



Australian Government
**Department of the
Prime Minister and Cabinet**



Implementation of Programme and Policy Initiatives

Making implementation matter



Better Practice Guide

October 2006



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FOREWORD BY THE SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET AND THE AUDITOR-GENERAL

Government policies need to be delivered on time, on budget and to expectations. Given the complexity, ambiguity and contestability of the environment in which public administration is delivered, that's no easy task. It requires leadership. And leadership requires support. Our aim in issuing this guide will be met if executives find it a useful structure within which to constantly refine and improve the way they deliver government initiatives.

The importance of policy implementation and service delivery for all levels of government cannot be overstated. Australia faces many challenges in maintaining its national security, growing its economy, helping Australians build a better life for themselves and their families, and preserving the environment. Meeting these challenges requires a sustained focus on the pace, efficiency and quality of implementation of government decisions and delivery of public services.

From the very different perspectives of our two organisations, we have both concluded that there would be value in drawing together messages from experience about how to implement government programmes effectively. Too often the challenges involved in turning a policy idea into effective outcomes, and the skills and effort required to do so, are not fully appreciated. Too often the results fall short of expectations. Yet we know that defects in implementation rob the community of the full benefits of a new policy and waste community resources.

The clear message from experience here and overseas is that executive management and support is a critical requirement for successful implementation. This is particularly the case in the public sector where the links between outputs and outcomes may be complex.

Implementation often raises issues that cross boundaries between and within agencies. This necessitates an agency-wide view of service delivery responsiveness and agility. The coherence of vision and commitment at the top is a crucial element in driving change. This guide poses introductory questions to help chief executives assess their agency's delivery capabilities from an agency-wide perspective.

The guide acknowledges that executive commitment needs to be based on planning and supported by the right skills, resources and structures. While it does not recommend a particular delivery approach, it systematically identifies questions about whether there are effective implementation practices.

The guide emphasises the importance of leadership. The best tools, templates and techniques will make little difference to an organisation without a demand for the best possible delivery from the most senior levels of management. A culture of delivery must be led from the top.

The questions posed in the guide reflect the collected experience and wisdom of senior managers and executives across the Australian Public Service. It quotes extensively from interviews with executives and we acknowledge that the apparent simplicity of the quotes belies the often painful way in which the experience behind them was accrued. We sincerely thank all those who contributed their ideas and advice.

The guide complements a range of other developments across the Australian Public Service. These include the establishment of the Cabinet Implementation Unit in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the application of the Gateway review methodology by the Department of Finance and Administration and the work of the Australian Government Information Management Office in implementing an Information and Communications Technology Investment Framework.

We encourage the use of this guide to assist agencies in the stewardship of public money invested in projects and programmes that significantly affect the interest and well-being of Australia's citizens and businesses.



Ian McPhee
Auditor-General



Peter Shergold
Secretary
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

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Introduction

Implementation and delivery of Australian Government policy initiatives is one of the key responsibilities of government agencies. In recent years there has been an increasing focus on and a community expectation of, sound policy implementation and seamless delivery of government policies — on time, within budget and to an acceptable level of quality.

Experience shows that optimal outcomes from policy initiatives are more likely to be obtained when there is early and systematic consideration of the practical aspects of implementation. This has been highlighted in several Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit reports in recent years. The work of the Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU) within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) has also highlighted the importance of a systematic focus on implementation.

The focus of this guide

This guide seeks to identify better practice considerations when implementing a policy or programme initiative, translating policy into reality. Consequently, there is a particular focus on the up-front planning and development phases leading up to an initiative's readiness for ongoing delivery. The guide does not seek to address ongoing management and delivery of a programme.

The guide is intended for public sector chief executives and senior officers responsible for overseeing the implementation of an initiative(s). (The latter are referred to as senior responsible officers).

The focus is on overarching principles for effective implementation, drawing on the experience of agencies to date, as well as lessons from overseas. The aim is to assist senior executives obtain assurance that appropriate approaches and methodologies are being followed.

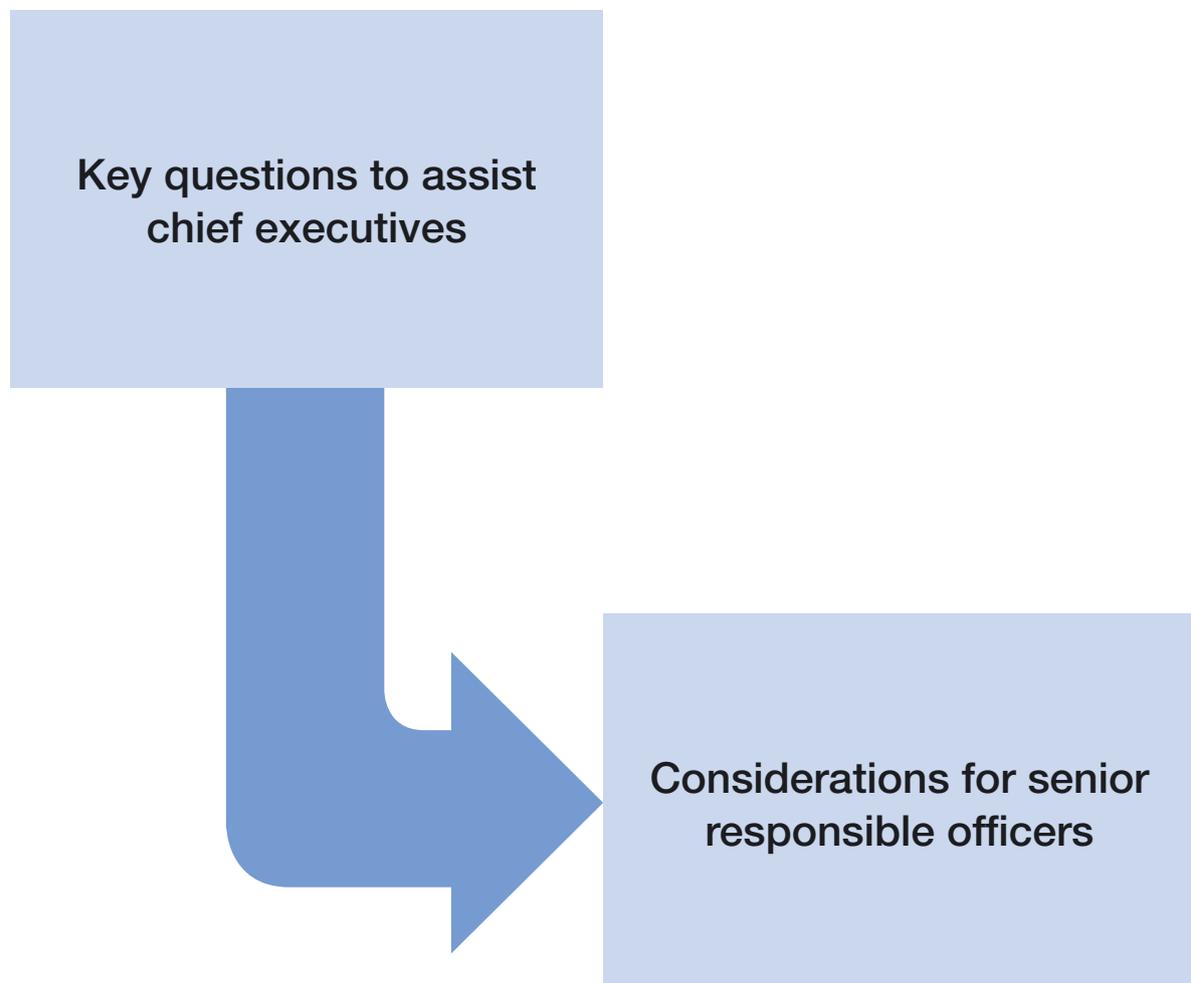
Agencies may wish to expand on the guide by providing guidance for those at the 'coal face'. For many agencies this may simply involve some realignment to existing documentation and guidance.

Structure of the guide

The guide focuses on key areas for assurance for chief executives and senior responsible officers. It begins by considering the importance of adequate attention, during policy development, to implementation risks and practicalities. This aspect of the guide is not intended as a guide on policy development, but on matters that may affect ability to deliver effectively on the ground.

The rest of the guide addresses other key considerations as the initiative develops from the initial policy concept. These include risk management; governance; implementation planning; procurement and contract management; stakeholder management; resources; communication; and monitoring and review.

For each area considered, the guide presents some key questions to help chief executives gain confidence about the management of the particular issue for consideration. The guide then expands on these matters to help senior responsible officers provide assurance that implementation challenges are being adequately addressed.



Source: ANAO

To further assist senior responsible officers, the guide provides checklists for each of the areas of implementation responsibility.

Figure 1: Building blocks of this guide



Source: ANAO

Enhancing implementation capabilities

The core of this guide is some key questions for chief executives to consider when facing the challenge of implementing a major project or programme. For many chief executives, that challenge arises repeatedly. This prompts questions about what capabilities agencies need in order to implement projects and programmes successfully and to learn from their experience; how well agencies measure up against these capabilities; and where agencies can improve. The following questions may help chief executives assess these matters.

- What process applies across the agency to ensure that implementation issues are considered and agreed when policy initiatives are being discussed?
- Is planning for implementation led by skilled and experienced personnel? Do systems and processes support consistent approaches to planning across the agency, with supporting corporate tools and reports?
- How is the priority of projects assessed against the other business priorities? How are these priorities conveyed throughout the agency and to its service providers?
- Are the benefits of systematic risk management communicated through the organisation and supported by systems, processes, tools and competencies?
- What processes are in place for monitoring the status, risks, costs and benefits of implementation activity across the agency?
- Is there an agency-wide process to prompt action when things are likely to, or have, gone wrong and to avoid surprises for the Government?
- Does the agency foster an environment where mistakes can be admitted? How are lessons of what went wrong and why fed into agency-wide knowledge for the benefit of future initiatives?
- What processes exist to ensure that adequate contingency planning occurs for all significant projects?

Identification of challenges to implementation during policy development

A policy initiative is more likely to achieve the best possible outcomes when the question of **how** the policy is to be implemented has been an integral part of policy design.

Where this does not receive sufficient and early attention, problems may arise during subsequent implementation. These problems may include: sub-optimal delivery methods; overambitious timeframes; resources not being available when required; inappropriate skills or capability for the initiative; and insufficient contingency planning.

I think one of the things we lack in the public service both at a Commonwealth and a State level is a consolidated focus on the efficient and timely and sympathetic delivery of services. We tend to look at service delivery as an afterthought rather than as a policy priority.

Source: Prime Minister of Australia¹

Implementation risks that may undermine the timely and effective achievement of intended outcomes are pertinent considerations for government, as is advice on mitigation strategies to reduce these risks and the effectiveness of these strategies.

¹ Prime Minister the Hon. John Howard MP, press conference, Canberra 22 October 2004.

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The following are **some key questions to help assure chief executives** that implementation issues and challenges have been adequately considered during policy design. These questions are not about the policy development process as such, but they warrant attention at the policy design stage to increase the likelihood of good delivery.

- Are the means of and barriers to, implementation of policy considered when policy initiatives are discussed?
- Is it known how the priority of this initiative compares and aligns with other activities?
- Has the knowledge and experience of the implementers been taken into account during policy development?
- Is the Government sufficiently informed of the risks, challenges and practical aspects of the policy that may have an impact on implementation?
- Are proposed commitments and announcements being checked for delivery implications before they are made?
- Are the timeframe and results promised realistic and consistent with estimates of resources?
- Where timeframe imperatives have shortened prior consideration of implementation issues, how will implementation risks be dealt with?
- Has consideration been given to the need for contingency measures and their impact on the Government's intended outcomes?
- Are there uncertainties in assumptions made in formulating the policy initiative that may have consequences for the success of implementation?
- Have appropriate record keeping and accountability mechanisms been established?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Providing policy advice to the Government is a core function of the Australian Public Service. The Government's expectation is that better policy outcomes will be achieved through a culture of delivery that emphasises adequate consideration of implementation challenges in the provision of policy advice.

Considering the challenges to implementation during policy development requires, among other things, identifying any risks and barriers to implementing policy, drawing on the practical experience of those who will have to implement the policy, and feeding the learning from implementation processes back into the policy process.

A policy which is embraced by a Minister, approved by Cabinet, announced publicly, but inadequately delivered is worse than no policy at all...

Source: Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet²

Making implementation an important consideration during policy design

Are the means of and barriers to, implementation of policy considered when policy initiatives are discussed?

Is it known how the priority of this initiative compares and aligns with other activities?

How a policy is to be implemented should be an integral part of policy design.

A systematic focus on implementation at the policy design stage includes identifying delivery challenges, and ensuring that any obstacles to delivery are understood.

There are likely to be several options for the delivery of a policy initiative or programme. For example:

- in-house within the policy development agency
- by a government, community or private service delivery agency
- through other outsourcing arrangements or partnerships
- through State and Territory government agencies
- through a cross-agency (or whole-of-government) initiative, or
- by a new body set up for service delivery.

Consideration and comparison of the costs, benefits, risks and opportunities of these options and barriers to implementation increases the likelihood of the Government's objective being achieved.

Engaging stakeholders at this stage can help not only to get the policy right but also to gain a sense of the barriers to implementation. The key question is whether the means of implementing/delivering this policy is likely to work in practice—whether it 'hits the mark'.

Potential implementation methods can be tested in a variety of ways: through trials or pilot tests before roll-out of the initiative; preparing formal analyses of the impacts and costs of different policy options; and consulting stakeholders and service suppliers.

However, a number of practical considerations need to be addressed when involving outside stakeholders. One of many possible examples is the need to manage Budget-sensitive matters that could provide personal or corporate gain for the stakeholder involved. Suitable risk management strategies by agencies, such as confidentiality agreements, are needed for stakeholder management. Part 6 — Stakeholder management outlines stakeholder engagement and management issues more fully.

It really pays off to consider upfront: how are we going to do it?

Source: Chief Executive interviews

² Dr Peter Shergold AM, *A Foundation of Ruined Hopes? Delivering Government Policy* [Internet], Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, 2003, available from <http://www.pmc.gov.au/speeches/shergold/delivery_policy_2003-10-15.cfm> [accessed 3 August 2006].

There is usually value in considering implementation of an initiative in relation to other delivery and operational activities of the agency. One option for implementation may become higher-risk than it would appear simply because the necessary resources are absorbed by other activities. Alternatively, assigning resources to the new task may undermine delivery of an existing higher-priority function.

Using the experience of the implementers during policy development

Has the knowledge and experience of the implementers been taken into account during policy development?

Central to determining how a policy is to be implemented is to engage those with implementation experience during the policy development stage. This is important for assessing the practicability of a policy.³ For example, it may identify:

- innovation at the delivery front that opens up opportunities for new policy options
- practical constraints that need to be overcome in order for the policy to deliver required results on the ground
- more reliable cost and uptake estimates.

Where there are distinct service delivery arrangements, a source of practical advice on implementation considerations will be clear. In other cases, there is still a need to identify, at the earliest stage possible, sources of practical advice on implementation issues that are likely to affect policy outcomes and timeliness.

Of course, the degree to which those with implementation experience are engaged in the policy development process will vary, depending on the nature of the policy. However, those with implementation experience almost always have some useful contribution to make. They are likely to have far better practical knowledge of what is likely to work and what is not.

You need to get implementers at the table during policy development, in particular to consider timing and how it will be implemented.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

One of the most important ways in which natural tendencies to failure can be avoided is by making sure that public policy is informed by the experience of those who have to implement it; those who work at the counters, in call centres and directly with communities.

Source: Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet⁴

Identifying, assessing and advising of risks

Is the Government sufficiently informed of the risks, challenges and practical aspects of the policy that may have an impact on implementation?

Are proposed commitments and announcements being checked for delivery implications before they are made?

Sufficient consideration of major implementation risks is essential during policy development. This includes identifying risk treatments.

It is imperative that risk assessments are sufficiently 'hard-nosed'; that is, they do not present Government and other agencies with an over-optimistic view of what will happen. It is a matter of adequately informing the Government of any significant risks to implementation.

It is equally important that commitments and announcements are not made without consideration of the delivery implications and risks, since the commitment/announcement stage is a key point at which risk to the Government crystallises. This may require policy developers to advise governments about the delivery difficulties of a proposed policy in terms of consultation, planning or negotiation.

³ National Audit Office 2001, *Modern Policy-Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money*, report by the Comptroller and Auditor-General HC 289 Session 2001–2002, the Stationery Office, London, 2001, p. 42.

⁴ Dr Peter Shergold AM, *Plan and Deliver: Avoiding Bureaucratic Hold-up* [Internet], Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, 2004, available from <http://www.pmc.gov.au/speeches/shergold/plan_and_deliver_2004-11-17.cfm> [accessed 3 August 2006].

The other benefit of sufficient high-level consideration of risks at this stage is that it provides a better base for when the initiative is rolled out. If risks to implementation are not identified early, then those involved in implementation are likely to be in a process of catch-up as unforeseen problems arise.

These practical risks to implementation are touched on in the next few sections, in particular, Part 3 — Risk management.

The risks faced by any policy should be identified and assessed during its design and this should be followed through to implementation when risk monitoring and management are essential.

Source: UK National Audit Office⁵

Adequate consideration of the timeframe for the policy to be implemented

Are the timeframe and results promised realistic and consistent with estimates of resources?

Where timeframe imperatives have shortened prior consideration of implementation issues, how will implementation risks be dealt with?

Overly ambitious timeframes are among the most common difficulties in implementation. Time pressures can leave too little time to address factors for success, such as different options for programme delivery, consultation with implementers and stakeholders, or resource requirements and constraints. This can result in substantial variances between funding estimates for an initiative and the resources that actually have to be employed to deliver the initiative successfully.

Of course, policy decisions may need to be implemented rapidly, with timeframes that are far from ideal. This may be difficult to avoid in some circumstances.

In situations where timeframe imperatives have curtailed the consideration of implementation issues, the risk to successful implementation ‘down the track’ increases markedly. One of the most pressing priorities for the senior responsible officer is to reduce or remove this risk promptly by getting the practical implementation advice and experience as soon as possible after the policy decision.

This situation also places even greater importance on monitoring and assessing roll-out of the initiative to ensure that practical problems do not reduce the anticipated outcomes. Monitoring is discussed more fully in Part 9 — Monitoring and review.

It is not uncommon for timeframe difficulties to arise after the policy decision and during implementation simply because an overly optimistic view about practical implementation aspects was taken during policy development.

This need not mean that detailed implementation plans are required at this stage, but rather that sufficient attention is given to the practical constraints to effective implementation.

The risk, in these cases, is that decisions are made on the run, possibly with reduced transparency and accountability. Arguably, it is when time pressures exist that a disciplined approach to implementation issues is likely to be most beneficial.

You need to be clear on what you can do... [this may need the CEO to say that you] may need extra time and money to deliver.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

⁵ National Audit Office, op. cit., p. 51.

Consideration of contingency measures and assumptions made

Has consideration been given to the need for contingency measures and their impact on the Government's intended outcomes?

Are there uncertainties in assumptions made in formulating the policy initiative that may have consequences for the success of implementation?

Uncertainty is a fact of life in the implementation of most initiatives. It can flow both from the nature of a policy and from the practical aspects of its implementation. Uncertainty means that appropriate consideration of contingency measures will often be required.

Another consideration is that most policy decisions are informed by data and research of various types. On occasions, the decisions may be based on less than perfect information, as well as forecasts or predictions on future trends or behaviour.

For this reason it is important to consider the degree to which, and in what ways, limits to information can have a significant impact on implementation.

What will be the consequence of gaps in information when the initiative is rolled out?

For example, uptake that is much higher or lower than expected may have implications for staff numbers or funding of the programme. The skills required of those implementing the initiative are also critical to consider.

Accuracy of projections on expenditure and uptake is the hardest thing to get right [during policy design and implementation]. It becomes extremely difficult to implement these initiatives as expectations may be very high.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

If the assumptions made about an initiative are clearly identified, along with their sensitivity to change, then Ministers and those implementing the initiative can be better informed of the possible risks and their consequences. An awareness of uncertainties increases the chance of successful implementation, including for safety-net initiatives, demand-driven programmes or wholly new initiatives, where there may be raised expectations.

Record keeping and accountability

Have appropriate record keeping and accountability mechanisms been established?

One challenge for agencies is to balance the major focus on results with appropriate accountability for those results.

The greater the pressure on an agency to progress initiatives over a short time period, the greater the demand for discipline in record keeping and accountability as part of a sound control environment. This is integral to robust and successful corporate governance.

In short, keep records of key decisions made and the basis for those decisions. This is also likely to improve the information available to the implementers, in particular on the practical considerations that went into policy design and what success looks like.

Checklist 1 on page 57 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on the identification of challenges to implementation during policy development.

Governance



While public sector chief executives are commonly required to deal with an array of policy, programme and organisational issues, it is also important that ongoing attention is given to measures to reinforce good governance and effective administration.⁶

Implementation of policy is more likely to succeed if there is strong executive-level support for the delivery processes for the policy. Chief executives are responsible not only for providing policy advice to the Government but also for ensuring the delivery of the services that result from that advice.

A critical prerequisite for successful implementation — especially that involving significant changes to an agency's structures, processes or culture — is an executive that is committed to, supports and models best practice. Without strong and visible top-down support, any underlying changes will be ineffective.

⁶ ANAO, *The Auditor-General Annual Report 2004–2005*, Canberra, 2005, p. 2.

2

In normal circumstances the chief executive will devolve some governance responsibilities to other members of the agency executive. However, the chief executive does need to obtain sufficient assurance around key governance issues for the implementation of any initiative. The following are **some key questions to assist chief executives** to be confident about governance matters for implementation processes generally across the agency. In reflecting on these points it is important to give weight to informal networks and organisational culture as well as to the formal arrangements.

- Is a single senior responsible officer accountable for the delivery of each policy?
- Does the senior responsible officer have the appropriate authority, skills and resources to deliver?
- Has sufficient consideration been given to the adequacy of governance arrangements in planning for implementation?
- Do arrangements reflect strong executive-level support? Do people in the organisation know that 'this matters'?
- Is there clarity of purpose, powers and relationships between all those involved in the implementation of a policy initiative?
- Are the governance arrangements between the various parties appropriately formalised and/or documented?
- Are there whole-of-government dimensions to the policy? If so:
 - Have the appropriate agencies been adequately engaged?
 - Has a lead agency been identified and its role articulated and accepted by other relevant agencies?
 - Are the coordination and sharing arrangements of sufficient breadth and robustness?
- Is there clear recognition of accountability arrangements?
- Do the governance arrangements provide for adequate reporting and review mechanisms, including escalation of significant issues and 'bad news'?
- Where policy development and its implementation involve negotiation and/or consultation with stakeholders, has significant attention been given to matters of conflict of interest?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Governance is the set of responsibilities and practices, policies and procedures, exercised by an agency's executive, to provide strategic direction, ensure objectives are achieved, manage risks and use resources responsibly and with accountability.

Sound governance arrangements are critical to the success of programme and policy implementation.

The nature and complexity of governance arrangements have to reflect the size and scope of the initiative. These factors will influence the degree to which senior managers need to be involved in obtaining assurance around the governance arrangements, as well as the degree of their formality.

At the least, consideration needs to be given to: the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of those involved; the rules and procedures for decision-making; and the integration of the project governance arrangement within an agency's broader corporate governance framework.

The important role of the senior responsible officer

Is a single senior responsible officer accountable for the delivery of each policy?

Does the senior responsible officer have the appropriate authority, skills and resources to deliver?

To be effective, policy and programme implementation requires there to be a senior responsible officer who is accountable for the success of a policy's implementation. This is the person to whom the relevant minister and executive turn for progress reports and details of emerging risks.

Absolutely need a senior responsible officer — someone who is clearly identified and accountable.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

The senior responsible officer can play a pivotal role in:

- obtaining 'buy-in' by the executive and key players
- giving visibility to the strength of executive-level support to implementation of the initiative
- considering funding issues relevant to the initiative
- providing delegations to the appropriate levels
- considering whether the right people have been engaged, and are working on the right things at the right time.

Senior responsible officers should consider whether they have the right skills to oversee the implementation of the initiative. If not, how will the right skills be obtained? This is not a matter to be left to chance, or to learning on the job. Options include the use of a mentor or specialist expertise.

Roles and responsibilities

Has sufficient consideration been given to the adequacy of governance arrangements in planning for implementation?

Do arrangements reflect strong executive-level support? Do people in the organisation know that 'this matters'?

Is there clarity of purpose, powers and relationships between all those involved in the implementation of a policy initiative?

Are the governance arrangements between the various parties appropriately formalised and/or documented?

Senior responsible officers are also required to set up the most appropriate team to implement the initiative. This includes the adequacy of skills of the implementation team. Clear direction from the senior responsible officer to the programme manager on the implementation team members' roles and responsibilities is a key requirement.

Engaging and negotiating with central and delivery agencies should be considered at the earliest possible stage. If the initiative requires service delivery by another agency, organisation or provider, then roles and responsibilities need to be formalised. The risk in deferring or not considering the formalisation of cross-agency arrangements is that a lack of agreement and confusion about roles may emerge later in implementation.

The key is to set up arrangements early, and to formalise them promptly. This applies equally to arrangements with other government agencies and those with providers outside the Australian Government.

When engaging Australian Government departments, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or an agreement outlining the objective, roles, responsibilities and reporting requirements of those involved is considered better practice. However, setting up these formalities requires an understanding about where there is shared ownership of policy and delivery and where policy owners cannot delegate responsibility and accountability for outcomes to deliverers.

In practice, there will often be differences of opinion and disputes through the implementation of an initiative. It is far better that any differences are dealt with informally and promptly; this can be facilitated by creating the right atmosphere in interactions. However, attention should also be given to more formal procedures before implementation begins — this can prevent blame-shifting when something goes wrong.

Whole-of-government considerations

Are there whole-of-government dimensions to the policy? If so:

- Have the appropriate agencies been adequately engaged?
- Has a lead agency been identified and its role articulated and accepted by other relevant agencies?
- Are the coordination and sharing arrangements of sufficient breadth and robustness?

Many of the Government's initiatives have a whole-of-government dimension, which may sometimes be a critical aspect of the implementation.

Where a number of agencies are contributing to the delivery of a programme or taking action to achieve programme goals, the costs and benefits of different whole-of-government approaches to implementation should be considered. However, as a minimum, identification of a lead agency is usually beneficial.

For the arrangement to be effective, the lead agency should have the authority and recognition to act in this capacity. It may be the case that the lead agency has primary policy responsibility (rather than an operational role), effectively becoming an actual or de facto purchaser of services from one or more other agencies to facilitate implementation.

Consideration should be given to formalising such arrangements through MOUs, agreements, contracts or committees. Their purpose is to set out:

- the objectives of the arrangement, including desired outcomes and timeframes
- the roles and responsibilities of the agencies, including their capacity to contribute
- the details of the activity, including specifications of services or projects to be undertaken

Failure to implement a policy as intended may arise where responsibility is diffuse. Even where lines of responsibility had been clear at the start of a policy initiative they may become blurred by subsequent changes and adjustments in the policy or the organisation relating to it.

Source: UK National Audit Office⁷

Where there is multifaceted implementation you need to have a lead agency/person, otherwise things fall through the cracks.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

⁷ National Audit Office, op. cit., p. 49.

- resources to be applied by the agencies and related budgetary issues
- the approach to identifying and sharing the risks and opportunities involved
- agreed modes of review and evaluation
- agreed dispute resolution arrangements.⁸

The lead agency should have the role of ensuring that: programme implementation is meeting the Government's objective; a process has been established where information is shared and flows between the agencies involved; performance is monitored; and the commitment by other agencies (as well as their own) is being met.

Steering committee and taskforce

Is there clear recognition of accountability arrangements?

The size and complexity of many initiatives is such that it is difficult for one senior responsible officer to be sufficiently well informed about every aspect of the initiative.

One approach in these circumstances is to establish a steering committee that is responsible for business issues associated with the initiative. This includes: budget strategies; monitoring risks, quality and timelines; and resourcing decisions. Steering committees can have members from inside the agency or more broadly involve stakeholders, specialist consultants or representatives from another agency. The chair of the steering committee then becomes the accountability point for progress of the project.

When setting up a steering committee consideration needs to be given to other aspects of good governance discussed in this guide, including the skills required, roles and responsibilities.

Where there are whole-of-government dimensions, inter-departmental committees or taskforces, representation at the senior responsible officer level from each agency is a useful means of communicating and monitoring progress on a whole-of-government initiative.

It is better practice to maintain and distribute minutes of meetings and agreed action items to all agencies involved in implementation. This provides transparency to the decision-making process.

Steering committees need to have clarity of roles/responsibilities, conflicts of interest declared, accountability and to assess performance at the end.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Effectiveness of arrangements for monitoring and review

Do the governance arrangements provide for adequate reporting and review mechanisms, including escalation of significant issues and 'bad news'?

Senior responsible officers need to provide for clear reporting arrangements sufficient to provide assurance to the chief executive on progress in implementation. Reporting should minimise the risk of duplication and/or gaps in information.

Where there are agreements or MOUs in place, they should specify the reporting requirements from other agencies or organisations involved with the implementation.

Reporting and monitoring arrangements need to be robust enough so that 'bad news' is not filtered out of reports to the executive and senior responsible officers.

Appropriate means of dealing with bad news promptly are critical to implementation success. Consideration should also be given to worst-case scenario and/or exit strategies if there is a risk that the initiative may not meet its objective.

Create an environment where people are prepared to ask for help early enough and not at a crisis point.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Reporting requirements are more fully described in Part 9 — Monitoring and review.

⁸ ANAO *Better Practice Guide—Public Sector Governance: Guidance Paper No. 7*, July 2003, Canberra, p. 3.

Guarding against conflicts of interest

Where policy development and its implementation involve negotiation and/or consultation with stakeholders, has significant attention been given to matters of conflict of interest?

Senior responsible officers should consider potential or perceived conflicts of interest, particularly when negotiation and/or consultation with stakeholders has occurred during policy development. Significant risks can arise when managing Budget-sensitive matters, particularly where those involved may gain knowledge or insights into information that could benefit them financially.

A suitable risk management strategy to preserve the integrity of sensitive information requires consideration of the degree, nature and extent of the potential for conflict of interest. The use of a confidentiality agreement during discussions with stakeholders is one option to consider in managing this risk.

It is also important that the implementation team knows what a conflict of interest is, and to create an environment where potential conflicts of interest can be discussed and disclosed in a transparent and accountable manner.

Checklist 2 on page 59 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on governance.

Risk management



The increased understanding across the public sector of risk management processes does not in itself guarantee the proper treatment of challenges to successful policy implementation. There also has to be a real belief in the benefits of risk management.

The effective management of risk requires a robust, agency-wide risk management climate where decisions are based on accurate, well informed judgments. An important consideration for the chief executive is the availability of appropriately skilled senior personnel to manage key risks to successful implementation.

A central implementation challenge for chief executives is to maintain alignment between expectations at ministerial level and agency-level progress with implementation. This is assisted by a robust risk management approach.

3

In normal circumstances the chief executive will devolve responsibilities for risk management to another member of the executive of the agency. However, the chief executive does need to obtain sufficient assurance around the agency's management approach regarding risks to successful implementation. The following are **some key questions to assist chief executives** to obtain such confidence.

- Has enough been done, early enough, to identify and reduce implementation risks?
- Does the senior responsible officer have access to sufficient risk management capability to provide assurance that risks to successful implementation will be dealt with effectively?
- Was the Government appropriately briefed, at an early stage, about key implementation risks, including unknown aspects? Is this adequately documented?
- Where other parties are involved in implementation, are risks appropriately shared? Is there clear recognition of the risk mitigation responsibilities of the various parties?
- Are risk treatments followed through in a systematic way and actively monitored during implementation for their effectiveness?
- Is there contingency planning, including the analysis and assessment of options and exit strategies for high-risk initiatives?
- Will implementation difficulties be identified promptly and reported?
- When mistakes occur, will they be admitted, with explanations of what went wrong and why, and the course corrected?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

There has been increasing recognition of the need to adopt an effective risk management approach. Agencies have responded in various ways to the need to be more systematic in risk management. Whatever the maturity, makeup or modus operandi of an agency's risk management framework, timely use of risk management techniques can make a valuable contribution to implementation.

Systematic risk management practices enable agencies to be confident that implementation has been designed to achieve government objectives most effectively. Good risk management practices reduce the likelihood or consequence of unpleasant surprises that may jeopardise the achievement of objectives. The treatment of implementation risks should be realistic, achievable within available resourcing and timelines, and monitored and assessed for effectiveness throughout the implementation process.

While good progress has been made in putting the machinery of risk management in place, there is still some distance to go before we can say that all public sector organisations have made effective risk management a central element of their day to day general management approach. APS entities generally need to do more on 'following through' on implementation and to be more proactive in managing risk and ensuring risk controls and treatments are in place across the organisation.

Source: Auditor-General⁹

Identifying and assessing risks to the project/programme early

Has enough been done, early enough, to identify and reduce implementation risks?

Does the senior responsible officer have access to sufficient risk management capability to provide assurance that risks to successful implementation will be dealt with effectively?

Was the Government appropriately briefed, at an early stage, about key implementation risks, including unknown aspects? Is this adequately documented?

Ideally, the identification and treatment of risk should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, that is, during policy design. More is required than consideration of the potential for something to go wrong. Risk identification and treatment should be an element of the control framework put in place for effective programme implementation.

It is important that judgments and risk assessments that are critical to successful implementation receive immediate and focused scrutiny. Risk management is most effective when those with the direct responsibility for the delivery of project components contribute to the process and when senior managers are accountable for the quality of risk management process.

A [key factor] is the importance of early risk identification in policy development.

Source: UK Government Strategy Unit

Avoid any tendency to downplay the analysis of implementation risks. This is especially important where there are time constraints and/or complex negotiation processes. The risk to avoid is that the necessary focus on the outcome may reduce attention on the capacity to deliver.

It may be necessary to brief the chief executive on significant risks to implementation, and proposed treatments, for possible ministerial attention. At times it will be equally important to consider risks arising from unknown aspects of implementation. It is important that assessments are appropriately documented.

Know what you don't know.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

If significant risks are neglected until a later stage in the implementation process, they can become unwanted surprises. Mitigation will then be much more difficult. As well, the ability to maintain service delivery may be reduced by the need to deal quickly with something unexpected.

⁹ Ian McPhee PSM, *Risk and Risk Management in the Public Sector*, Australian National Audit Office, Canberra, 2005, available from <<http://www.anao.gov.au/WebSite.nsf/Publications/DA91EE45CCB75C58CA25706F001D2831>> [accessed 3 August 2006].

Whole-of-government considerations

Where other parties are involved in implementation, are risks appropriately shared? Is there clear recognition of the risk mitigation responsibilities of the various parties?

Implementation initiatives that involve cross-portfolio or Australian Government—State/Territory governments, or other inter-jurisdictional partnerships, face increased dimensions and complexity of risk management.

It is important to ensure that there is a common understanding of the risks associated with shared implementation. This requires that the senior responsible officer is assured of both their own agency's capability to assess and manage key risks and that of other parties. A clear and agreed identification of who carries which risks, including those that are shared, is a necessary part of this.

This applies not only to identifying and assigning responsibility for risk, but also to active management, monitoring and reporting through implementation. This may well require consolidated reporting of the effectiveness of risk mitigation.

Working with organisations outside government

Where other parties are involved in implementation, are risks appropriately shared? Is there clear recognition of the risk mitigation responsibilities of the various parties?

The early identification and assessment of implementation risks is even more important when locking in decisions with outside parties. This is because the consequences of unmitigated implementation risks are much harder to address with back-end processes and controls if, for example, the agency is tied into contractual arrangements.

Senior responsible officers need to obtain assurance that they have access to adequate risk management expertise to provide assurance around three key matters. First, that there is a shared understanding of the risks for which implementation partners are jointly or separately responsible. Second, that there is an appropriate balance in the transfer of those risks to outside parties. Third, that responsibility for risks is formally acknowledged.

Notwithstanding the formal considerations, there remains an underlying reality that Australian Government agencies cannot transfer all risks. They have ultimate responsibility for delivering or maintaining service delivery and for contingency plans in the event of risks materialising.

Having a contract does not absolve you from what the contractor does with your programme.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Managing risks through implementation

Are risk treatments followed through in a systematic way and actively monitored during implementation for their effectiveness?

Because implementation is most commonly a staged process, rather than part of a one-off exercise, risk management needs to be a continuing focus of attention. Risks need to be actively managed to take account of changing circumstances through the various phases of implementation.

Risks should be reviewed at the key stages of a project. For example, before the release of tender documentation; at formal approval to proceed to implementation; and/or at any later key decision points, such as refinement of policy details and/or significant discussions with key stakeholders.

Where an agency may be outside its traditional area of expertise or experience, an external health check of the effectiveness of risk identification and management strategies should be considered.

Managing the consequences of risk and when to escalate

Is there contingency planning, including the analysis and assessment of options and exit strategies for high-risk initiatives?

Will implementation difficulties be identified promptly and reported?

When mistakes occur, will they be admitted, with explanations of what went wrong and why, and the course corrected?

Notwithstanding the benefits of identifying and analysing key implementation risks, all risks cannot be removed. Sound risk management includes a willingness to act on the unexpected, including deficiencies in mitigation strategies, when confronted by warning indicators. Senior responsible officers need to be open to the implications of new data and warning signs.

Swift and, on occasion, significant action may be needed if important implementation risks begin to materialise. If consideration of emerging risks suggests the project is too large or ambitious for the agreed timelines and resourcing, this should be brought to the chief executive's, and possibly the Government's, attention.

Appropriate responses to emerging problems will be more manageable and predictable where robust implementation contingency plans have already been developed as part of the risk management strategy. Depending on the levels of assessed risk, contingency planning may usefully include exit strategies if the project becomes too problematic or unviable.

Build in exit strategies very early on.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Checklist 3 on page 61 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on risk management.

4 Planning for implementation

Lessons from the work of the CIU in PM&C and from ANAO audits reflect the value of systematic and structured implementation planning. Experience shows that implementation planning reduces the risk of delay to and dilution of, outcomes.

Planning provides a 'map' of how an initiative will be implemented, addressing matters such as timeframe, phases of implementation, roles and responsibilities, and resourcing.

A level of management, experience and skills commensurate with the sensitivity, significance and impact of initiatives should be applied to the development of implementation planning. It is important to avoid the assumption that this is a low level technical task.

4

The following are **some key questions to assist chief executives** to obtain assurance that sufficient and appropriate attention has been given to planning for implementation across the agency.

- Has sufficient and appropriate attention been given to structured implementation planning?
- Has implementation planning been given sufficient weight (that is, it is not a technical matter for junior staff)?
- Has there been sufficient testing of proposed implementation arrangements?
- Have lessons from previous experience been considered in planning for implementation?
- Have critical implementation success factors been identified and given sufficient attention?
- Does planning cover critical dependencies such as organisational change, procurement and change management?
- Has the role of any third parties been given sufficient attention in planning?
- Is there an overarching plan that brings it all together?
- Are timelines for critical steps, and the resources applied, realistic?
- Has sufficient attention been given to breaking implementation into manageable steps?
- Have adequate review points been put in place through the implementation cycle?
- Do planning arrangements adequately cater for managing change to the plan and/or requirements?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Effective implementation planning is a critical factor contributing to an agency's ability to successfully prepare for intended policy outcomes. Planning for successful implementation involves getting the implementation strategy, plan and design right before beginning time-critical and expensive implementation activities.

Planning for implementation is most effective when it is: led by appropriately skilled and experienced personnel; underpinned by a systematic and structured approach; and supported by a sound project management methodology that tailors corporate tools and reporting processes to the requirements of individual measures and programmes.

The importance of early planning

Has sufficient and appropriate attention been given to structured implementation planning?

Has implementation planning been given sufficient weight (that is, it is not a technical matter for junior staff)?

Has there been sufficient testing of proposed implementation arrangements?

Have lessons from previous experience been considered in planning for implementation?

Lessons from Australia and overseas reinforce the importance of thorough planning for implementation.

Senior responsible officers should avoid any tendency or pressure to unduly restrict the time spent on early planning for implementation. Inadequate preparation may lead to the emergence of unforeseen barriers and to delays, cost overruns, or a failure to deliver the intended benefits.

Ensuring sufficient time has been given to planning requires senior-level attention and leadership, as well as application of the right skills. Development of effective plans will invariably involve negotiation within and across organisational boundaries, consultation with third parties, compromise on variables such as cost, timing, scope and quality, and decisions about interactions, roles and responsibilities. It is not a matter to be devolved to the lowest level.

Not enough time goes into project planning.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

While an initiative may be 'greenfields', it is rare that an implementation challenge is entirely new to an agency. One of the practical contributions that a senior responsible officer can make is to draw on relevant lessons from past implementation experience, both within the agency and from external experience. This may seem an obvious point, but can be easily overlooked in the rush to roll-out an initiative.

It is also useful to consider the options for testing the implementation at an early stage. This may help avoid over-engineered implementation arrangements that place an unnecessary burden on program beneficiaries.

Implementation plan

Have critical implementation success factors been identified and given sufficient attention?

Does planning cover critical dependencies such as organisational change, procurement and change management?

Has the role of any third parties been given sufficient attention in planning?

Better practice implementation plans are scalable and flexible. They reflect the degree of urgency, innovation, complexity and/or sensitivity associated with the particular policy measure, and provide sufficient detail to support and inform successful implementation.

At the least, implementation plans should present a clear alignment between policy objectives and implementation; make clear the assumptions that have been made in policy development; spell out critical intermediate and final results; and identify areas of uncertainty, and how and when they will be clarified.

An implementation plan should reflect adequate consideration of key risks to implementation, throughout the entire implementation process — not just at the beginning. This is particularly important where policy or programme implementation involves untested service delivery models or new technology, or where significant behaviour change is expected.

Plans should provide a map of how an initiative will be implemented. The map should deal with matters such as:

- timeframes, including the different phases for implementation
- roles and responsibilities of all those involved in implementation
- resources (including funding and human resources)
- risk management, including how any potential barriers to implementation will be dealt with
- monitoring and reporting requirements.

Experience indicates that particular attention needs to be given to:

- the choice of appropriate legislative instruments and the time needed for drafting
- any requirements for subsequent micro-policy development, as this can significantly affect the implementation of the relevant systems, training or other requirements
- the role of third parties in delivery. For example, many initiatives depend on collaboration with private sector organisations, including establishing Information Technology (IT). However, insufficient planning and consultation can mean that different players have a different view of the priorities or optimal approaches.

Whole-of-government considerations

Is there an overarching plan that brings it all together?

Experience indicates that the likelihood of effective cross-agency implementation is greater when there is an overarching, high-level implementation plan that is coordinated by a nominated lead agency and has clearly defined critical cross-agency dependencies and responsibilities.

It is vital that there is a clear and commonly understood identification of key elements of shared implementation planning. These may include: governance and decision-making arrangements; possible resource and scheduling constraints; risk management strategies; shared funding arrangements; and the procurement and management of contracts.

Each agency can have their own project plan, but you need to have one master plan to make it work.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Consideration of time, costs and resources required

Are timelines for critical steps, and the resources applied, realistic?

Regardless of how structured the development of a plan is, getting the timing and resourcing right is likely to be difficult. Consultation — within and possibly outside the organisation — drawing in all those who are best informed on the various issues relevant to implementation of the initiative, is often a prerequisite to getting it right.

It is also a matter of ensuring that adequate attention is given to the right balance of types of resources and skills. It is not just a matter of the quantum of resources, but whether the right people are there to make it happen. The plan is likely to need to address development of the right skills and training.

It is important to avoid overly optimistic estimates about the pace of roll-out and the time needed to implement successfully. Systematic and structured risk management can make a significant contribution in planning timeframes better.

Unrealistic timeframes can increase the cost and risk of a project.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Having manageable steps and milestones

Has sufficient attention been given to breaking implementation into manageable steps?

Have adequate review points been put in place through the implementation cycle?

Projects are subject to less risk to outcomes if they are broken down into manageable steps. The more specific these steps, the more likely it is that barriers to successful implementation will be identified.

As far as possible, proposed approaches and plans should be tested to ensure that their approach is considered and incremental. Senior responsible officers should be particularly aware of the risks for IT-enabled projects.

Milestones should reflect appropriately significant and assessable deliverables at each stage. Where implementation involves a range of concurrent or parallel activities, it is important to communicate the separate and interim milestones and how they fit into the broader implementation structure.

More broadly, there should be enough review points built in so that the project can be amended, or even stopped, if changed circumstances mean that the anticipated benefits are unlikely to be achieved.

Too little attention is given to breaking development and implementation into manageable steps.

Source: UK Office of Government Commerce

Managing changes to plans

Do planning arrangements adequately cater for managing change to the plan and/or requirements?

Part of successful planning is to recognise the likelihood that the implementation team will be presented with the need for changes to planned implementation. This could arise due to changes in the scope or the outcomes required, or due to practical problems arising in roll-out.

Part of a good plan, therefore, is to incorporate procedures for managing any such change. It is important that such changes are appropriately assessed by team management for impact and any possible need to advise the chief executive or the Minister. There needs to be provision for escalation and high-level sign-off to revised plans.

The thing that kills implementation is a late system change.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Checklist 4 on page 63 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on planning for implementation.

5 Procurement and contract management

An important consideration for the chief executive is the extent to which implementation is dependent upon procurement of services and contract management.

Agencies have tended to find procurement and contract management among the more challenging aspects of public administration. The challenge inevitably increases when implementing a high-risk project, or one with a limited timeframe. In all circumstances, where procurement and contract management are involved, they should be recognised as a source of implementation risk.

External sourcing requires robust procurement and contract management processes, and the right balance of skills to make the formal processes work well.

5

In normal circumstances the chief executive may devolve most responsibility for procurement and contract management to another member of the agency's executive. However, the chief executive needs to obtain sufficient assurance around procurement and contract management issues that are central to the implementation of an initiative. The following are **some key questions to assist chief executives** be confident that the agency has effective procurement and contract management arrangements in place for an initiative.

- Has the importance of procurement and management of contracts been identified, acknowledged and built into implementation strategies?
- Has adequate consideration been given to what procurement strategy best supports long-term service delivery objectives?
- Have checks been made that the supply industry understands the agency's approach and requirements? Are they achievable?
- Does the senior responsible officer have access to the right skills and capability to handle complex procurement and contract management?
- Will evaluation of proposals have sufficient regard to long-term value for money (especially intended policy outcomes) as opposed to initial price?
- Has sufficient attention been given to any ethical or probity issues that may flow from procurement activities, as well as any risks for the contractor in service delivery?
- Has enough attention been given to getting the contract right?
- Are risks and risk mitigation responsibilities appropriately allocated through contractual arrangements?
- Will there be effective longer-term contract management?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Increasingly, the procurement and contract management of services provided through the private sector is central to many implementation initiatives. They can be critical elements in achieving expected policy outcomes.

Procurement and contract management are most effective when they are led by appropriately senior and experienced personnel and supported by robust governance and risk management practices and procedures.

Where procurement and contract management do not receive sufficient senior attention, the risk of failure increases.

Establishing the strategy

Has the importance of procurement and management of contracts been identified, acknowledged and built into implementation strategies?

Has adequate consideration been given to what procurement strategy best supports long-term service delivery objectives?

Have checks been made that the supply industry understands the agency's approach and requirements? Are they achievable?

A starting point is a considered strategic assessment of the degree to which implementation relies on purchasing and contracting with private sector providers. Procurement activities will be more effective when they are approached strategically and considered at the earliest stage possible.

This consideration needs to have regard to the procurement requirement, its size and complexity, potential problems and risks. Strategic procurement decisions taken at the initial stage will affect the rest of the implementation cycle and the nature of the subsequent contract management roles. The procurement strategy needs to clearly support the longer-term outcomes intended from the policy initiative.

For example, decisions at the initial stage may include whether to contract out the whole, or a major part of the requirement. This would lead to implementation of the initiative being focused on a single procurement and subsequent (relatively straightforward) contract management task. Alternatively, the decision may be to contract out packages of work, possibly with some done by Australian Government agencies. This would require more extensive coordination of procurement, as well as create an additional contract management role of service integration and coordination.

Strategic decisions on procurement are better informed if the team is sufficiently engaged with relevant industry, or has relevant experience. This assists in understanding the way in which the strategic procurement options interact with possible risks to supply.

An assessment of market interest may also be required to manage some of these risks. At the least, this requires that business requirements are unambiguous and can be clearly understood by potential suppliers. It is equally important that a realistic assessment of market capability is made.

Contracting is now a fundamental part of how we do business. As a result, effective management of contracts of whatever size and for whatever purpose is an essential requirement for most, if not all, public sector programs. It is however an aspect of administration that has not always been given the focus and attention it deserves.

Source: Auditor-General¹⁰

The seed of either effective, or problematic, contract management is often laid at the earliest stage of defining the procurement requirement and the general strategy of fulfilling the need.

Source: Auditor-General¹¹

¹⁰ Ian McPhee PSM, *Contract Management in the Public Sector — an ANAO Better Practice Perspective*, Australian National Audit Office, Canberra, 2006, available from < <http://www.anao.gov.au/WebSite.nsf/Publications/DB92F37A0D6AECA6CA25714600829F8C> > [accessed 3 August 2006].

¹¹ *ibid.*

The outcome of all of this, indeed the ‘acid test’, will be a well-designed procurement phase for the implementation of the initiative. This will include clear articulation of requirements and an appropriate level of risk identification and mitigation. For more complex projects, this will require structured and formal risk assessment, as discussed in Part 3 — Risk management.

Having the right expertise/experience

Does the senior responsible officer have access to the right skills and capability to handle complex procurement and contract management?

Experience shows that having the right skills and capability is the key to effective procurement and good contract management. This applies from initial strategic procurement considerations through to routine day to day management of the ensuing contract.

Where agencies have sound procurement and contract management procedures and practices, these should be used to reduce the risk to implementation. However, where such administrative capability is not as strong, even greater reliance is placed on the skills of individuals within the team. This requires a ‘hard-nosed’ assessment and response, which is likely to significantly affect the ultimate success of implementation.

One option, particularly where there is complex procurement, may be to use specialist expertise. Expert advice is most effective when there is a shared understanding and agreement of roles and responsibilities, and of the level of specialist and/or independent assurance being provided.

The need for clarity on roles and responsibilities applies throughout the implementation cycle. It is important to avoid any tendency to delegate procurement and contract management activities to more junior or inexperienced staff as implementation progresses (unless this is based on a sound risk assessment).

Evaluation of proposals

Will evaluation of proposals have sufficient regard to long-term value for money (especially intended policy outcomes) as opposed to initial price?

Has sufficient attention been given to any ethical or probity issues that may flow from procurement activities, as well as any risks for the contractor in service delivery?

When evaluating proposals, there is a need to strike a balance between the risks an agency reasonably incurs in promoting competition and innovation, and the longer-term service delivery benefits to be obtained. It is a matter of both appropriate process and of matching the scale of analysis to the scale of the initiative and associated risk.

Experience shows procurement activities will be most effective when they are informed by risk management techniques. Evaluation of proposals should have regard to this.

It is vital that the procurement process follows legal and government policy requirements. This may seem an obvious point, but experience shows that details can be easily overlooked by managers in the rush to deliver an initiative. It is generally advisable to use a probity adviser in any significant new procurement exercise. Also, independent specialist advice may be desirable where implementation involves cutting-edge technology or untested new service delivery.

Getting the right contract

Has enough attention been given to getting the contract right?

Are risks and risk mitigation responsibilities appropriately allocated through contractual arrangements?

It is generally recognised that getting the contractual arrangements right is critical to success and there is a substantial body of published guidance available that can assist implementers. However, giving this sufficient consideration in the midst of the pressures of a complex or high pressure implementation is challenging.

Clear description in a contract of what deliverables are wanted is crucial, but it usually takes more effort than expected. One important aspect to keep in focus is describing requirements in terms of results, rather than the methods of performing work.

Careful consideration should be given to specifying a contract's performance measures. It is not a matter of quantity of measures specified, but of quality; that is, the measures reflect the results and outcomes required from the contract and can be accurately quantified or assessed. Contract performance measures should also reflect an agreed understanding of the specific responsibilities of the parties to the contract.

Clearly defined and regular reviews of performance in the contract also help subsequent management of performance.

Experience shows that it is important to incorporate appropriate flexibility into the contract — for example the flexibility to respond to changing policy and/or service delivery imperatives. The need for, and appropriate nature of, flexibility in the contract should be guided by risk assessments, as flexibility is likely to have a price consequence.

The need to follow through consistently on identified risk mitigation strategies is a feature of all aspects of implementation. This is particularly the case when locking in decisions with outside parties through contractual arrangements. There is little point in having identified a risk treatment but not requiring its implementation by a contractor. The consequences of unmitigated implementation risks are much harder to address once an agency is tied into contractual arrangements.

The allocation and sharing of risks should be explicit in a contract and well understood by all parties. The aim should be to avoid any debate about responsibility if a risk materialises, but rather to have a focus on prompt response by the agreed party.

Contract management and monitoring

Will there be effective longer-term contract management?

Notwithstanding a formal contractual relationship with a private sector supplier, contract managers need to recognise the mutual dependence of the parties to the contract and thus their mutual interest in developing a cooperative relationship. This is particularly important in long-term contracts, where the interdependency between the agency and provider increases. The key point is that strong relationship management skills can head off many issues before they become formal contract problems.

Formal monitoring of performance against specified standards provides assurance that deliverables are on track and that implementation is proceeding smoothly. Alternatively, it will flag problems that have to be resolved for progress to continue.

It is important that changes to the original scope of the contract after it has been entered into are appropriately assessed. This would include high-level sign-off to revised contracts.

Part of good contract management is to recognise and follow thorough record keeping practices from the start. Establishing appropriate record keeping structures at the beginning may yield benefits well into implementation if procurement or contractual difficulties subsequently arise.

Having a contract does not absolve you for what the contractor does with your programme.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Checklist 5 on page 65 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on procurement and contract management.

6 Stakeholder management

Stakeholder management starts with a clear objective for consultation, followed by an identification of the range of people and agencies with an interest in the initiative. It is important that stakeholders understand why they are being consulted and have a realistic expectation about their capacity to influence the implementation.

The nature and means of consulting with stakeholders will, in part, reflect their involvement during the policy development phase. Stakeholders may not have been consulted for a number of reasons, including the sensitivity of the initiative or insufficient time. As with many aspects of planning for implementation, stakeholder engagement should happen as early as possible.

6

In normal circumstances the chief executive may devolve responsibility for stakeholder management to another member of the agency's executive. However, the chief executive does need to obtain assurance around key stakeholder management issues for the implementation of an initiative. The following are **some key questions to assist chief executives** to be confident about stakeholder management for an initiative.

- Is the purpose and benefit of stakeholder engagement in planning for implementation clear? For example, is it to obtain buy-in, provide a communication channel, test the design or test the roll-out?
- Have the right stakeholders been identified?
- Has sufficient consideration been given to how stakeholder interactions will be managed during the implementation phase?
- Is there clear accountability for stakeholder management, including managing expectations?
- When is the best time for stakeholders to be engaged to facilitate successful implementation?
- Will the information obtained through stakeholder engagement be acted on?
- Will information from the consultations with stakeholders be used to inform a communication strategy for implementation?
- Are there satisfactory arrangements to manage perceptions of conflict of interest that may arise from consulting with stakeholders?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Most agencies have a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in their operations. The interests represented by these stakeholders can be disparate, sometimes to the point where they can be in conflict with one another. Stakeholder management is therefore a key aspect of implementation.¹²

If stakeholders are not identified and consulted, they may object to various elements during implementation. For this reason, governance structures should ensure that the legitimate interests of a range of stakeholders are properly and appropriately considered. The less stakeholders are involved, the higher the risk of failure during implementation.

Stakeholder management requires an openness and consideration as to why people are being consulted, how they will be consulted and how much influence they will have. Communication is essential and those consulted need to be provided with comprehensive, balanced and accurate information.

Identification of stakeholders

Is the purpose and benefit of stakeholder engagement in planning for implementation clear? For example, is it to obtain buy-in, provide a communication channel, test the design or test the roll-out?

Have the right stakeholders been identified?

The first step is to clearly define the objective of the planned engagement with stakeholders. For example, is the purpose to:

- obtain buy-in
- have a means of communicating with the client group
- test the initiative, or
- test the design.

Once this has been determined, consideration can be given to identifying the target group of stakeholders.

The target group may be some or all of those with the greatest knowledge or understanding of the issue; those likely to be most affected by the policy response; or those who have an interest in the workability of the solution.

Often stakeholder views and judgments will reflect their own interests. Nevertheless, consideration of stakeholder input, having regard to conflicting interests and different perspectives, is likely to improve practical knowledge of what may work on the ground. This will help thinking about the proposed way forward, including from the end-user's perspective — that is, from a customer-focused view.

Key stakeholders are likely to include: other Australian Government agencies; State and Territory governments; industry representatives; private sector organisations; non-government organisations; lobby groups; and the potential client group.

The list of prospective stakeholders may therefore be long. It is useful to weigh up and consider the risk and impact on implementation if particular stakeholders are not engaged. Equally, the agency needs some confidence that it will gain something from stakeholder engagement, as this can be a costly and time-consuming exercise raising probity issues and issues of control of policy development by the Government.

The hardest thing to get right with implementation is to see whether rubber hits the ground with roll-out. This is why you need genuine [stakeholder] engagement.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Be prepared to use experts in the field if outside your area of expertise.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

¹² ANAO *Better Practice Guide—Public Sector Governance*, July 2003, Canberra, p. 17.

Managing stakeholder interactions

Has sufficient consideration been given to how stakeholder interactions will be managed during the implementation phase?

Is there clear accountability for stakeholder management, including managing expectations?

When is the best time for stakeholders to be engaged to facilitate successful implementation?

No simple approach to engaging stakeholders is suitable for all situations. Quite often a mix of approaches is necessary. Accordingly, it is important to consider the unique characteristics of groups of stakeholders, and what approaches are best for particular groups. Forms of stakeholder engagement include:

- one-to-one discussions
- focus groups
- providing documentation for comment
- questionnaires
- forums
- consultative committees
- surveys.

Sometimes, stakeholder engagement may mean going through stakeholder groups, such as peak industry associations. However, it is important to recognise that these groups may not reflect the totality of views of stakeholders.

Engaging with State and Territory government stakeholders can often bring different considerations. For example, discussions on implementation may become confused with broader policy positions. The key is to be realistic about the time necessary to win joint engagement with the initiative.

One thing to consider is whether there is likely to be stakeholder resistance to the proposed change. If this is likely, it will be an important factor in engaging with stakeholders. In particular, it will raise issues of how to overcome any resistance to change and how to achieve stakeholder buy-in.

It is important for the senior responsible officer to establish who will be responsible and accountable for stakeholder management. The responsible person needs to be aware of how stakeholder engagement contributes to the ultimate success of the initiative in achieving the agreed policy objective. Managing interactions with stakeholders may require different skills to those of the rest of the implementation team.

Engaging with stakeholders acknowledges their role and their views but it is also important to manage the risk of unduly raising the expectations of stakeholders in the process of engagement.

The risk of disappointed expectations arises when stakeholders believe they will have more power or influence than is intended or possible. This risk can be managed by making clear from the outset what the objectives of stakeholder engagement are and what this implies for the respective roles of the participating parties.

Engaging stakeholders is an important step in testing whether an initiative is likely to work in practice. As a rule of thumb, it should be undertaken as early as possible to allow for a greater range of solutions to emerge and to raise the chance of successful implementation. Planning should allow adequate time and resources for this to occur.

You have to get an understanding of the clients and their needs.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Stakeholder management and managing expectations is one of the hardest things to get right.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Engage with those affected by the initiative at an early time.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Using information from stakeholders

Will the information obtained through stakeholder engagement be acted on?

Will information from the consultations with stakeholders be used to inform a communication strategy for implementation?

There is no point in extensively engaging stakeholders if the consultations are not going to shape implementation. Processes need to be in place so that the information and insights obtained are acted on to improve the quality of the implementation.

Test for the usability... to give the best options to make things work.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Agencies also need to demonstrate to stakeholders how their input may be used and why it may not always be possible to do so. Otherwise, consultation mechanisms may foster cynicism amongst stakeholders, undermining the purpose of the initiative.

While the views of all stakeholders should be considered, it is not always possible to please everyone. A strategy on how to deal with potential sensitivities should be developed. Keeping stakeholders informed of a decision and explaining the reason for a decision can reduce this risk. It should also be noted that some of the information from stakeholders may be of considerable significance for the ultimate impact and success of the initiative. This information may need to be escalated to the chief executive, or even to the Minister.

One of the benefits of consulting with stakeholders is the information it provides to enable an agency to communicate to the target audience more effectively during implementation. This requires establishing a means by which stakeholder views can be tested to inform future communications, and making sure that ensuing messages go back to those responsible for the communication strategy.

Managing conflicts of interest

Are there satisfactory arrangements to manage perceptions of conflict of interest that may arise from consulting with stakeholders?

It is better practice to formally reflect relationships with stakeholders in governance structures. This helps provide adequate communication flows and manage possible conflicts of interest.

It is often not possible to avoid all potential conflicts. Stakeholders with the most to offer are often those who have the greatest interest in the outcome.

It is important, therefore, to consider the nature and extent of such potential conflicts of interest and to make these known to the parties involved, including protocols to minimise the likelihood of such conflicts.¹³ In practice, some of the things to consider include:

- good documentation of key events and interactions with stakeholders
- procedures on how to recognise conflicts of interest and how to deal with them
- procedures on what to do if the rules are not observed.

A useful practice for all implementation team members when engaging with stakeholders is to check with senior team management when in doubt about matters of ethics, including any potential for conflicts of interest.

Checklist 6 on page 67 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on stakeholder management.

¹³ ANAO, op. cit., p. 3.

7 Resources

Notwithstanding factors such as the quality of planning and risk management, a crucial test is always that the right type and quantum of resources are available at the right time to prepare for and roll-out the initiative.

Misalignment between resources and needs at the roll-out stage creates a significant risk that the implementation team will be unable to deliver the required outcomes. Alternatively, there may be unacceptable delays to the implementation through time lost in the delayed provision of necessary resources.

Any potential constraints, such as the capability of IT systems and staff expertise, should be identified and dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity.

7

In normal circumstances the chief executive may devolve responsibility for resources to another member of the agency's executive. However, the chief executive does need to obtain assurance around key resourcing issues for the implementation. The following are **some key questions to assist chief executives** to be confident about resources for implementation.

- Are implementation skills valued and developed to assist in the implementation challenge?
- Are there skilled and experienced people available in the implementation team? If not, is there access to expertise to minimise the risk?
- Is there alignment between resources for implementation and requirements?
- Has adequate attention been given to cultural and change management issues?
- Are there adequate approaches for estimating, monitoring and controlling expenditure on implementation?
- Are information systems resources and management sufficient to support implementation?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Implementation requires the right mix of skills and resources to achieve expected policy objectives. The right results are more likely where adequate consideration of the various resources required for successful outcomes is incorporated into the implementation planning.

Implementation often requires specific skill sets. Availability of the required mix of skills can be assisted by effective workforce planning and skills development. Not least among the required skills is the area of financial resource management.

Consideration of staffing and skills required to implement the initiative

Are implementation skills valued and developed to assist in the implementation challenge?

Are there skilled and experienced people available in the implementation team? If not, is there access to expertise to minimise the risk?

Is there alignment between resources for implementation and requirements?

One of the most common implementation problems is the unavailability of personnel with the skills and knowledge to implement initiatives. Even where skilled personnel are available, they may face conflicting priorities, with a consequential risk to implementation.

Need to recognise there are different skills required for implementation.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

An early assessment of the required and available resources and skills should be conducted during implementation planning. There needs to be clear identification of the different types of skills needed at the different stages and how they can be readily integrated and utilised by the project.

Where implementation skills for an initiative are in short supply, or outside an agency's traditional skills, consideration may also be given to employing outside expertise. In these cases, a transfer of knowledge back to the agency is required to minimise the risk of skills being lost once the consultant or contractor completes the contract.

Training needs for successful implementation are an important consideration, to ensure the required skill sets are available at the time needed. This may require the consideration of various training methods, such as web-based or video conferencing. This has particular value where the workforce is large, not co-located and/or implementation involves service delivery through contracted service providers.

Training needs are sometimes 'shortcut' during implementation. However, there are costs to the programme on cutting back resources, communication and training.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Any residual misalignment between resources available and requirements for implementation should be assessed for their impact on the likelihood of success of the initiative and escalated accordingly.

Change management issues

Has adequate attention been given to cultural and change management issues?

Major policy initiatives often involve significant organisational change. This is by nature complex and requires senior-level attention and leadership as well as the right skills.

Successful change management strategies require structured planning, design, communication and administration, as well as early and continuous stakeholder involvement.

Where implementation involves significant service delivery and/or behavioural changes, it may be necessary to escalate stakeholder feedback if this indicates that the change may be more difficult to implement than expected.

It is important not to underestimate the importance of change management. Insufficient attention to this may lead to unexpected reactions and resistance to the change, reducing the likelihood of timely and successful policy outcomes.

Financial resources

Are there adequate approaches for estimating, monitoring and controlling expenditure on implementation?

As discussed earlier in this guide, realistic timeframes and systematic planning reduce the likelihood of significant variance between funding estimates and actual resource usage. Notwithstanding the robustness of planning, one of the major challenges for agencies is applying adequate financial management to the initiative.

The early involvement of appropriately skilled and experienced financial management personnel is usually necessary for all but the smallest initiatives.

One of the key issues is sufficient skilled attention to identification of the appropriate funding requirements for implementation. Generally speaking, this includes an appropriately crafted budget and establishing the ground rules for managing that budget, including managing contingency funding and financial risk.

Need to deeply embed financial management personnel... some managers are not that skilled, which then impacts on intended/expected outcomes.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Effective financial management involves monitoring and reporting against expenditure trends to support the capacity to optimise implementation resources.

Detailed and accurate expenditure reports are an essential tool for tracking the expenditure trends that inform decision-making. In the absence of accurate scheduling against milestones, there may be raised expectations about the progress of implementation.

Systems resources

Are information systems resources and management sufficient to support implementation?

Information systems and databases support the delivery of most Australian Government programmes and services. It is therefore likely that IT capability is a critical success factor in implementing an initiative.

Experience shows that this is an area where the risk of failure can be high. Where systems are inadequate and replacements are not identified early enough in the process, this could have serious consequences for the progress of implementation.

Whilst there is a substantial body of guidance on processes for the development of IT systems, there are some important practical considerations that can assist senior responsible officers in overseeing projects which have a substantial dependence on IT system changes/developments.

As with all aspects of implementation, a key consideration is that IT project development processes and methodologies are well-established and applied consistently through the life of the project. The skills and experience of the project team, allied with well defined responsibilities, is a key factor in achieving success.

A continuing challenge, especially in highly technical IT-based initiatives, is that system development remains aligned with the policy objectives of the initiatives and promised IT benefits are achievable. This means subjecting the promised system benefits to a 'hard-nosed' appraisal. The most critical technical assessments require close review, and may benefit from independent advice. It is easier to make these assessments when there is good communication between the senior responsible officer, IT team members and specialists and the rest of the implementation team.

Implementation plans should include structured testing of IT systems, and formal acceptance sign-off, prior to system implementation.

Checklist 7 on page 69 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on resources.

8 Communication

Communication about a policy or programme initiative needs commitment and support from **all** those involved with implementation. This involves being 'outward-looking', that is, a view not only from the agency perspective but also from the perspective of stakeholders, and in particular on how the target audience will react and the best means of communication.

The objective of communication should be clear (and in line with the initial policy objective). This is assisted by the development of a communication strategy which also provides a means of assessing success or otherwise.

8

In normal circumstances the chief executive may devolve most responsibility for communication to another member of the agency's executive. However, the chief executive does need to obtain sufficient assurance around key communication issues for the implementation. The following are **some key questions to assist chief executives** to be confident that communication has been adequately considered and addressed.

- Has sufficient consideration been given to communication requirements for the initiative, including major obstacles to communication and how they might be overcome?
- Is the communication strategy structured around the success criteria for the initiative?
- Does the communication strategy address proactive and reactive media management?
- Have sufficient resources been allocated for communication requirements?
- Is the implementation team clear on what is to be achieved through the communication strategy?
- Are communications appropriately targeted to particular client/stakeholder groups?
- Is the nature and timing of communication aligned with roll-out?
- Is there an overarching approach to communication, media management and promotional activities for whole-of-government initiatives?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Communication is a central component of any change process. The greater the impact or change, the greater the need for clear communication of the reasons and rationale behind it, the benefits expected, the plans for its implementation and its proposed effects. Without effective communication, stakeholders may miss out on vital information and may not understand why change is needed, or the benefits to them of the change.

The objective of communication is to:

- keep awareness and commitment high
- maintain consistent messages
- ensure that expectations do not drift out of line with what will be delivered.

Developing a communication strategy

Has sufficient consideration been given to communication requirements for the initiative, including major obstacles to communication and how they might be overcome?

Is the communication strategy structured around the success criteria for the initiative?

Does the communication strategy address proactive and reactive media management?

Have sufficient resources been allocated for communication requirements?

A risk to implementation of a policy initiative is that those who are intended to benefit from the initiative do not do so. Effectively communicating what the initiative is about, and intended to achieve, reduces this risk.

Implementation of an initiative is likely to be more successful if there is a clear communication strategy. The role of a communication strategy is to identify the target audiences and to describe what will be communicated, how it will be communicated, when and by whom.

Ensure that there is sufficient information and publicity 'out there' for a new initiative.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

Matters to assess when developing a strategy include an awareness of the obstacles to effective communication, and targeting of different stakeholders using different means. The strategy should also address the information needs of all those affected — for example interested stakeholders who may not be eligible for services/benefits, but who may be able to disseminate information, as well as deliverers and implementers. Actions arising from the strategy should be appropriately reflected in the implementation planning for the initiative.

Media management is often an important aspect of a communication strategy. The strategy may need to consider both proactive and reactive aspects of media management.

When developing the strategy it is important to allow senior management to be engaged in the process, to discuss their expectations and to provide any feedback. This also facilitates identifying how the success criteria for the initiative can be reflected in key messages of the communication strategy.

Agencies frequently underestimate the resources required for the conduct of an effective communications campaign. The Government Communications Unit (GCU), located in PM&C, is available to provide advice on communications best practice, including research, public relations and advertising.

Making communication an integral part of implementation

Is the implementation team clear on what is to be achieved through the communication strategy?

Are communications appropriately targeted to particular client/stakeholder groups?

Is the nature and timing of communication aligned with roll-out?

It is important that the implementation team clearly understands what is to be achieved by the communication strategy, as they will have to make the decisions about timing and roll-out of the strategy as implementation progresses.

The best means of communication with stakeholders within an overall strategy will vary. There may be a number of forms of communication to choose from, including: seminars and workshops; press/media; bulletins; briefings and announcements; press releases; television; radio; and websites. It is better to limit the number of channels, rather than use a wide variety of ways, as this may hinder communication or cause confusion. These decisions should be guided by the assessed information channel preferences of the target group(s), as reflected in the communication strategy.

Changes to communication means and priorities may be required during implementation, in order to cater for the evolving requirements of stakeholders, particularly as their knowledge increases and demand for information grows. Monitoring of stakeholder reactions to the various means of communication assists in assessing the need for such changes and in managing expectations throughout implementation.

The appropriate timing of communication is essential. There is little value in having a communication strategy that is rolled out at the wrong time. If it is too late, concerns and incorrect assumptions may have developed; if it is too early, it is likely to miss its target. Such timing problems are likely to make implementation and acceptance of the initiative more difficult.

Additional whole-of-government considerations

Is there an overarching approach to communication, media management and promotional activities for whole-of-government initiatives?

Where the initiative is whole-of-government, identification of a lead agency is often highly desirable. The lead agency has the role of ensuring that a process has been established where information is shared and flows between the agencies involved. This includes communication strategies.

It is better practice for whole-of-government initiatives to have an overarching communication strategy so that all parties can collaborate with each other effectively. While each agency involved may develop its own communication strategy, an overarching strategy ensures consistency of key messages. If agencies do not coordinate communication, stakeholders may become confused and be overwhelmed with information. Alternatively there may be gaps in the information provided.

Whole-of-government initiatives also require agencies to share information on communication issues, such as what activities each agency is undertaking. Joint communication activities can often be very effective for whole-of-government initiatives, presenting more of a 'one-stop shop' approach, and shared opportunities for media management activities.

Checklist 8 on page 71 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on communication.

Monitoring and review



It is desirable that regular monitoring and review of key implementation deliverables be established as early as possible, preferably during the implementation planning phase. Experience indicates that the later monitoring and review commences in the implementation cycle, the more difficult it is to implement any required remedial action.

Progress reporting should provide an assurance of the quality and reliability of the information used. This is optimised when those responsible provide timely, accurate and consistent status reporting.

9

In normal circumstances the chief executive may devolve most responsibility for monitoring to another member of the agency's executive. However, the chief executive does need to obtain sufficient assurance around key monitoring, review and delivery issues for the implementation. The degree of reporting detail at each level of the agency, does not need to be any more than that necessary for providing this assurance. The following are **some key questions that would assist chief executives** to be confident that the agency has effective monitoring and review arrangements in place when implementing an initiative.

- Is there a process for monitoring and review of progress on key implementation deliverables?
- Are data supporting performance and progress reporting sufficient for their purpose?
- Is the agency executive kept informed about progress with implementation reports submitted to the CIU?
- Is implementation subject to the Gateway Review Process™? If so, has adequate consideration been given to the documentation required?
- Are risks to success regularly reviewed, and are the results of these reviews provided to senior management?
- Are appropriate escalation strategies in place?
- Are concerns and lessons learned addressed before progressing to the next stage of multi-staged initiatives?
- Is there a willingness to intervene with corrective action, or if necessary, close down implementation if benefits are not being achieved or are not on track?
- In the case of cross-agency measures, have reporting responsibilities and requirements been identified?
- Is the lead agency's role supported by monitoring activities conducted by other agencies?
- Are there feedback loops to learn the lessons from an implementation?

Considerations for senior responsible officers

Effective implementation monitoring and review enables agencies to ensure that adequate resources continue to be available to deal with the scope, risk and sensitivity of implementation. It also, enables stakeholders to assess implementation progress, identify and address problems and review its ongoing relevance and priority.

Monitoring and review is more effective when it is performed by personnel with skills and knowledge specific to the implementation being undertaken and who have adequate administrative resources to process routine monitoring data. Results will be optimised when governance arrangements are robust enough to ensure that 'bad news' is not filtered out in progress reports.

Implementation is a form of learning. One key element of that learning is to use the monitoring and review process to provide advice back to the government (including the public service) as implementation proceeds. This allows both decision makers and programme deliverers to learn from the process and where necessary adapt their expectations, adjust their approaches and identify new opportunities.

Source: Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet¹⁴

Monitoring the initiative during implementation

Is there a process for monitoring and review of progress on key implementation deliverables?

Are data supporting performance and progress reporting sufficient for their purpose?

Is the agency executive kept informed about progress with implementation reports submitted to the CIU?

Is implementation subject to the Gateway Review Process™? If so, has adequate consideration been given to the documentation required?

Monitoring of implementation is most effective when there is early consideration of monitoring arrangements, and agreement on the level and frequency of information to be provided. A key issue at this stage is discussion and agreement on what success looks like.

Monitoring and reporting requirements should reflect the importance of the initiative and its implementation risks and have regard to the administrative burden that data collection and reporting places upon the implementation team and other agency resources. Reporting is most effective when it delivers the right level of detail for accountabilities at each agency level.

Early identification of appropriate data sources assists in establishing timely and effective monitoring activities. The timely reporting of key issues and trends may have a higher priority than the precise accuracy of underlying data, particularly for higher risk initiatives.

It is desirable to identify particular monitoring activities, such as environmental scans and independent reviews or health checks, to enable an agency to learn what is and what is not working.

Monitoring should also cover the potential risks to implementation budgeting. For example, that the project might be prematurely committed, overspend or, conversely be unable to spend the full amount budgeted in the prescribed period. Particular attention to monitoring expenditure needs to be applied where implementation involves funding to third-party providers, community-based organisations and/or individuals.

It is a constant battle to keep the project/programme on track with the Government's objective.

Source: Chief Executive interviews

¹⁴ Dr Peter Shergold AM, *Plan and Deliver: Avoiding Bureaucratic Hold-up* [Internet], Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, 2004, available from <http://www.pmc.gov.au/speeches/shergold/plan_and_deliver_2004-11-17.cfm> [accessed 3 August 2006].

Moderate to high-risk initiatives are likely to be selected for monitoring by the CIU in PM&C. The Unit monitors the implementation progress of these initiatives and reports to the Prime Minister and Cabinet on their status.

Effective management, monitoring and reporting arrangements will keep agency senior management informed of the progress of key initiatives, and reduce the impact of external reporting requirements, such as the provision of reports to the CIU. It is preferable that internal accountability arrangements are well aligned with external requirements to reduce rework and provide consistent standards and expectations

The Australian Government's introduction of the Gateway Review Process™ has provided a further tool to improve delivery of major projects. Projects included in Gateway will proceed to subsequent gates in the Gateway process during the project's life cycle. The key issue for senior responsible officers subject to Gateway reviews will be the adequacy of project documentation, which is a focus of the reviews. This includes project plans, issues logs, risk registers and architectural strategies, depending on the nature of the project and the stage under review.

Review of progress and initiating any corrective action

Are risks to success regularly reviewed, and are the results of these reviews provided to senior management?

Are appropriate escalation strategies in place?

Are concerns and lessons learned addressed before progressing to the next stage of multi-staged initiatives?

Is there a willingness to intervene with corrective action, or if necessary, close down implementation if benefits are not being achieved or are not on track?

Monitoring and review is not a compliance-driven overhead, but a fundamental element of sound governance and quality management. It supports ongoing assessment of progress and risks and informs decisions about whether an initiative is still achievable, or whether its scope, timing or resourcing need to be reviewed.

The senior responsible officer is central to this role through ensuring project teams provide timely and reliable status reports throughout implementation and that there is prompt assessment of the reports and any risks to success.

A part of appropriate response arrangements is the willingness to escalate issues to senior management in a way that allows them to focus on the key issues and possible solutions. In this context, bad news may be more important for management attention than good news, and needs to be passed on and listened to.

Where the implementation of initiatives is multi-staged, it is particularly important that any concerns or lessons from each stage are assessed, escalated as necessary, and resolved. Issues arising should be appropriately addressed before implementation progresses to the next stage.

When unforeseen issues arise and solutions are identified, the implementation plan will need to be adjusted accordingly. Monitoring and review arrangements should provide for agreed corrective actions to be communicated to project managers and followed through in a systematic manner, to ensure the issues are appropriately addressed.

Whole-of-government considerations

In the case of cross-agency measures, have reporting responsibilities and requirements been identified?

Is the lead agency's role supported by monitoring activities conducted by other agencies?

Where a number of agencies share implementation responsibilities, a coordinated approach for cross-agency reporting is required. A key part of this is clear agreement over where overall responsibility for monitoring and reporting lies, as well as the individual responsibilities for the different components of reporting.

One of the considerations in such arrangements is to give sufficient attention to the risks of incompatible data between agencies and how this will be dealt with. A balance needs to be struck between the benefits of enhanced data compatibility between agencies and the resources needed to collect any additional information required.

Underpinning all of this is agreement between agencies on performance indicators and targets for the initiative.

Assessing the quality of the initiative post-implementation

Are there feedback loops to learn the lessons from an implementation?

There can be a tendency to leave consideration of arrangements for evaluation and review until after implementation. However, evaluating an implementation can assist in determining the extent to which the implementation approach adopted contributed to achieving policy objectives. Key lessons learnt may make a significant contribution to the delivery of future policy initiatives.

Evaluations should aim to identify lessons that may help in the future to:

- improve policy design implementation and decision-making
- help resource allocation
- enhance accountability in terms of assessing what outcomes were achieved
- promote organisational learning and good practice.¹⁵

Checklist 9 on page 73 provides some key questions for senior responsible officers on monitoring and review.

¹⁵ National Audit Office, op. cit., p. 56.

Senior responsible officers' checklists

Checklist 1: Identification of challenges to implementation during policy development

Checklist 2: Governance

Checklist 3: Risk management

Checklist 4: Planning for implementation

Checklist 5: Procurement and contract management

Checklist 6: Stakeholder management

Checklist 7: Resources

Checklist 8: Communication

Checklist 9: Monitoring and review

Identification of challenges to implementation during policy development

Making implementation an important consideration during policy design

- Has there been a systematic focus on implementation at the policy development stage? This includes identifying delivery challenges and ensuring these obstacles are understood.
- Has consideration been given to all options for programme delivery?
- Is the Government adequately informed of practical implementation issues, including the extent to which proposals will actually work and what alternatives there are?
- Has consideration been given to testing the options under consideration?
- Has consideration been given to engaging stakeholders to develop a sense of potential barriers to implementation and possible means of addressing them?
- Have suitable risk management strategies been put in place to manage any perceived conflicts of interest?
- Has consideration been given to the priority of the initiative compared to other delivery and operational activities?

Using the experience of the implementers during policy development

- What parties will contribute to implementation and have they been involved during the policy development stage?
- Is the arrangement for service delivery clear? If not, where will practical advice on implementation issues be obtained?

Identifying, assessing and advising of risks

- Has sufficient consideration been given to major implementation risks? This includes identifying risk treatments.
- Is the risk assessment sufficiently 'hard-nosed'? Is the Government adequately informed of any significant risks to implementation?

1

Adequate consideration of the timeframe for the policy to be implemented

- Have policy considerations made practical allowances for implementation timeframes?
- If there was necessarily limited consideration of implementation issues during policy development, is there assurance that these matters will now be given immediate attention?
- Has sufficient attention been given to critical paths and practical constraints of the time needed for effective implementation?

Consideration of contingency measures and assumptions made

- Has sufficient consideration been given to the need for contingency measures?
- Do reliable data support implementation assumptions? If not, how are attempts being made to obtain data? Are alternative resources being considered to obtain data not immediately available? Will this be done immediately or later?
- Has consideration been given to any gaps in information and their possible impact on implementation? What is the consequence when the initiative is rolled out?
- Have the implementers been advised of any possible risks and consequences due to gaps in information? This includes any sensitivity analysis.

Record keeping and accountability

- Are arrangements in place to provide a sound control environment through record keeping? Are records made of key decisions and the basis for those decisions?

Governance



The important role of the senior responsible officer

- Is there clear senior management ownership and leadership in order for implementation to succeed?
- Is there senior responsible officer commitment to the success of this initiative? Lack of commitment has serious implications for the success of implementation.

Roles and responsibilities

- Have the executive and key players been consulted to discuss their expectations and are there arrangements in place to ensure this alignment is regularly checked?
- Is the cultural environment supportive of a successful implementation? Is there confidence that the team and organisational support will give a successful outcome?
- Are the expectations of the executive and key players being communicated to the programme manager and implementation team?
- Does the senior responsible officer have the right skills to be working on the policy or programme initiative (for example, legal, contract management or systems skills)? If not, has the use of a mentor or specialist expertise been considered?
- Have the roles and responsibilities of those involved in implementation been clearly defined and articulated in a formal manner?
- Do the programme/project manager and implementation team have the appropriate skills to implement the initiative (for example, financial, legal, contract management and project management skills)?
- Is there access to expertise that can benefit those fulfilling the necessary roles?
- Have the necessary delegations been provided to the programme manager and implementation team members?
- Have central and delivery agencies been consulted to negotiate delivery arrangements? Have the roles and responsibilities been agreed and formalised?
- Where third-party providers are to be used, do arrangements adequately reflect the particular risk management and governance arrangements that may arise from using such providers?
- Have dispute resolution procedures been put in place?

2

Whole-of-government considerations

Where there are whole-of-government dimensions to the policy:

- Is there a common understanding of what the initiative is trying to do, and how and when it will be done?
- Is there an understanding of the user pathways of stakeholders, including the processes within partner agencies?
- Has a lead agency been identified?
- Does the lead agency have the authority to act in this capacity?
- Have MOUs, agreements, contracts or committees been considered to formalise arrangements between the agencies?
- Have joint briefings been put in place?

Steering committee and taskforce

- Does the size and complexity of an initiative require a steering committee or taskforce to assist in implementation?
- Do members of steering committees and taskforces have the required skills?
- Is there clarity on the roles and responsibilities of members?

Effectiveness of arrangements for monitoring and review

- Are there clearly defined criteria for reporting the status of implementation and for the escalation of risks and issues to the level required?
- Are the governance arrangements robust enough to ensure that 'bad news' is not filtered out of reports to the executive?
- Will the risks/issues be resolved openly and promptly?

Guarding against conflicts of interest

- Have potential or perceived conflicts of interest been considered and addressed?
- Has the micro policy been sorted out before engaging stakeholders?

Risk management

3

Identifying and assessing risks to the project/programme early

- Will mistakes and unforeseen events be admitted and brought to the senior responsible officer's attention?
- Is risk assessment and treatment sufficiently systematic?
- If the agency is outside its traditional area of expertise or experience, how will this impact on the effectiveness of risk management? Is there a need for external risk management expertise?
- Is there assurance that risk management is undertaken by appropriately skilled and senior personnel?
- Has the chief executive been appropriately briefed on the risks to implementation? Has this been adequately documented?

Whole-of-government considerations

- Is there a common understanding of the risks to shared implementation?
- Is there an agreed identification of which entity carries which risks?

Working with organisations outside government

- Are the implementation risks of working with other organisations and contracted service providers adequately identified, assessed and treated?
- Are implementation risks appropriately and explicitly shared between the organisations in a way to maximise their effective management?

Managing risks through implementation

- Are major areas of risk broken into manageable elements with clear accountabilities?
- Are risks tracked and evaluated at key stages of implementation or when there are significant changes?
- Has an external health check of implementation risk identification and management strategies been considered?

3

Managing the consequences of risk and when to escalate

- Does the organisation have an appropriate risk escalation strategy in place?
- Is there a contingency plan, including an exit strategy, for extreme risk implementation initiatives?

4

Planning for implementation

The importance of early planning

- Has enough time been spent on planning for implementation?
- Are there adequate skills and experience for implementation?
- Have lessons from previous experience been drawn on?
- Has consideration been given to testing the implementation at an early stage?

Implementation plan

- Is the implementation plan scalable and flexible?
- What assumptions are the implementation plan based upon and how well have they been tested?
- Has the agency's experience from other implementations been incorporated into this plan?
- Does the plan provide sufficient detail to support and inform implementation?
- Does the plan address the key elements of project management, including: timeframes, roles and responsibilities; resources; risk management; and monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation?
- Does the implementation plan adequately reflect identified risks and how they will be managed and communicated?

Whole-of-government considerations

- Is there an overarching implementation plan for cross-agency initiatives, addressing the roles and dependencies of those involved?
- Is there clear and common understanding of key elements of shared implementation planning, including; governance and decision-making arrangements; possible resource and scheduling constraints; and risk management strategies?

4

Consideration of time, costs and resources required

- How do the assumptions made impact on the robustness of the plan? Those made about: pace of roll-out and timeliness; resourcing; and scope are particularly critical.
- Is adequate attention being given to the quantum and type of resources required?

Having manageable steps and milestones

- Can more be done to break implementation of the initiative into manageable steps? Try to avoid a 'big bang' approach.
- Do milestones reflect appropriately significant and assessable deliverables at each stage?
- Do milestones address the interactions and dependencies of concurrent or parallel activities?
- What is the critical path, and how will it be known that the right path is being taken?
- Are there sufficient review points so that the project can be amended, or even stopped, if necessary?

Managing changes to plans

- Are there procedures to assess the need for and manage changes to the plan, including appropriate high-level sign-off?
- Has adequate attention been given to minimising the occurrence of system changes late in the implementation cycle?

5 Procurement and contract management

Establishing the strategy

- Is there a clear understanding of the extent to which implementation depends on procurement and contract management activities?
- Does the procurement strategy support value for money and long-term service delivery objectives?
- Are the dynamics of industry understood sufficiently to determine whether acquisition requirements can be met?
- Is there a well designed procurement phase, with clearly articulated requirements, and an appropriate level of risk identification and mitigation?

Having the right expertise/experience

- Are appropriate procurement and contract management and monitoring skills available to the team? At the right time?
- Is there adequate expertise to understand the supplier market and their track record? Does this need supplementing with specialist advice?
- Is the level of decision-making and associated delegation consistent with the significance and complexity of implementation procurement and contract management processes?

Evaluation of proposals

- Is the procurement strategy legal, robust, appropriate and understood by the supplier?
- Does the approach to evaluation of proposals have both appropriate process, and match the scale of analysis to the scale of the initiative and associated risk?
- Have suppliers been asked to state any assumptions they are making against their proposals?
- Does procurement need probity advice?
- Is there confidence in evaluation of projects involving cutting-edge technology or untested service delivery? Will the use of specialist advice increase confidence in these cases?

5

Getting the right contract

- Are deliverables focused on results required?
- Can contract deliverables be accurately measured and/or assessed?
- Does the contract define regular and appropriate reviews?
- Are implementation risk mitigation measures carried through into the contract?
- Is the contract flexible enough to allow for policy and/or service delivery changes?
- Are risks appropriately and explicitly allocated?
- Does the contract contain mechanisms for managing underperformance by the contractor? The use of penalty clauses could be considered.

Contract management and monitoring

- Is there the expertise and experience to manage the supplier relationship?
- Are there procedures to allow for raising issues and handling problems, so that they are dealt with as early as possible and at the appropriate level?
- Are there formal arrangements to regularly review and assess contractor performance?
- Will changes to the contract receive the appropriate senior attention and sign-off?
- Is there assurance that agreed changes to contract do not compromise the original requirements?
- Is contract record keeping up to date and compliant with legislative requirements?

6

Stakeholder management

Identification of stakeholders

- Are the objectives for identifying stakeholders clear and understood?
- Have target groups of stakeholders been identified, consistent with intended policy outcomes?
- Do targeted stakeholders include those with knowledge or understanding of the issue, those likely to be affected, and those who have an interest in the workability of the solution?
- Has consideration been given to the risk and impact to implementation of not engaging particular stakeholders?
- What will be gained from stakeholder engagement?

Managing stakeholder interactions

- Has consideration been given to the unique characteristics of each stakeholder group?
- What approach will be used to engage each stakeholder group?
- Has consideration been given to whether there is likely to be stakeholder resistance to the proposed change and how this will be overcome?
- Is there clear responsibility for stakeholder management, and the outcomes required from stakeholder engagement?
- How will the risk of inadvertently raising stakeholder expectations be managed?
- Has consideration been given to the best timing to engage stakeholders?
- Have adequate time and resources been made available to engage stakeholders?

6

Using information from stakeholders

- Are there processes in place to ensure that information obtained from stakeholders will be acted on to improve the quality of the implementation?
- Have stakeholders been informed about how information will be used? Or, if it may not be used, are stakeholders aware that this is the case?
- Is there a strategy to deal with any potential sensitivities?
- Is there a process to escalate stakeholder information that may affect the success of the initiative?

Managing conflicts of interest

- Do governance structures formally reflect relationships with stakeholders?
- Is there any potential conflict of interest with stakeholders? If so, are there protocols in place to minimise the likelihood of such conflicts?

7

Resources

Consideration of staffing and skills required to implement the initiative

- Has enough time been spent planning resources required for implementation?
- Are there adequately skilled and experienced people available for implementation?
- Does implementation require the agency to work outside its available skills? If so, has consideration been given to employing outside expertise?
- If required implementation skills are not sufficiently available, how will the gap be patched? Has the use of an implementation mentor been considered?
- Has adequate time been spent planning the necessary training and support? If not, what are the risks, and how will they be managed?
- Has adequate consideration been given to various available training methods, such as video conferencing and on-line training?

Change management issues

- Are there structured change management strategies?
- Is there likely to be stakeholder resistance to the changes that implementation will bring? If so, are these being effectively managed and escalated as necessary?

Financial resources

- Are appropriately skilled and experienced financial management personnel available?
- Are resource estimates realistic, or do they present a risk for programme performance down the track?
- Do financial reporting arrangements provide effective monitoring and forecasting of expenditure against expectations?

7

Systems resources

- Are IT project development processes and methodologies well-established and will they be applied consistently through the life of the project?
- Does the IT project team have the right skills and experience?
- Are promised system benefits subject to a hard-nosed appraisal? The most critical technical assessments require close review, and may benefit from independent advice.
- Do implementation plans provide for structured testing of IT systems, and formal acceptance sign-off, prior to system implementation?

8 Communication

Developing a communication strategy

- Is there a clear alignment between the communication strategy and implementation's success factors?
- Has there been appropriate senior management input?
- Is the communication strategy supported by stakeholder analysis?
- Is there an alignment between the communication strategy and stakeholder analysis?

Making communication an integral part of implementation

- Is the communication strategy reflected in the implementation plan? How will it be reviewed and updated during the implementation cycle?
- Does the timing of key messages support the achievement of implementation milestones?
- Does implementation require the agency to adopt diverse methods of communication? If so, how will the necessary messages reach the right client groups?
- Does the communication strategy provide for stakeholder feedback?
- Are resources targeted to maximise the necessary messages to all stakeholders?

8

Additional whole-of-government considerations

- Does the communication strategy require the involvement of and/or advice from PM&C's Government Communications Unit?
- Are arrangements in place to ensure shared implementation activities are aligned?

Monitoring and review

9

Monitoring the initiative during implementation

- Has monitoring and review been considered as part of implementation planning?
- Are monitoring and review activities aligned with the scope and complexity of implementation?
- Are monitoring and review arrangements a realistic use of available resources?
- Are there arrangements to ensure consistent, high-quality and appropriate frequency of monitoring?
- Are monitoring arrangements linked to the critical implementation risks?
- Are monitoring and review arrangements aligned with external requirements?

Review of progress and initiating any corrective action

- Do management information systems support the provision of timely data? If not, what is being done to address this?
- Is there an effective escalation strategy to deal with 'warning sign' performance data?
- Is there integrated and systematic tracking?

Whole-of-government considerations

- Is there a shared understanding of the different reporting roles and responsibilities? Is this documented?
- Is there compatibility of data across agencies? If not, what is needed to provide meaningful progress reports?

9

Assessing the quality of the initiative post-implementation

- Is the importance of evaluation understood? Is this reflected in the implementation plan?
- Do arrangements for data collection support effective evaluation? Is there assurance that data is both accurate and consistent?
- How will results of evaluation be used to inform future implementation?

References and further guidance

References

Australian National Audit Office 2003, *Better Practice Guide — Public Sector Governance*, July, Canberra.

National Audit Office 2001, *Modern Policy-Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money*, report by the Comptroller and Auditor-General HC 289 Session 2001–2002, the Stationery Office, London.

Office of Government Commerce, *Successful Delivery Toolkit*,
http://www.ogc.gov.uk/resource_toolkit_successful_delivery_toolkit.asp

Further information

Cabinet Implementation Unit, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C)

The Cabinet Implementation Unit in PM&C works with Australian Government departments and agencies to ensure that the Australian Government's decisions are implemented on time, on budget and to expectations. The Unit seeks to ensure that policy prepared for consideration by the Prime Minister and Cabinet has clear goals, a robust assessment of costs and benefits, and clarity about how it will be implemented. The Unit helps departments and agencies to prepare their implementation plans and identify, assess and manage implementation risks. The Unit also monitors the progress of the implementation of key Government decisions and reports to the Prime Minister and Cabinet on the status of these decisions.

Further details on the Unit, including guidance on the preparation of implementation plans, is at <http://www.dpmmc.gov.au/implementation/index.cfm>

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO)

The ANAO is a specialist public sector practice providing a full range of audit services to the Parliament and Commonwealth public sector agencies and statutory bodies. The ANAO assists the Auditor-General to provide an independent view of the performance and financial management of public sector agencies and bodies. The ANAO has developed a range of Better Practice Guides which outline a series of better practice elements, that, if adopted, will encourage more efficient and effective achievement of organisational goals and objectives.

Further information on the ANAO and its reports and links to audit offices in other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally is at <http://www.anao.gov.au>

The Department of Finance and Administration (Finance)

Australian Government agencies and officials conduct procurement of property and services within a framework of legislation and relevant Government policy. The Department of Finance and Administration is responsible for the development and implementation of Government procurement policy. The Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines establish the core Australian Government Procurement Policy Framework and articulate the Government's expectations for all Departments and agencies subject to the framework.

They can be found at <http://www.finance.gov.au/procurement/>

Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO)

AGIMO is a specialist group of Finance which provides strategic advice and guidance on the application of emerging and existing information and communication technologies (ICT). The Office takes a leading role in the development and implementation of a consistent and targeted ICT approach in supporting the Government's operations and reform agenda.

They can be found at <http://www.agimo.gov.au/>

Australian Public Service Commission (APSC)

The APSC's role is to promote, review and evaluate a values-based Australian Public Service and to foster its capability. The APSC provides a wide range of leadership events and training activities including programme design, implementation and delivery, which have been developed to meet the needs of APS leaders and their agencies.

Further information may be found at <http://www.apsc.gov.au/seslearn/index.html>

Government Communications Unit (GCU)

GCU, located in the PM&C, is available to provide advice on communications best practice, including research, public relations and advertising. The GCU manages the Central Advertising System to achieve effective media planning and cost-effective media placement for government advertising. It also maintains a whole-of-government overview of current and forecast communication activities and can assist in developing communications strategies and briefs for consultants.

The GCU website is at <http://www.gcu.gov.au/>

Comcover

Comcover, located within Finance portfolio, is the Australian Government's self-managed general insurance fund, and provides insurance and risk management services to Australian Government Departments and agencies. Comcover's risk management programme assists Fund Members to obtain the knowledge, skills and expertise required to assist with the successful implementation and integration of risk management within their organisations.

The Comcover website is at <http://www.finance.gov.au/comcover/>

Office of Government Commerce UK (OGC)

OGC is an independent Office of HM Treasury UK. It is responsible for UK procurement and ppm policy and practice. As a result it has developed a wide range of high-level guidance covering procurement strategy, programme management, service management, and performance management. This practice is aligned to the life cycle of delivery from policy initiation to benefits capture. The OGC Successful Delivery Toolkit describes proven good practice for procurement, programmes, projects, risk and service management. The Toolkit includes the OGC Gateway process and brings together policy and good practice in a single place aligned to the delivery life cycle. It helps the user to ask critical questions about capability and project delivery and gives practical advice on how to improve performance.

The OGC offers a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) mentoring service that provides continuing support to leaders throughout the life cycle of a programme. For more details, contact ServiceDesk@ogc.gsi.gov.uk

The OGC website is at <http://www.ogc.gov.uk/>

Networks and contacts

PM&C and the ANAO do not endorse or promote any of the following networks or organisations, but provides this list for information.

Risk Management Institution of Australasia Limited (RMIA)

RMIA is the largest professional association for risk management practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region. It has more than 1,700 members covering every sector of the Australian economy, and all levels of government.

More information is at <http://www.rmia.org.au>

Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM)

AIPM is the national peak body for project management in Australia. The AIPM can assist government agencies with competency based training and certification for project managers, aligned with the Australian Qualifications Framework and based on individual assessment to the National Competency Standards of Project Management; assessment-based organisational accreditation programmes; and access to the latest project management research and materials across all industries.

More information is at <http://www.aipm.com.au/html/default.cfm>

Project Management Institute (PMI)

PMI is a global, not-for-profit project management association. PMI assists government agencies with project governance through the use of the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK). It provides internationally recognised qualifications, tools and services for organisations to assess and improve their level of project management maturity.

More information is at <http://www.pmi.org/info/default.asp>

Notes

www.pmc.gov.au
www.anao.gov.au