



Commonwealth Evaluation Maturity Model – Glossary and FAQs

Glossary

This glossary provides definitions and descriptions of specific terms used in the Commonwealth Evaluation Maturity Model assessment tool.

Some definitions provide links to specific resources, including resources and content within the Australian Centre for Evaluation's toolkit.

Term	Definition
Authorising environment	The set of formal and informal factors that grant authority to public sector organisations to carry out its functions. It includes formal powers like legislation, budget approvals and a range of delegations, alongside informal elements such as key stakeholder support.
Commonwealth performance planning	Commonwealth entities and companies must prepare corporate plans each financial year. Evaluation can be included in the corporate plan under the capability section.
Cultural safety	Cultural safety is when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural identity is respected and they feel valued, safe and trusted. First Nations people determine what cultural safety looks like for them.
Data systems	In this context, data systems refer to either administrative data or central data repositories set up to monitor specific policies, programs or services. The Australian Centre for Evaluation has recently published a guide to Government administrative data sources for evaluation in Australia .
Evaluation framework	An evaluation framework (sometimes called a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework) supports the implementation of an evaluation. The scope may include an evaluation of a specific program; connected programs across an agency; a connected group of programs delivered across one or more jurisdictions; or a suite of connected programs delivered within a particular cultural or social context.

Term	Definition
Evaluation strategy	<p>An evaluation strategy provides a structure to strengthen policy and program evaluation practice and culture and increase the use of evaluation evidence for decision making, planning and reporting.</p> <p>It typically provides a principles-based approach for the conduct of evaluations across an agency and can be used to help plan how decisions are made about which government programs and activities will be evaluated across the policy cycle in line with best practice approaches.</p>
Ethical evaluation design	<p>This involves applying ethical research principles to all evaluation designs, which are tailored to the cohort the evaluation is engaging. For example, if the evaluation is being undertaken in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ensure that the evaluation design applies the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research.</p>
Evidence	<p>Evidence is factual information used to support a claim or belief. It is information and research selected from the best available sources to support a decision. Evidence is used to inform decision making to achieve the most effective outcomes.¹</p>
Evidence bank	<p>An evaluation evidence bank is a repository providing a single access point to evaluation reports, either undertaken by external consultants or conducted in-house.</p>
Evidence translation	<p>Evidence translators are individuals and organisations who identify, filter, interpret, adapt, contextualise and communicate evidence so that it informs policy.²</p>
Formal evaluation	<p>A systematic method for collecting, analysing, and using data to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and, as importantly, to contribute to continuous program improvement.</p>
Governance mechanisms	<p>A governance mechanism is a group or taskforce that has a strong authorising environment to ensure accountability and oversight over a project, process or organisation.</p>
Impact evaluation	<p>Impact evaluation is used to understand if government programs and policies work and how well they work. The Australian Centre for Evaluation generally uses the term to mean the average effect of a program or policy on the outcome or outcomes it was designed to influence.³</p>

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- 1 NSW Government, **The Evidence Portal: What is evidence?**, 2022, <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/content/dcj/evidenceportal/evidence-portal-home/using-evidence/what-is-evidence.html>
 - 2 Results for Development, 'A Brief on Evidence Translation and Translators', 2018, https://www.r4d.org/wp-content/uploads/R4D_EIP-TranslatorBrief_F_WEB.pdf
 - 3 Australian Centre for Evaluation, 'Toolkit: Impact evaluation,' 2023, <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/toolkit/impact-evaluation>

Term	Definition
	An impact evaluation must establish the cause of the observed changes. Identifying the cause is known as 'causal attribution' or 'causal inference'.
Methods	Evaluation uses robust analytical methods to provide evidence and input to decision-makers about performance and good practices across the policy cycle. It is important to select methods and tools that are fit for purpose, robust, ethical and culturally appropriate. Data collection strategies and analytic methods need to be both practical and possible (within available resources). ⁴
New Policy Proposal	A New Policy Proposal (NPP) constitutes a decision by Government that involves a new initiative or discretionary change to existing policy. ⁵
Performance monitoring	Performance monitoring involves performing and analysing routine measurements to detect changes. The Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014 establishes legislative requirements to measure and assess performance, and establishes the characteristics of good performance measures. ⁶
Program logic	A program logic is a structured representation that links a program's activities to its intended outcomes. It is usually a plan on a page that helps to document the main elements of a program, showing inputs (e.g. money, staff, resources) needed to deliver planned activities and how they lead to short, medium and long-term outcomes.
Senior leaders	Senior leaders refer to senior executive staff within your agency.
Staff	Staff refers to the staff in your team, branch or division which you are basing this maturity assessment on.
Technical evaluation skills	This refers to skills such as the development of program logic, evaluation frameworks/plans, survey design, use of qualitative and quantitative methods, data analysis and reporting writing (for example, someone with skills in designing specific methodologies such as mixed methods or experimental design).

4 Australian Centre for Evaluation, 'Toolkit: Define evidence and data sources,' 2023, <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/toolkit/define-evidence-and-data-sources>

5 Australian Centre for Evaluation, 'Toolkit: Evaluation planning for new policy proposals,' 2023, <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/toolkit/new-policy-proposals>

6 Australian Centre for Evaluation, 'Toolkit: Evaluation in context', 2023, <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/toolkit/evaluation-context>

Term	Definition
Theory of change	A theory of change explains how an intervention is expected to lead to a desired outcome. It is a logical explanation of how and why a desired change is expected to happen. It helps to identify key assumptions and clarify causal relationships. Theories of change can help you to think about how you will track and report on progress and make changes.
Risk management	The <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> (PGPA Act) requires agencies establish and maintain appropriate systems and internal controls for the oversight and management of risk . The Commonwealth Risk Management Policy supports the PGPA Act and requires that each agency develop a policy and approach to managing risk. Evaluation can be included as a mechanism to manage risk.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will it take to complete the assessment?

Planning the coordination, undertaking the assessment tool and developing an action plan could take anywhere between one to four months depending on how many teams are involved. If the evaluation unit or coordination team are conducting the assessment without team coordination, this may reduce the time commitment.

If the Commonwealth Evaluation Maturity Model (Maturity Model) is being undertaken across multiple teams and divisions within an agency it could take at least four months to brief senior leaders and teams, undertake the assessment, analyse results and develop an action plan. Further advice on how to use the Maturity Model is outlined in the User Guide.

Who will see the results from the assessment?

It is up to the team, division or agency to determine how they would like to use the results, and who they share them with. Options could include sharing the results with senior leaders, with program, policy or service areas across the agency, other agencies or evaluation units and the Australian Centre for Evaluation (ACE).

The online assessment tool provides an option to share results with the ACE via email, which we can use to gain a better understanding of what type of support we can provide to agencies across the APS.

How can agencies interpret the results?

The results will provide a baseline assessment of your maturity, or an indication of how you have progressed since your last maturity assessment. To interpret and analyse results, agencies can use a range of approaches outlined in the User Guide under 'Stage 3: Analysis assessment results and develop an action plan'.

To see different approaches of how agencies have translated their results into action plans, please see examples in the User Guide and the Action Bank.

Will there be any support to undertake the process?

The Maturity Model is designed to empower each agency to develop their own approach to assess evaluation maturity in their context and develop an action plan. The ACE recommends reaching out to your evaluation unit (if you have one) or evaluation experts within your agency to support your team to undertake the Maturity Model assessment or action plan.

The ACE has prepared several supporting resources to help guide users with the process: a user guide, an action bank, and a senior leaders brief.

Subject to competing priorities, the ACE may also be able to offer support sessions for users who are undertaking the process for the first time or who would like support developing action plans or evaluation strategies. For this or other queries, please contact the ACE at

Evaluation@TREASURY.GOV.AU