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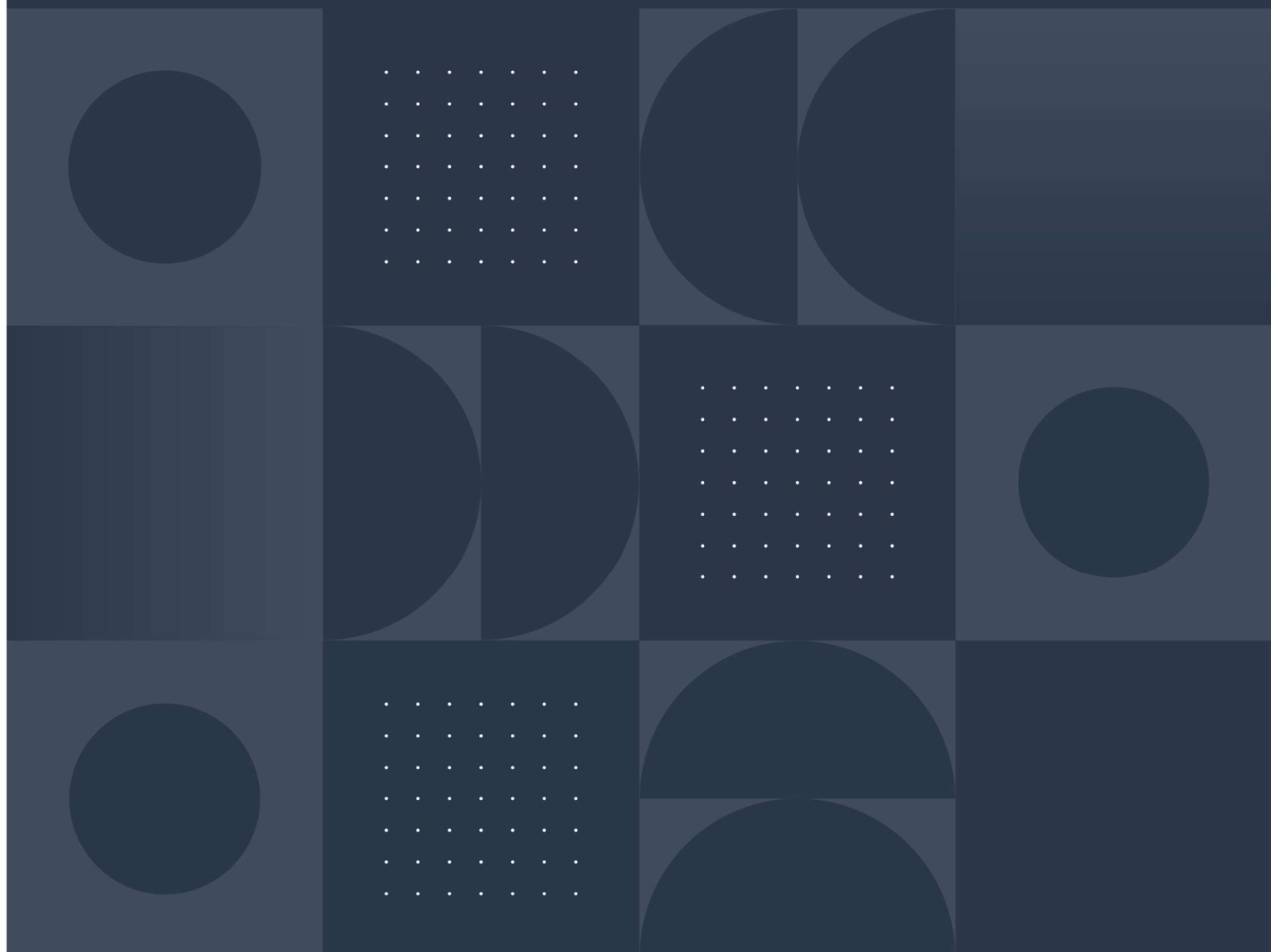
Australian
Centre for
Evaluation

ace

Strengthening Evaluation in the Australian Government

Action Plan 2026–2030

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

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Treasury acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Contents

Summary	1
Introduction.....	2
Purpose and scope.....	2
Vision	2
Background.....	2
Priorities and action plan.....	3
Priority 1: Evaluation leadership and culture.....	3
Priority 2: Evaluation capability	4
Priority 3: Evaluation planning and delivery	4
Priority 4: Use of evaluation evidence	5
Governance and implementation	6
Whole-of-government governance	6
Entity-level governance	6
Resourcing and review.....	7
Monitoring progress	7

Summary

This whole-of-government action plan for 2026 to 2030 sets out a roadmap to strengthen and embed high-quality evaluation across the Australian Government. Its vision is an Australian Public Service (APS) that values and routinely uses high-quality and culturally safe evaluation to drive better outcomes for Australians.

This plan builds on existing evaluation efforts across the Australian Government. These include: the longstanding arrangements under the Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis for ex ante evaluation of policy options, in-house evaluation units or functions in many departments and agencies, the adoption of the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy, and the establishment of the Evaluation Profession. The plan is structured around 4 interconnected priorities.

Priority 1. Evaluation leadership and culture: fostering a culture where evaluation is championed by senior leaders and valued across the APS. Key actions:

- appoint chief evaluation officers or evaluation champions in entities,
- appoint an evaluation committee or embed evaluation into an existing committee or process
- include evaluation in Senior Executive Service performance plans
- implement processes to ensure evaluations are culturally safe and ethical.

Priority 2. Evaluation capability: investing in and building the necessary evaluation skills, resources and networks across the workforce. Key actions that are already planned or underway:

- deliver training to build foundational evaluation skills throughout the APS
- establish a network of evaluation trainers
- deliver training to build specialist evaluation expertise.

Priority 3. Evaluation planning and delivery: systematically embed high-quality evaluation practices into the policy and program life cycle. Key actions:

- consider stronger policy, legislative or regulatory requirements for evaluation
- develop entity evaluation strategies
- establish or maintain dedicated in-house evaluation roles or units in large entities
- develop evaluation quality guidelines and standards, as appropriate.

Priority 4. Use of evaluation evidence: ensure that robust evaluation findings are consistently used to inform government decisions, funding allocations and continuous learning. Key actions:

- routinely share evaluation findings and publish where appropriate
- implement formal management responses to evaluations
- promote the use of evaluation evidence in funding decisions and budget processes.

Implementation of this plan will be overseen by the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group (for system-wide actions) and entity-level oversight. Individual entities will retain discretion on how best to implement the actions in this plan, consistent with the overall intent of this plan. Progress will be monitored through the annual State of Evaluation in the Australian Government survey, with reports provided to the Secretaries Board and subsequently published.

Introduction

Purpose and scope

This document outlines a whole-of-government action plan for 2026-2030 to strengthen the volume, quality and use of evaluation in advice on policies, program, regulations and service delivery.

This plan applies to all Commonwealth entities and companies. It details actions that can be taken at both a system and entity level over the next 5 years to help embed an enduring culture of evaluation across the Australian Government. The plan is intended for all Australian public servants, but especially for APS leaders and evaluation professionals.

Vision

An APS that values and routinely uses high-quality and culturally safe evaluation to inform decisions, drive continuous improvement, foster accountability, and deliver effective programs and services. This will help drive better outcomes for individuals and communities.

Background

The delivery and use of high-quality evaluation is fundamental to policy making, regulation, and program and service delivery that improves the wellbeing of the Australian people. A culture of evaluation supports a culture of learning and continuous improvement within the public service and generates actionable evidence to inform government decisions. It also ensures the government is meeting the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act).

The Australian Government has some well-established evaluation functions and institutions. Notably, the Australian Guide to Policy Impact Analysis has, in various forms, provided the foundation for ex-ante evaluation of policy options since the 1980s. Many government departments have longstanding record of supporting evaluation through in-house evaluation units and the regular delivery and publication of policy evaluation.

Since the 2019 Independent Review of the APS¹, a range of reforms have been implemented to strengthen evaluation leadership, practice and capability across the Australian government. These include:

- the introduction of the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy
- new requirements regarding evaluation planning in the Budget Process Operational Rules
- the establishment of the Australian Centre for Evaluation (ACE)
- the establishment of the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group
- the establishment of the APS Evaluation Profession
- embedding evaluation in guidance on the APS Value of Stewardship.

1 See Recommendation 26, pp220-23: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/independent-review-australian-public-service>

Priorities and action plan

This plan is structured around 4 priorities with 14 actions to achieve the overall vision. The tables under each priority describe these actions along with lead responsibility, timeline for implementation, and intended outputs. For actions that lie with individual entities to implement, each entity retains discretion about how best to adopt the action, consistent with the intent of this plan. The ACE will work with the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group to prepare supplementary guidance, as needed, to assist entities with implementation of these actions.

Priority 1: Evaluation leadership and culture

This priority focuses on fostering a strong culture where evaluation is valued and championed by leaders across the APS. The actions aim to strengthen evaluation leadership and governance across government, embedding evaluation into key governance processes at the entity level, and ensuring all evaluation practices uphold cultural safety and ethical standards.

Vision for 2030: An APS where evaluation is a core tenet of public policy and administration, actively championed and demanded by senior leaders, and embedded in key decision-making processes. A robust network of in-house evaluation units from across government that works in partnership to promote and strengthen the practice and use of evaluation.

Action plan – evaluation leadership and culture

Action	Lead	Timeline	Outputs
1.1 Chief Evaluation Officers: Appoint Chief Evaluation Officers or Senior Executive Service (SES)-level (or equivalent) evaluation champions.	Individual entities	From 2026	* Chief Evaluation Officers or SES-level (or equivalent) evaluation champions.
1.2 Evaluation committee: Appoint entity-level evaluation committees or embed evaluation into an existing committee or governance process to: plan and prioritise future evaluations, review evaluation capability, and consider management responses to completed evaluations.	Individual entities	From 2026	* Evaluation committees (or equivalent) established and meeting regularly. * Evaluation integrated into corporate governance, planning frameworks and processes as appropriate.
1.3 SES performance agreements: Formalise the role of senior leaders in championing evaluation.	Individual entities	From 2026	* Evaluation-related performance targets included in SES performance agreements where appropriate.
1.4 Ethics and cultural safety: Develop and implement processes to ensure that evaluations are (a) culturally safe and (b) subject to appropriate ethical review, consistent with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.	Individual entities & ACE	From 2026	* Cultural safety integrated into evaluation planning, procurement and quality review processes. * Staff responsible for evaluation trained in culturally safe evaluation practice. * Entities have a procedure in place for ethics review and submit evaluation plans for ethics review where required.

Priority 2: Evaluation capability

This priority is dedicated to investing in the development of evaluation skills across all staff, commensurate with their role. A series of actions to strengthen evaluation capability are already planned or underway, via the Australian Centre for Evaluation, the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group, the APS Commission, and the Evaluation Profession. These actions include delivery of foundational and specialised training (delivered in person or through online modules or videos), a train-the-trainer model, professional networks and communities of practice, and tools and resources to support evaluation.² Consequently, the actions proposed under this priority commit to embedding and promoting existing initiatives to build evaluation capability across the service.

Vision for 2030: Staff at all levels across the APS have a foundational knowledge of evaluation and its importance for the design, delivery and ongoing improvement of policies, programs and services. The APS has a well-established Evaluation Profession, with membership across the APS at all levels, with the expertise to design, commission, deliver and use high-quality, fit-for-purpose evaluations.

Actions already planned or underway – evaluation capability

Existing Action	Lead	Timeline	Outputs
2.1 Foundational training: Develop and deliver training to build foundational evaluation skills at all levels of the APS and for SES regarding their role as evaluation commissioners and champions.	ACE & APSC	From 2026	* Core training modules available on APS Learn. * Training delivered for graduates, new starters, evaluation professionals and SES.
2.2 Evaluation trainer network: Establish and grow a network of evaluation trainers across the APS to help build evaluation capabilities in all entities.	ACE & individual entities	From 2026	* Network of evaluation trainers established
2.3 Specialist training: Develop and deliver training to build expertise in specific technical areas of evaluation.	ACE & experts	From 2026	* Specialised training courses developed and delivered regularly.

Priority 3: Evaluation planning and delivery

This priority aims to embed high-quality evaluation practices into the policy and program lifecycles, establish guidelines to support quality standards.

Vision for 2030: A rigorous and proportionate approach to evaluation is applied to all programs and activities across government, with all high-value and high-risk programs subject to formal evaluations. The design, delivery and use of these evaluations are supported by well-resourced, in-house evaluation teams working in partnership with relevant experts. Evaluations consistently meet high standards of quality. In particular, impact evaluations provide a clear rationale for how they have established a credible counter-factual and limitations are transparently reported.

2 For more details, see the ACE's Training and Capability Strategy:
<https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/publications/ace-training-capability-strategy>

Action plan – evaluation planning and delivery

Action	Lead	Timeline	Output
3.1 Evaluation requirements: Consider stronger policy, legislative or regulatory requirements for evaluation, such as mandatory evaluation for high value/high-risk programs.	ACE & central agencies	From 2027	* Proposal considered and a clear record of a decision taken.
3.2 Evaluation strategy: Develop evaluation strategies (or similar) at the entity level, including a robust evaluation prioritisation model.	Individual entities	From 2026	* A publicly available document outlining the entity level evaluation strategy or framework and/or prioritisation model.
3.3 In-house evaluation: Establish or maintain dedicated in-house evaluation roles or units in all large entities to support high standards of evaluation planning and delivery.	Individual entities	2026	* Portfolio departments and large entities establish or maintain in-house evaluation roles or units
3.4 Evaluation standards: Develop quality guidelines and standards for evaluation as appropriate, beginning with impact evaluation.	ACE	From 2027	* A published set of quality guidelines and standards for evaluation as appropriate.

Priority 4: Use of evaluation evidence

This priority is about ensuring that entities and Government routinely use robust evaluation findings to inform policy and funding decisions and for learning and improvement. Actions under this priority aim to improve the dissemination of findings, make evidence more accessible, and promote the use of evaluation to inform key decisions, such as funding.

Vision for 2030: Evaluation findings are a core input into all major government decisions, with a transparent process for disseminating and using evidence to improve policy and program outcomes.

Action plan – use of evaluation evidence

Action	Lead agency	Timeline	Output
4.1 Publication of evaluations: Routinely share evaluation findings to support program and policy design and publicly disseminate evaluation findings and reports where appropriate.	Individual entities	From 2026	* Entities publicly sharing evaluation findings through the ACE Evaluation Library.
4.2 Management responses: Develop and implement a formal process for government/management responses to evaluation findings.	Individual entities	From 2026	* Evaluation reports receive a formal management response.
4.3 Budget processes: Promote the use of evaluation evidence in funding decisions and budget processes where appropriate.	Individual entities	From 2026	* Utilisation of evaluation evidence and findings when making funding decisions.

Governance and implementation

This plan will be implemented through a dual governance structure that operates at both a whole-of-government system level and at an entity level. For entity-level implementation, individual entities will have discretion about the most appropriate way to implement each action in their context, consistent with the intent of this plan.

Effective delivery of this plan will rely on strong collaboration across government and with external partners – including universities, research institutions, and non-government organisations. Such partnerships will build on existing structures for collaboration, such as the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Profession.

Whole-of-government governance

Whole-of-government governance will provide strategic direction and oversight for the implementation of this plan. This will be overseen by the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group, with an annual report to Secretaries Board coinciding with annual updates to the *State of Evaluation in the Australian Government*. These responsibilities will include:

- **Championing:** promoting the value of high-quality, robust evaluations across the public service and fostering a culture of continual learning.
- **Oversight and accountability:** providing high-level guidance and accountability for the progress of this plan.
- **Monitoring:** regularly tracking and reporting on the overall progress of implementation and its indicators.

Entity-level governance

Entity-level governance will be responsible for implementing this plan within individual entities and will vary at the discretion of individual entities. However, for entities who appoint a Chief Evaluation Officer or evaluation committee, it is envisaged that these will have immediate governance responsibility within that entity. These responsibilities will include:

- **Championing:** securing senior leadership commitment and embedding a culture of evaluation within the entity.
- **Oversight and accountability:** providing internal guidance and accountability for entity on the progress of this plan.
- **Delivery:** overseeing the establishment and resourcing of dedicated evaluation units where appropriate and the delivery of high-quality, robust evaluations.
- **Capacity building:** leading the capacity development of staff through training and professional development.
- **Evidence use:** embedding evaluation into planning and performance governance structures, and ensuring evaluation evidence is used in decision-making, including the implementation of management responses to evaluation findings.
- **Monitoring:** regularly tracking and reporting on the overall progress of implementation and its indicators and contributing to whole-of-government data collection processes through annual State of Evaluation in the Australian Government updates.

Resourcing and review

Entities will be responsible for ensuring appropriate levels of resourcing for their initiatives. System-wide initiatives implemented by the ACE will be funded from within existing resources.

This plan will be treated as a living document that is reviewed by the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group annually. Details of any amendments or refinements to the plan will be included in updates reported to Secretaries Board.

Monitoring progress

Progress against each action will be monitored by the Commonwealth Evaluation Reference Group and reported on annually in the context of regular State of Evaluation in the Australian Government updates to Secretaries Board.

Initially, the following indicators will be tracked using the annual State of Evaluation survey. These indicators may be revised following advice from the Evaluation Reference Group, or direction from Secretaries Board, to capture the outputs of other actions that not currently included in the State of Evaluation survey.

Priority	Indicators	Data Source
1. Evaluation leadership and culture	% of entities with a designated SES-level officer responsible for evaluation. % of entities having established processes to ensure evaluations are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. % of entities agency with an evaluation ethics review process.	State of Evaluation Survey
2. Evaluation capability	% of entities engaging in evaluation capability building.	State of Evaluation Survey
3. Evaluation planning and delivery	% of entities that have adopted an evaluation framework or strategy or similar. % of entities with a dedicated in-house evaluation unit or function.	State of Evaluation Survey
4. Use of evaluation evidence	% of entities 'always' or 'often' using evaluation evidence in advice on funding allocation decisions. % of entities that routinely publish evaluation findings or reports. % of entities that routinely publish management responses.	State of Evaluation Survey