaluation governance establishes the structures, processes and relationships that oversee and guide policy and program evaluation activities. Governance connects the right people at the right time, and clarifies roles and responsibilities, so that evaluations are well-designed, properly implemented and support learning and improvement.

Effective governance of an evaluation:

- engages diverse stakeholders throughout the process
- gives oversight and support from key decision-makers
- creates pathways for collaborative decision-making
- mobilises appropriate resources and expertise.

If multiple entities are involved in designing and implementing a program, its evaluation governance must balance multiple organisational perspectives and maintain evaluation integrity and utility. A collaborative approach strengthens the evaluation process and its outcomes.

## Benefits

Good evaluation governance links diverse perspectives and expertise. This creates value and strengthens the evaluation process. When done well, governance transforms evaluation from a technical exercise into a shared learning opportunity.

## Improved quality and learning

Strong governance engages diverse stakeholders such as program implementers, service users and technical experts. It allows them to ask the right questions at the right time, interpret findings accurately, and reflect on the process and emerging issues in a collaborative way so the evaluation is robust, credible and useful.

## Better implementation

Governance helps secure resources, coordinate across organisational boundaries, resolve conflicts and clear obstacles.

## Commitment to action

When stakeholders shape evaluations, they are more likely to own and act on findings.

## Formal authority

Governance establishes the authority for data collection and reporting. It makes sure evaluation complies with policy and legislative requirements including the:

- *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*
- Commonwealth Evaluation Policy.

# Key functions

## Strategic direction and oversight

The primary function of good evaluation governance is giving strategic direction through collaborative decision-making.

Evaluation plans specify key questions, methodological approaches, timelines and resource requirements. Decision makers consider all stakeholder perspectives and approve evaluation plans.

Governance involves regularly monitoring progress against the plan. The plan may need adjustments after identifying and addressing barriers collaboratively.

Governance sets up quality control processes to assess evaluation quality. This includes using diverse expertise and experience, reviewing designs, instruments, analyses and reports.

## Coordination and resource management

Governance bodies allocate resources (financial and other) to evaluation components and activities. This includes determining which entities will contribute certain resources.

Governance bodies oversee procurement processes for any external expertise or services needed. This provides transparency and value for money.

Governance bodies facilitate coordination between agencies on:

- data sharing
- access to program information
- aligning evaluation activities with program implementation.

## Inclusive stakeholder engagement

Governance bodies identify all relevant stakeholders including:

- service users
- community representatives
- delivery partners
- decision makers.

They find appropriate meaningful opportunities to involve them throughout the evaluation process.

Governance bodies create and apply communication strategies to keep stakeholders informed and engaged. They facilitate two-way conversation about progress, emerging findings and implications.

Good governance creates learning opportunities that reflect and bring together multiple perspectives and priorities. This includes stakeholders working together to interpret findings, consider implications and make recommendations.

## Risk management

Governance bodies take collective responsibility for addressing risks. They draw on diverse perspectives to identify potential risks to evaluation success. These can be technical, political and practical challenges.

Governance creates shared fora for problem solving. This allows different stakeholders to use their knowledge and expertise. Governance manages changing circumstances and new challenges. Adaptive management can involve adjusting evaluation approaches, timelines or governance arrangements.

## Fit-for-purpose evaluation governance

Effective governance needs fit-for-purpose structures. These structures should match the evaluation's scale, complexity and stakeholder landscape. The following framework outlines five complementary governance mechanisms. The governance arrangement required for a specific evaluation may use different combinations of these mechanisms. Not all evaluations will need multiple bodies. Use the evaluation's complexity to determine which mechanisms you need.

Table 1 Comparison of evaluation governance mechanisms

Governance body	Purpose	Typical membership	Key functions	When to use
<b>Evaluation steering committee</b>	Overall governance oversight, strategic direction and resource decisions	Senior staff (SES level or equivalent) from participating entities  Can include independent members, senior service delivery and consumer representatives	Approve evaluation plans and major decisions Allocate resources Resolve cross-agency issues Provide strategic oversight and direction Ensure organisational commitment	Large, complex or high-risk evaluations, particularly cross-entity evaluations
<b>Technical working group</b>	Expert guidance on evaluation design and implementation	Subject matter experts, methodological specialists and evaluation practitioners	Advise on evaluation questions and methods Review evaluation instruments and analysis plans Guide interpretation of findings	Evaluations that need specialised technical expertise or complex methodological approaches
<b>Advisory group</b>	Stakeholder input and validating approaches and findings	Service users, community representatives, delivery partners, academic experts and consumer advocates	Validate evaluation approaches and findings Support interpretation and the use of findings Advise on communication and dissemination	Most evaluations, particularly those affecting service users or communities, especially vulnerable populations
<b>Chair/Lead agency</b>	Leads relevant governance body	Representative/delegate of lead agency	Coordinate governance activities Manage documentation Manage communication between governance bodies Facilitates inclusive decision-making processes Make sure decisions are implemented	All evaluations
<b>Executive sponsor</b>	High level championship and issue resolution	Single senior officer (SES level or equivalent) with authority across entities	Champion the evaluation at senior levels Resolve significant issues or conflicts Secure resources and organisational commitment Provide escalation pathway for major decisions	High profile evaluations, cross-entity evaluations or where governance committees need senior support

## Integrated governance arrangements

Most evaluations will benefit from combining governance mechanisms.

Use streamlined governance for smaller single-entity evaluations. This could include a combined technical working group and stakeholder advisory function. Include a clear escalation pathway to senior management.

Use comprehensive governance for large multi-entity evaluations, such as:

- Evaluation committee for overall direction
- Technical working group for methodological guidance
- Advisory group, including consumer representatives, for stakeholder input
- Executive sponsor for support.

### Example 1. Streamlined governance

The employment services program for diverse job-seeker populations involved multiple external service providers. As it is a mid-scale evaluation of a program within a single department, we use a streamlined approach.

#### Governance structure

##### Combined technical and advisory group

- **Chair:** Branch Manager, Employment Programs.
- **Members:** Program managers, evaluation specialist, service provider representatives, job seeker advocates, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative and an academic expert
- **Meetings:** monthly throughout implementation.
- **Focus:** strategic oversight, technical guidance, stakeholder engagement

##### Executive Sponsor

- Assistant Secretary, Employment Division
- **Role:** strategic direction, resource approval, secure senior level commitment and manage political sensitivities.

## Example 2. Comprehensive governance

A national mental health program providing services to diverse communities. The Health, Social Services and Education departments delivered the program.

As this is a large multi-entity evaluation, we are using a comprehensive approach.

### Governance structure

#### Evaluation steering committee

- **Chair:** Assistant Secretary, Health Department.
- **Members:** SES representatives from each implementing agency, senior mental health consumer advocate and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative.
- **Meetings:** monthly during planning, bi-monthly during implementation.
- **Key decisions:** Evaluation scope, resource allocation and major methodological choices.

#### Technical working group

- **Chair:** Principal Advisor, Health Department.
- **Members:** evaluation/research methodologists from each agency, external academic expert in mental health evaluation and data analysts.
- **Meetings:** fortnightly during design phase, monthly during implementation.
- **Focus:** detailed methodological guidance, and advice on instrument development and analysis.

#### Advisory Group

- **Co-chairs:** consumer representative and community leader.
- **Members:** service users with lived experience, carer representatives, service providers, community organisation representatives and academic experts.
- **Role:** validate evaluation questions, review findings and guide communication and recommendations.

#### Executive Sponsor

- Deputy Secretary, Health Department.
- **Role:** resolve cross-entity conflicts, secure senior level commitment and manage political sensitivities.

## Design principles

### Proportionality

Governance arrangements should match the evaluation's scale, complexity, risk and stakeholder diversity. A community-based program evaluation requires different governance to a major cross-government policy evaluation.

### Authority

Governance bodies need sufficient authority to oversee implementation and make decisions. They should still make sure stakeholders can meaningfully influence direction.

### Clarity

Clearly define and document roles, responsibilities and decision-making authorities. Governance should be adaptive to changing circumstances and emerging stakeholder needs.

### Meaningful participation

Design governance structures to facilitate meaningful, not tokenistic, engagement. This gives all stakeholder groups opportunities to contribute.

### Learning orientation

Emphasize collective learning and improvement, not just oversight and control.

## Step-by-step: setting up evaluation governance

### 1. Assess context and stakeholder landscape

Map existing program governance and understand evaluation requirements and constraints. Identify all relevant stakeholders, including service users and beneficiaries.

### 2. Design integrated governance

Select the appropriate combination of governance mechanisms based on:

- evaluation needs
- stakeholder requirements
- organisational context.



### 3. Develop documentation

For each governance body, create [terms of reference](#).

### 4. Secure commitment

Get formal approval and commitments from senior leaders in all participating entities. This includes commitments to resourcing and meaningful stakeholder engagement.

### 5. Select and orient members

Identify representatives who:

- have necessary authority and expertise
- can commit required time
- represent stakeholder groups effectively.

Conduct orientation to build shared understanding of governance roles and evaluation approaches.

### 6. Establish collaborative processes

Develop procedures to facilitate collaboration throughout the evaluation life cycle, such as:

- inclusive decision-making
- regular communication
- adaptive management.

Collaborative processes to develop and regularly review theory of change or logic models can help identify emerging issues and promote a shared understanding across the evaluation cycle.

### 7. Build in review and adaptation

Plan for periodic review of governance effectiveness with all stakeholders. Make sure there are mechanisms to adjust arrangements.

## Documentation requirements

Effective governance is underpinned by good documentation.

### Terms of reference

For each governance body, clearly outline the:

- purpose
- authority
- membership
- roles
- operating procedures
- stakeholder engagement approaches.

### Decision records and meeting documentation

Document all significant decisions. Include their rationale, relevant dissenting views and implementation requirements.

Record decisions, key discussions, stakeholder perspectives and emerging insights.

### Progress and communication reports

Regularly update stakeholders about progress, governance decisions and emerging findings.

## Risk management

Effective governance proactively identifies and manages risks that could undermine evaluation success. This framework pairs common risks with mitigation strategies.

Table 2 Common evaluation governance risks and mitigations

Risk	Impact	Mitigation strategies
<b>Authority constraints</b>	Governance bodies lack sufficient authority to make decisions or resolve conflicts. This leads to delays or compromised evaluation quality.	Secure visible commitment from senior leaders. Define decision-making authority clearly in terms of reference. Set up escalation pathways to senior levels. Make sure governance members have general authority to commit their organisations.
<b>Resource constraints</b>	Inadequate resources allocated for governance activities and stakeholder engagement. This impairs how effective the oversight is.	Include governance costs in evaluation budgets from the outset. Secure dedicated staffing for secretariat functions. Plan travel, accommodation, accessibility support and stakeholder engagement costs. Build resource requirements into agency commitments.
<b>Agency or stakeholder disengagement</b>	Participating agencies or stakeholder groups lose interest or commitment. This reduces participation and support for evaluation	Communicate regularly about evaluation value and progress. Provide genuine collaboration and influence through governance, not just consultation. Address stakeholder concerns quickly and transparently. Demonstrate impact of stakeholder input.
<b>Political pressure</b>	Political considerations put pressure on governance bodies. This inappropriately influences evaluation, direction, methods or findings.	Set clear protocols to maintain evaluation independence. Build diverse stakeholder support. Document governance decisions transparently. Engage executive sponsors.
<b>Communication breakdowns</b>	Poor communication between governance bodies, evaluation teams and stakeholders. This can lead to misalignment, duplication or exclusion.	Make comprehensive communication plans with multiple channels. Create feedback mechanisms to identify communication problems early. Check-in with all stakeholder groups regularly.
<b>Tokenistic engagement</b>	Despite consultation, stakeholders (particularly service users) are not genuinely involved in governance decisions.	Design governance structures that provide real influence, not just input. Give support for meaningful participation such as training, resources and accessibility supports. Use co-design approaches where appropriate. Seek regular feedback from stakeholder groups about governance effectiveness. Report on how stakeholder input influences decisions transparently.

## Enhancing evaluation impact

Governance bodies should lead efforts to ensure evaluation findings are used to improve programs and services.

Engage users early so the evaluation's findings will be relevant and actionable for different users. Develop evaluation questions and approaches with likely users. They could be service providers, policy makers and program beneficiaries.

Identify different ways to use findings, including for:

- program improvements
- policy adjustment
- service delivery changes
- better outcomes for beneficiaries.

Translate findings into clear practical recommendations that different stakeholders can action. Give stakeholders specific responsibilities to help with this. Include mechanisms after the evaluation to support uptake of findings. This could be:

- facilitating management responses
- tracking application of recommendations.

## Conclusion

Effective evaluation governance brings people together to learn, improve and create better outcomes. Governance oversees the evaluation, making sure it complies with requirements. However, the greatest value of good evaluation governance is fostering collaboration, building shared ownership and enabling meaningful change.

Well-designed governance arrangements give diverse stakeholders opportunities to work together throughout the evaluation process. This can range from senior policy makers to frontline service providers and program beneficiaries.

This collaborative approach strengthens evaluation quality and credibility. It builds the relationships and commitment needed to translate findings into meaningful improvements.

## Resources

Australian Centre for Evaluation, [Why evaluate](#)

Better Evaluation, [Establish decision-making processes](#)