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NSW Department of Education and Communities

Evaluation Framework

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Contents

Executive Summary 3

1. Introduction 4

2. Definitions and concepts 5

2.1. What is a program? 5

2.2. What is evaluation? 6

2.3. When to evaluate? 8

3. Key principles and standards 10

3.1 Key principles 10

3.2 Standards and ethics 11

4. Setting priorities 11

4.1 Criteria for prioritising evaluation 11

4.2 Scaling evaluation 13

4.3 Evaluation plans 14

4.4 Evaluation schedules 14

5. Making evaluation transparent 15

6. Governance, roles and responsibilities 16

7. Building evaluation capability 18

8. Link to legislation, guidelines and policies 20

9. References 21

Appendix 1: Program logic models 22

Appendix 2: Template for planning an evaluation or review 24

Appendix 3: Rolling evaluation schedule template for Education & Communities Cluster 25

Appendix 4: Glossary 26

Executive Summary

The NSW Department of Education and Communities Evaluation Framework should be read in conjunction with the department's Evaluation Policy.

Key features of the policy and framework

Policy context	The department's Evaluation Framework provides guidelines to support the implementation of the Evaluation Policy. The policy and framework were developed in response to the *NSW Government Evaluation Framework* issued by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet.
Primary objective	The aim of the policy and framework is to strengthen evaluation practices across the education and community cluster to improve performance and accountability of government programs. Evaluation should support more informed, evidence based policy and decision making to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of government services.
Audience and applicability	Business unit managers and staff are expected to evaluate their programs in accordance with government policies. The Evaluation Policy applies to staff in state office portfolios, directorates, schools, TAFE NSW institutes, divisions and entities. Consistent with government commitments to increase transparency and consistency in evaluation, students, parents and carers, industry, communities and partner organisations may also be interested in the policy and the frameworks.
Key definitions	A **program** is broadly defined as a set of activities managed together over a sustained period of time that aim to deliver outcomes for a client or client group. 'Program' is sometimes used interchangeably with policy, strategy, project, initiative or intervention. Programs may include one or more projects that aim to deliver a specific product or output and achieve a strategic outcome within a specific timeframe and budget. **Evaluation** is defined as a rigorous, systematic and objective process to make judgments about the impacts and merits or worth of a program, usually in relation to its effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness.
Approach	This framework identifies the key concepts, principles, processes and structures that will guide and direct program evaluation within the department. Individual business units are responsible for implementing the policy and building their evaluation capability.
Key principles	• Evaluation will be planned early during the design of programs. • Evaluation will be appropriately resourced as part of program design, taking into account what is feasible and realistic to achieve within time and budget constraints. • Evaluation will be rigorous, systematic and objective, with appropriate scale and design. • Evaluation will be conducted with the right mix of expertise and independence from program managers. • Stakeholders are to be identified and actively involved in the evaluation process. • Evaluation will be timely and strategic to influence decision making. • Evaluation will be transparent and open.
Key requirements	Program evaluations and reviews will be conducted according to rolling evaluation schedules that will be approved by the department's executive and submitted to the Cabinet Standing Committee on Expenditure Review each financial year. All programs should undergo some form of periodic review and/or evaluation. Sound evaluation is an integral component of any program that is central to the achievement of state, corporate and national goals, involves large scale investment or is resource intensive. The scale of an evaluation should be proportionate to the size and strategic significance of the program. Major initiatives of strategic significance must incorporate an evaluation plan with appropriate budget in their implementation plan. Evaluation findings must be made publicly available on the department's website and evaluation repository, except where there is an overriding public interest against disclosure, in line with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPAA).

1. Introduction

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) Evaluation Framework provides the key principles and procedures to guide rigorous and transparent program evaluations that will inform better decision making, planning and practice. This framework is provided to support the implementation of the department's Evaluation Policy.

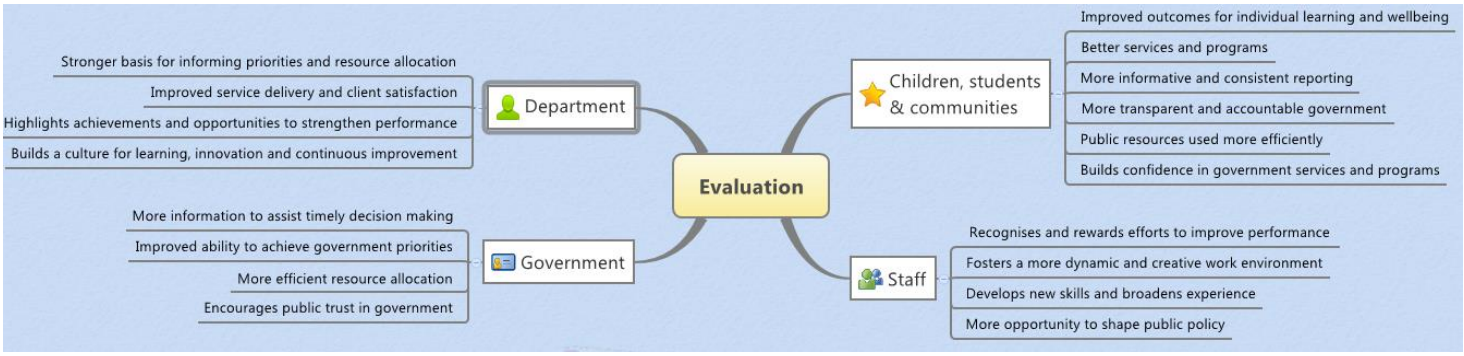
This framework provides:

- definitions and key concepts
- key principles and standards
- guidelines for setting priorities on what, when and how to evaluate
- guidelines for how to utilise evaluation findings to inform better decision and policy making and service delivery
- governance, roles and responsibilities at all levels of the organisation and
- strategies to build evaluation capability and strengthen a culture of continuous improvement.

The department's Evaluation Framework has been developed in response to the *NSW Government Evaluation Framework* and the *Circular C2013-08 Program Evaluation and Review* issued by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.[1] It aims to create a shared understanding of what evaluation is and how it should be implemented across the policy cycle. This framework reflects a whole-of-government commitment to return to quality services through evidence-based policy and decision making. Robust and systematic evaluation is essential to learn and share what works, what does not work and why, to improve delivery of quality services and enhance government accountability.

Evaluation can result in potential benefits for children, students and communities, staff, the department and the government – see Figure 1

Figure 1. Potential benefits of evaluation



[1] Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2013). *Program Evaluation and Review, Circular C2013-08* . Sydney.

2. Definitions and concepts

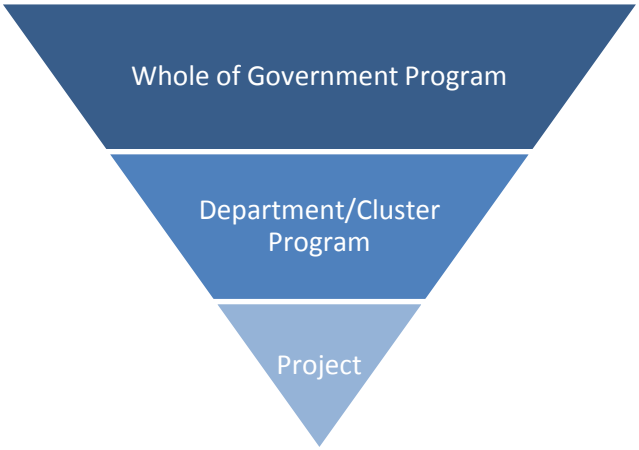
2.1. What is a program?

A program is broadly defined as: "A set of activities managed together over a sustained period of time that aims to deliver outcomes for a client or client group."[2]

For the purposes of this framework, the term 'program' is sometimes used interchangeably with policy, strategy, project, initiative or intervention. Programs may include one or more projects that aim to deliver a specific product or output and achieve a strategic outcome within a specific timeframe and budget. Programs are discrete sets of funded activities that are usually easily differentiated from the day to day delivery of services, business activities or operational functions that are core business. For example, the employment of teachers is 'business as usual'. The allocation of funds to enable beginning teachers to engage in professional development activities under *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* would be classified as a program. Major infrastructure projects would generally be outside of the scope of this framework.

Programs can be large and involve a whole-of-government initiative such as the *Stronger Together* or *Keep Them Safe*. Programs may be delivered at a local community, school or state level by multiple agencies.

Figure 2. Examples of programs at different levels



e.g. Keep them safe

e.g. Connected Communities Strategy; Great Teaching, Inspired Learning ; Community Partnership Program; Smart and Skilled; OCHRE: opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility, empowerment

e.g. Beginning teacher relief time; teach.Rural scholarships; Skills List; Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests; structured workplace learning programs; kids holiday camps

Programs include cross-sectoral partnerships with non-government organisations such as the *Connected Communities Strategy* or the National Partnerships programs for *Early Childhood Education*, the *Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership* or the *NSW Literacy and Numeracy Smarter Schools National Partnership*.

Programs may vary in size and structure and include large scale agency-wide reform such as G*reat Teaching, Inspired Learning*. These larger overarching programs usually have to be broken down into smaller projects for the purposes of evaluation. For example, rather than evaluating *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning*, evaluators may need to separately evaluate the beginning teacher relief time, *teach. Rural scholarships* and cadetship sub-programs that sit under the strategy (see Figure 2).

> Evaluation is a key tool to support evidence based policy and decision making in government.
>
> NSW Government Evaluation Framework 2013

Regardless of program scope and size, evaluation can provide useful evidence about the effectiveness or otherwise of programs at each level. Evaluation will be required for both existing and new programs. New programs include newly funded initiatives, grant programs or time-limited programs that receive recurrent funding.

[2] Adapted from Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2013). *NSW Government Evaluation Framework. Sydney*.

2.2. What is evaluation?

Evaluation is defined as: "a rigorous, systematic and objective process to make judgments about the impacts and merits or worth of a program, usually in relation to its effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness."[3]

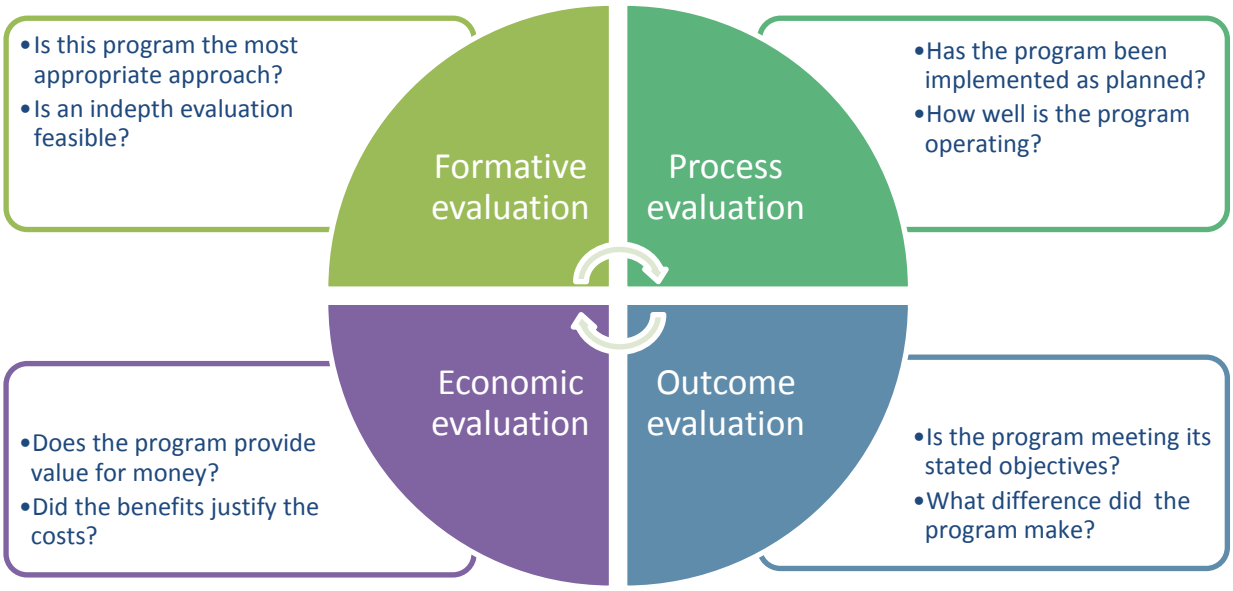
Evaluation helps to answer questions such as:

- Is the program meeting the needs of students/the community?
- Is the program achieving its objectives?
- Is the program achieving its intended outcomes?
- Is the program resulting in unintended outcomes and are these being risk managed?
- Has the program been implemented as planned?
- Does the program provide value for money?
- Should the program be continued, expanded, modified, or discontinued?
- Are there better ways to achieve the same result?
- Can resources be allocated more efficiently in the future?[4]

Evaluation that is well planned and undertaken in accordance with good practice standards is an integral part of the policy making cycle or program lifecycle. Evaluation can contribute to improvements and innovation in government policies and programs. The department uses four main types of evaluation depending on the key questions that needed to be answered, and the stage of program development and implementation – see Figure 3.

Evaluation is an integral part of managing government programs at every stage of the policy cycle.

Figure 3. Key questions to identify the type of evaluation



[3] ibid

[4] Adapted from ACT Government. (2010). *Evaluation Policy and Guidelines* . Canberra.

While a program is still in development, a **formative evaluation** is conducted. When the program has been operating for enough time to demonstrate results, a **summative evaluation** is conducted. In practice, a program evaluation may use one or more of these types of evaluation[5]:

- **Formative evaluation** – can provide information on how the program might be developed in the case of new programs or improved in both new and existing programs. Examples include:
  - **Needs assessment** to determine who needs the program, how great the need is, and what might work to meet the need
  - **Development of a program logic** to ensure there is a clear picture of how and why the program will produce the expected outcomes
  - **Business case** to define the program, delivery mechanisms, the target population and the possible outcomes with the estimated resource requirements
  - **Evaluability assessment** to determine whether an evaluation is feasible and how stakeholders can help shape its usefulness. This is useful if implementation has commenced without an evaluation plan.
- **Process evaluation** – investigates how the program is delivered, and may consider alternative delivery procedures. It can assess whether activities are being implemented as intended, which aspects of a program are working well and which aspects could be improved to inform adjustments to service delivery.
- **Outcome evaluation** – determines whether the program is meeting its stated objectives and achieving its intended results. Key questions relate to whether the program made a difference and caused demonstrable effects on specifically defined target outcomes. Program effectiveness can be measured in terms of its short, medium, or long-term impact. This is often referred to as impact or result evaluation.
- **Economic evaluation** – can address questions of efficiency by standardising outcomes in terms of their dollar value to answer questions of value for money. **Cost-benefit analysis** determines the net benefits of a program accruing to society and whether the net benefits outweigh the costs of providing the program. **Cost-effectiveness analysis** compares the costs of different methods that are attempting to achieve the same outcomes to determine which is the most efficient service. Cost-effectiveness analysis is also used where valuation of outcomes cannot easily be done –refer to the NSW Government's *Guidelines for Economic Appraisal*, Section 8 for more information.

More details on program logic models are provided in Appendix 1.

Evaluation can differ from other types of research, monitoring and assessments that are carried out within the department. It is important to recognise that the range of activities listed below may use similar methods of data collection and analysis as used in evaluation, but their purpose and level of analysis vary significantly.

- **Program reviews** – are typically quicker and less methodically rigorous. Reviews focus more on operational assessments of progress in achieving program objectives often to inform continuous improvement. This is often referred to as management review. Reviews often take place periodically after implementation has started and may be useful when there is insufficient information to conduct an evaluation or if the resources and timing for the evaluation are limited. They can also be used to set up an evaluation framework for an existing program that previously did not have one. It is often less important that reviews be conducted by an independent party.

[5] Adapted from Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. (2007). *Program Evaluation Guidelines* . Sydney; Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2013). *NSW Government Evaluation Framework. Sydney*.

- **Policy analysis** – examines the impacts, benefits and costs of options to assess the best or preferred response to an identified issue. It typically occurs prior to implementation.[6]
- **Research** – is closely related to evaluation, and when asking questions about the effectiveness of a program, may even be the same thing. Research can also ask different types of questions that may not be related to merit or worth of a program.[7]
- **Monitoring** – is a management process to periodically report against planned program targets or agreed key performance indicators (KPIs). This is sometimes referred to as performance management. Monitoring is not generally concerned with questions about the purpose, merit, or relevance of programs. Monitoring is typically used to describe outputs to ensure the best possible performance and give an indication of progress in a program rather than establishing outcomes.[8]
- **Audit** – examines programs focusing on questions about the efficient delivery of a program and whether it achieved its objectives, rather than questioning the objectives or assessing other program options. Audits can assess the adequacy, consistency or effectiveness of performance, improvement of governance, compliance with regulations, rules, policies or procedures or the adequacy of organisational structures, systems or processes.
- **Action research** – is a process designed to enable practitioners to reflect critically on the impacts of their programs or self-evaluate their teaching and learning programs to inform improvements in program design or implementation.[9] Self-evaluation is critically important. It falls outside the parameters of this framework because one of the key principles underpinning robust evaluation is that evaluators must be independent and impartial.

2.3. When to evaluate?

Evaluation can and may take place across the lifecycle of a program, from initial design and piloting through to implementation and ongoing delivery as a mainstream program. All new and existing programs will be evaluated to assess their continued relevance and relationship to the department's priorities and other programs and their effectiveness and efficiency in delivering outcomes.

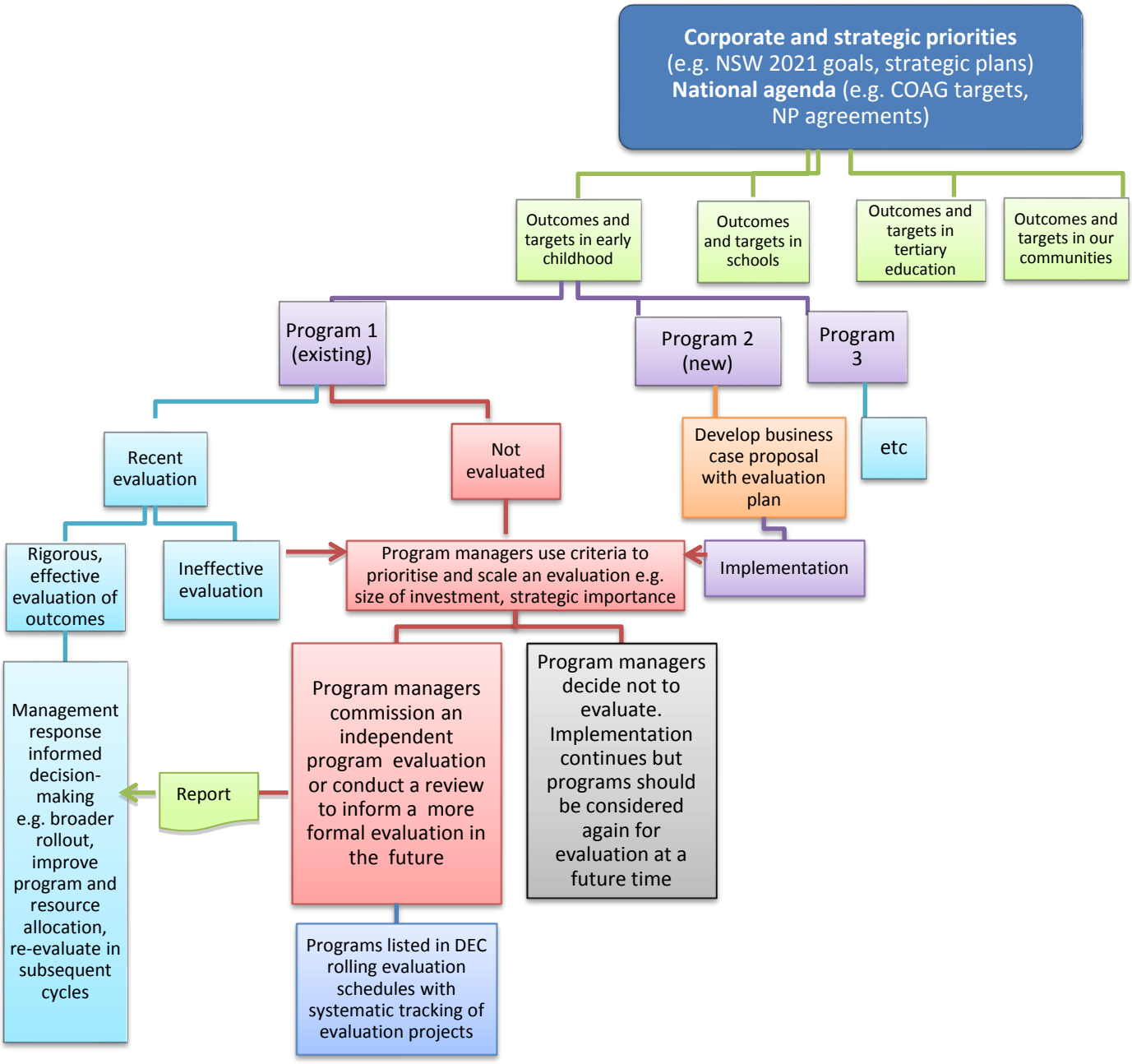
Evaluations could identify possible program improvements. Evaluation has an equally important role to play in assessing the impact of new policies and assessing whether existing mainstream programs are continuing to deliver outcomes effectively and efficiently.

A decision making process to determine when an evaluation is scheduled and whether a program should be included as a priority in the department's rolling evaluation schedule is outlined in Figure 4. All existing programs that involve a major investment of departmental and other government resources and are commitments included in state and/or strategic plans will be evaluated. Programs will also be considered as priorities for evaluation if they have not been recently evaluated, or where the standard of evidence in support of program effectiveness is very poor.

Program managers are responsible for the prioritisation and evaluation of grant programs, ideally occurring prior to the renewal of funding agreements. (More factors to consider in prioritising programs for evaluation are in Section 4).

[6] Althaus, C., Bridgeman, P. & Davis, G., *Australian Policy Handbook* (4th ed.). (2007). Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
[7] Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2013). *NSW Government Evaluation Framework. Sydney*.
[8] Ibid; ACT Government. (2010). *Evaluation Policy and Guidelines* . Canberra.
[9] NSW Department of Education and Training. (2010). *Action Research in Education Guidelines*. Sydney.

Figure 4. Using evaluations and reviews to inform decision making and planning



If a program is not included on the department's rolling evaluation schedule, senior officers and program managers are still responsible for prioritising program evaluations within their areas of responsibility and commissioning independent evaluations as part of the program lifecycle. If a formal evaluation is not possible (e.g. due to limited information, resources or time constraints), it may be appropriate for program managers to seek a program review in the first instance. These review findings could be used to develop a more formal evaluation at a future time.

Evaluation plans are required for all business case proposals that are submitted to the Cabinet Standing Committee on Expenditure Review (ERC). NSW Treasury provides direction on the timing, process and format for the submission of business case proposals as part of annual budget processes. Finance Directorate will coordinate the collation of business case proposals for submission to ERC. The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) and Finance Directorate must be consulted on evaluation activity that requires the endorsement of ERC. This may result in specialist evaluation units such

as CESE actively conducting the evaluation, managing external evaluation providers or contributing to project reference groups to ensure robust evaluation processes are adopted. Internal approval processes will be adapted to ensure that CESE has the opportunity to review and facilitate appropriate evaluation proposals before they are submitted to ERC for funding approval.

Evaluation also needs to be built into smaller programs that do not have to go before ERC. The department's Evaluation Policy identifies roles and responsibilities in relation to evaluation. As a general principle, program managers would be planning the evaluation whenever implementing any new policy or program. However, it is not feasible to evaluate all programs and evaluation needs to be scaled accordingly. At a minimum, program managers are expected to articulate the outcomes their programs aim to achieve and identify appropriate measurable indicators. They need to ensure that information systems and data sets are well developed for monitoring and recording information that would enable an independent evaluator to assess the program for effectiveness at a later date. As a general rule, all programs should undergo some form of periodic review and/or evaluation.[10]

3. Key principles and standards

3.1 Key principles

Key principles that will underpin the planning and conduct of quality evaluations are:

- **Evaluation will be planned early during the design of programs** – Evaluations should be built into the formative stage of program design to ensure that programs are designed in such a way that they can be evaluated and to increase the robustness of the evaluation. This includes articulating evaluation questions, developing a program logic and identifying clear outcome measures, data to measure the outcomes and key stakeholders.
- **Evaluation will be appropriately resourced as part of program design, taking into account what is feasible and realistic to achieve within time and budget constraints** – Appropriate resources should be allocated for an evaluation during the design of a program. A robust evaluation design may use both quantitative and qualitative methods including the use of existing administrative data sets and information systems and collecting data from clients.
- **Evaluation will be rigorous, systematic and objective with appropriate scale and design** – Evaluations should be methodologically sound and replicable in accordance with the program's size, risk, priority and significance.
- **Evaluation will be conducted with the right mix of expertise and independence from program managers** – Evaluation teams may need to include relevant expertise such as experts and be balanced in composition taking into account gender and cultural diversity where appropriate. The involvement of program managers, stakeholders and subject matter experts in the planning and governance of evaluations and reviewing draft evaluation reports can enhance the potential learning from an evaluation and acceptance of its results. Evaluation teams must undertake to correct any identified errors of fact but the responsibility for the final content of evaluation reports will rest with the evaluators.
- **Stakeholders are to be identified and actively involved in the evaluation process** – This will ensure that the definition of outcomes, activities and outputs, as well as what is important to measure in assessing program success, is determined in a collaborative way. Stakeholders are vital in contributing to the interpretation of evaluation information and in formulating recommendations.
- **Evaluation will be timely and strategic to influence decision making** – Early planning of evaluations should commence with the selection of methodologies and collection of baseline data. Providing valid, reliable information requires a balance of technical and time requirements with practical realities to ensure the evaluation supports decision making. The timing of evaluations

[10] Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2010). Good Practice Guide to Grants Administration. Sydney, p. 23-24

needs to take into account a realistic amount of time needed to answer the questions being asked. Some evaluations may take more time to accrue sufficient evidence and produce measurable outcomes. Evaluation reports will be used to inform decision making where appropriate, to improve outcomes and resource allocation. Evaluation will be used to identify impacts and benefits, to expand successful programs, to redesign the delivery of existing programs, or to reprioritise resources from existing programs should they no longer be considered a government priority or effective and efficient in achieving expected benefits.

- **Evaluation will be transparent and open** – Comprehensive information on all aspects of the evaluation should be systematically recorded, including choice of methods, analyses, testing of assumptions, findings and conclusions. Factual findings and conclusions should be explicitly justified and clearly distinguished from value judgements and recommendations. Evaluation reports must be publicly released, except where there is an overriding public interest against disclosure, in line with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPAA). Evaluation reports should be published, with a plain English executive summary, in a range of forums, including the department's website and evaluation repository, to enhance accountability and promote evidence-based policy development.

3.2 Standards and ethics

Staff and other parties engaged to evaluate programs must do so in accordance with the professional standards endorsed by the department's *Code of Conduct Policy*. All evaluations need to be conducted using ethical and culturally appropriate principles set out in the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007* issued by the National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia; the *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Evaluations* from the Australasian Evaluation Society; and the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies 2011* from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Links to these codes and guidelines are listed in Section 8.

4. Setting priorities

4.1 Criteria for prioritising evaluation

All major programs of strategic significance and/or substantial financial investment need to incorporate an evaluation strategy (with appropriate budget) into their implementation plan. Careful consideration needs to be given to the type, scope and frequency of evaluation within the time and resources required and available. To ensure consistency and strategic coverage across the wide range of policies, programs and services delivered across the department, the following five criteria will be considered as the most important to prioritise and focus evaluation activity:

- **Financial scale** – The larger the budget allocation/government investment, the higher the priority for evaluation to assess if the programs achieved the intended outcomes and delivered value for money.
- **Strategic alignment of the program to government priorities** – Programs that are included in corporate and strategic plans or state government plans will be prioritised for evaluation. Programs that have greater potential to contribute to the achievement of the department's goals are more important to evaluate.
- **External requirements** – Programs that are funded with cross-sectoral involvement and have contractual obligations will be considered of higher importance for evaluation. Programs that are delivered in partnership with other government agencies or non-government organisations would also be given higher priority for evaluation.
- **Existing evidence base** – Depending on the maturity of the program, higher priority would be given to programs that have not been recently evaluated e.g. in the past five years for major strategic programs or within the past ten years for smaller scale programs[11]. Greater importance would also

[11] NSW Treasury. (2007). NSW Government Guidelines for Economic Appraisal, pp. 21, 68

be given to programs where the existing evidence base did not adequately assess the impact of the program or the design and methodology applied was of poor standard.

- **Methodological considerations** – It is important to consider whether the evaluation will result in robust conclusions and recommendations. Programs that cannot be evaluated must be treated differently e.g. subjected to a review for appropriateness, efficiency etc.

Table 1 lists each criteria and examples of factors to consider when prioritising evaluation activity. The criteria are not ranked in order of importance. Other criteria include: risk to clients, stakeholders or the department of not meeting objectives; innovation; terminating programs; evaluation requests and cluster capability. Business unit managers could apply the criteria to ensure the programs of greatest strategic importance are prioritised for inclusion in rolling evaluation schedules – see Section 4.4.

Table 1: Criteria for prioritising evaluation activity

Criteria	Examples of factors to be considered
Key Criteria	
Financial scale size of investment	• What is the budget allocation or other associated costs for this program? • Is the program large or small scale or resource intensive? • Are the costs likely to escalate significantly in the future?
Strategic alignment of the program to government priorities	• Is the program of higher or lower priority for the Department's policy development? • Is the program aligned with the Department's and/or state government corporate plans? • Is the client group a high/stated policy priority for the department or the government? • What are the key questions to be addressed by the evaluation? • What is the scale of the evaluation required?
External requirements e.g. cross-sectoral involvement	• Is the program partly or wholly funded by other jurisdictions such as the Australian Government, Council of Australian Governments (COAG)? • Does the program have contractual obligations for evaluation such as the National Partnership Agreements and other Commonwealth-State Agreements? • Is the program delivered in partnership with other agencies or NGOs?
Existing evidence base	• Has the program been recently evaluated (e.g. in past 5 years)? • Do existing evaluations adequately assess the impact of the program?
Methodological considerations	• Will this evaluation result in robust conclusions and recommendations? • Are the objectives of the program clearly stated and measurable? • Does the program have a clear logic for how the objectives will be achieved? • Are there existing data sources to measure outcomes and obtain baseline data and/or comparison groups available? • Is there sufficient statistical power and sample size to detect program effects? • What outcome evaluation designs are feasible to allow for causal attribution to be made about the effect of the program? • Does the design of the program allow for a counterfactual to be drawn (i.e. what would have happened in the absence of the program/intervention)?
Other criteria	
Risk management	• Does the program pose risks to children, young people, staff or to the department? • Is the program at risk of not meeting its objectives?
Innovation	• Is the program a trial or pilot prior to rollout? • Is the program being transferred to a new setting or target group? • Is a new policy being developed? • Are new needs emerging or are clients' needs changing?
Terminating programs	• Is the program funded on a time-limited basis?
Evaluation requests	• Is there a request for an evaluation e.g. internally from senior management or externally from outside interests?
Cluster capability	• Does the department's research and evaluation function have the capability, resources and independence to conduct the evaluation?

4.2 Scaling evaluation

Evaluation needs to be scaled to the size, priority, profile, risks and potential benefits of the program.

The scale of an evaluation needs to be proportionate to the size or significance of a program. The *NSW Government Evaluation Framework* outlines the extent to which programs of varying importance on four levels could be evaluated and how the evaluation may be scaled depending on the priority of the program (see Table 2). Decisions on scaling will be made at the discretion of senior officers, in consultation with the Executive. At times, other government agencies may request an evaluation.

Table 2: Program characteristics and relative scale of evaluation[12]

Tier	Characteristics of Program	Characteristics of Evaluation
1	• Limited investment of resources • Low strategic priority • Low risk • Similar to programs that have been evaluated • Responsibility of a single Minister • Simple design • Not widely publicised	Evaluate at Secretary's discretion, but may be a less formal review process. Program information should be routinely collected: • Program rationale, objectives • Budget • Risks • Milestones • Performance measures (such as KPIs) • Responsible Executive and/or program manager
2	• Moderate investment (relative to agency) • Named in agency strategic plan • Low to moderate risk • Responsibility of single Minister or agency • Not recently reviewed (in the case of existing programs)	Secretary's discretion to evaluate, and decide: • At what points to evaluate (may be summative only) • To evaluate internally or contract out • If contracted out, whether to manage contract through program area or cluster evaluation unit • Budget source and amount • Need for a Steering Committee and its composition • Publication of evaluation report.
3	• Significant investment (relative to cluster/agency) • Named in NSW 2021/strategic plans • Moderate to high risk • Joint responsibility of two or more Ministers • Involvement of external stakeholders or delivery partners • Complicated design, with multiple elements (or sub-programs) • Not recently reviewed	Evaluation expected • Evaluation plan agreed with partners with clear KPIs and responsibility for data collection • Quarantined evaluation budget (for new proposals) • Consider independent evaluation by Treasury, consultants or by cluster specialists • Steering Committee with membership representing all responsible agencies, NGOs and possibly central agencies • Peer review, perhaps by evaluation expert in another cluster • Report to responsible Ministers and Secretary/CEOs • Support and advice from CESE and DPC/Treasury if sought • Publication of evaluation report.
4	• Substantial investment (relative to government) • Resource intensive • High priority (at cluster or whole of government level) • High risk or controversial • Joint responsibility of multiple ministers • Complex • Innovative, pilot, trial • Involves multiple delivery partners • External reporting / evaluation requirement	Formal evaluation mandatory • Detailed evaluation plan covering the program lifecycle with methods, data, analyses, KPIs agreed prior to implementation • Quarantined evaluation budget • Independent evaluation, in consultation with Treasury, with governance led outside the affected agency or cluster • Evaluation steering committee chaired or co-chaired by agency Executive; DPC/Treasury Executive representation • Peer review by content and evaluation experts and/or Treasury (if not carrying out evaluation) • Report results and next steps to relevant Ministers & Cabinet • Publication of evaluation report.

[12] Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2013). *NSW Government Evaluation Framework*. Sydney.

4.3 Evaluation plans

To ensure consistency of evaluations undertaken and to maximise the benefits of an evaluation, staff are responsible for developing evaluation plans for programs they intend to evaluate. These plans need to be negotiated and agreed with all delivery partners, including non-government organisations. Consultation with other key stakeholders and service users may also be required. Although the details and scope of the evaluation plan will differ from evaluation to evaluation, all plans need to consider and specify the:

- subject of the evaluation
- purpose of the program to be evaluated
- description of the program/ project/ initiative including its alignment with the Department's corporate plans; major components, how it is expected to work and the resources involved
- purpose of the evaluation
- key questions the evaluation will seek to answer
- primary audience of the evaluation
- human and material resources to be allocated to the evaluation e.g. a quarantined evaluation budget
- who will conduct and manage the evaluation
- baseline data and methodology
- plans to disseminate and/or publish the findings
- privacy and ethical considerations
- governance arrangements e.g. steering committee or reference group and membership
- evaluation budget and timeline.

A template for an evaluation plan is given in Appendix 2. More details on the elements of an evaluation plan are provided in the *NSW Government Evaluation Framework.*

New program proposals for the Expenditure Review Committee or proposals to expand or significantly reform existing programs must include:

- an evaluation plan attached to a business case
- a quarantined evaluation budget based on the type of evaluation to be undertaken and estimated costs
- an explicit, pre-determined date for review or evaluation to inform future decisions on expenditure
- findings of the evaluation/review conducted (in the case of proposals for additional funding).

4.4 Evaluation schedules

The department is required to prepare rolling schedules of programs to be evaluated or reviewed over the forward financial year.[13] Schedules must be prepared for each financial year, in consultation with DPC and Treasury and submitted to ERC for approval, starting from 2013/14 onwards. The Executive will approve the rolling evaluation schedules for the department.

In the longer term, evaluation activity should arise out of an effective corporate planning and performance reporting cycle. Business units will be asked to align their activities to the department's and the government's strategic objectives. This will allow the executive to ask questions about whether the activities undertaken are the most efficient and most cost-effective means of achieving those goals.

Until such time as this planning process is implemented, CESE will coordinate the preparation of the Schedules in consultation with senior officers across the cluster for submission to ERC. A template for the rolling evaluation schedule is given in Appendix 3. In the first instance, program managers (at the executive director, general manager or director level) will be asked to prioritise and identify all programs that are being evaluated, reviewed or are planned for evaluation, including programs at Tiers 1 to 4.

[13] Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2013, August). *Program Evaluation and Review, Circular C2013-08* . Sydney.

The schedules will then be submitted to the Executive, who will be asked to identify whether there are any Tier 3 or Tier 4 programs that are not scheduled for evaluation. The Executive will then decide whether an evaluation should be scoped for those programs. Some flexibility may also be required to adjust the annual schedules to meet emerging needs for program evaluations or unexpected external requests.

5. Making evaluation transparent

The benefits of evaluation will be enhanced by proactive communication of the findings and recommendations to decision makers, stakeholders, and the community. How the findings of an evaluation will be used and disseminated needs to be considered at the planning stages of the evaluation.[14]

Evaluation findings are to be made publicly available, unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure, in line with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPAA). Government information includes published reports, data and evaluation findings as indicated in the Agency Information Guide on the department's website. CESE will publish the department's program evaluation reports in a repository hosted on the CESE website except where there is an overriding public interest against disclosure. Business units will be encouraged to also provide a link to evaluation reports on their own websites, in accordance with the delegations of authority under GIPAA. Completed reports will be identified during the process of compiling rolling evaluation schedules and annual reports. Business unit managers should notify the Director, CESE when evaluation projects are completed and provide either URLs or soft copies of the final reports or advice on their determination not to proceed with proactive release of the reports.

The Information Access Unit (IAU) has the responsibility to provide advice on the GIPAA requirements to departmental staff. If a program manager believes that there are compelling reasons against publication of evaluations findings, the IAU should be consulted to assess whether these reasons amount to an overriding public interest against disclosure. Where there exists an overriding public interest against disclosing the evaluation findings, the program manager would provide a copy of the evaluation findings to the CESE together with a summary of reasons supporting the decision not to publish. If the overriding public interest against disclosure only applies to selected information within the evaluation findings, those sections could be redacted and the remaining information published. The IAU can provide assistance with redacting documents to facilitate partial release. In such a case, the program manager would provide CESE with two versions of the evaluation findings – a full version for record keeping and a redacted version for public disclosure, together with a summary of reasons supporting the decision for partial release.

Communicating the evaluation findings helps to:

- disseminate knowledge, experiences and key lessons
- promote transparency and accountability
- build confidence in the effectiveness of a program
- improve evaluation quality
- contribute to learning and the development of stronger evidence bases
- drive positive change to promote improved performance
- reduce duplication of effort and
- share lessons learnt from the evaluation with other evaluators.[15]

The aim of communicating evaluation is to inform decision making at all levels for better policy, planning, resource allocation, and service delivery. It is important to identify the primary audience for the evaluation, that is, the specific people who will use the evaluation findings, and who have the capacity and required authority to effect change. Evaluation should be closely aligned with internal

[14] HM Treasury. (2011). *The Magenta Book: Guidance for evaluation.* London.

[15] Adapted from Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2013). *NSW Government Evaluation Framework. Sydney*.

decision-making cycles such as the annual budget, corporate planning, and reporting cycle and with external decision making processes at the state and national levels.

Evaluation evidence can be used to inform a range of different types of decisions, such as:

- immediate decisions about the program, including whether to roll out a pilot as a mainstream program
- longer term decisions about the program, including informing budget reviews and the future scale of investment
- how the program could be improved, for example, if the evaluation identifies issues or challenges to delivery how future policies and programs could be designed and implemented.

6. Governance, roles and responsibilities

All staff members have key but distinct roles and responsibilities to ensure that evaluation is an integral part of their work, and supports learning and accountability.

Secretary

The secretary is responsible for the overall leadership of the evaluation function. The secretary will have the following responsibilities:

- report to the Minister on the program of works in the department's rolling evaluation schedules
- report to DPC on the implementation of the *NSW Government Evaluation Framework*
- create an enabling environment that recognises the importance of evaluation and prioritises resource allocation for the evaluation function
- require and seek assurance of management response and follow-up to all commissioned evaluations in the department's rolling evaluation schedules.

The Executive

The executive will provide oversight and assure the overall coordination of the evaluation function. The executive will have the following responsibilities:

- approve the evaluation policy and consider annual reports on its implementation
- ensure the independence and quality of the evaluation function
- approve the Evaluation Framework and oversee its implementation
- identify priority programs to be included in the rolling evaluation schedules
- approve the program of work and costings in the rolling evaluation schedules
- require and seek assurance of management response and follow-up to program evaluations
- utilise and draw on the findings and recommendations of evaluations to inform corporate policy development, strategic planning and decision making for resource allocation and service delivery
- review and approve the management response to independent evaluations and major strategic evaluations where the scale of the evaluation involves significant resources.

Deputy secretaries

The members of the executive are responsible for the overall leadership of the evaluation function in their portfolios. The deputy secretaries will have the following responsibilities:

- advise on the program of works for the department's rolling evaluation schedules
- report to the secretary on the planning and implementation of the department's Evaluation Framework in their portfolio
- create an enabling environment that recognises the importance of evaluation and prioritises resource allocation to ensure the independence and quality of the evaluation function in their portfolio
- require and seek assurance that senior officers and staff respond and follow-up on all evaluations undertaken within their portfolio.

General managers, executive directors, and chief executive officers

Senior officers are responsible for the overall coordination and leadership of the evaluation function in their directorates/entities

The general managers, executive directors, and chief executive officers will have the following responsibilities:

- coordinate and manage the evaluation function in the directorate /entity
- report to the Executive on the implementation of the department's evaluation policy in the directorate/ entity
- provide inputs for inclusion in the rolling evaluation schedules
- ensure all staff are briefed on the department's evaluation policies and procedures
- review and approve the evaluation plans and final reports on major strategic evaluations in the directorate/ entity. The approvals will be based on the principles, standards and ethical guidelines outlined in the Evaluation Framework
- make all requested and relevant information available to independent evaluators
- provide support and resources in an enabling environment that recognises the importance of evaluation and ensures the independence and quality of the evaluation function in the directorate/ entity
- ensure the transparency of and public access to evaluation reports for those evaluations included in the department's rolling evaluation schedules and all other evaluations undertaken within the directorate/ entity, unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure in line with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*
- monitor management responses to all evaluations commissioned in the department's rolling evaluation schedules, indicating the feasibility of implementing recommendations, and actions to address recommendations, as appropriate.

Program managers e.g. directors, principals, senior managers, grant program managers

Senior managers are responsible for the overall coordination and leadership of the evaluation function in the directorate/school/entity. These managers will have the following responsibilities:

- coordinate and manage the evaluation function in the directorate/school/entity
- ensure all staff are briefed on the department's evaluation policies and procedures
- ensure the evaluability of programs by identifying clear outcomes, developing measurable performance indicators, establishing targets and ensuring that management information systems are in place to capture baseline and program-level information
- ensure management responses to all commissioned evaluations by drawing on findings and indicating the feasibility of implementing recommendations and actions to address recommendations, as appropriate to improve program quality and guide decision making on resource allocation
- promote organisational learning through analysis and utilising evaluation findings across policies and programs in the directorate/school/entity.

For the conduct of school self-evaluation, school leaders and staff should refer to the School Planning Policy and the Leading and Managing the School support document.

Evaluations of preschool programs are key requirements in the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. All service providers must be assessed and certified, by the Department of Education and Communities as the regulatory authority in NSW for the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

Strategic Information and Reporting Directorate

The general manager, strategic information and reporting is responsible for overall policy coordination and monitoring of the department's Evaluation Policy and implementation documents.

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) will have the following responsibilities:

- lead major strategic evaluation projects for the department
- lead the implementation of the Evaluation Framework, including development of the department's evaluation policy, rolling evaluation schedules and the publication of evaluation reports in a repository on the CESE's website
- coordinate, monitor and report on the implementation of the department's Evaluation Framework
- develop and disseminate support documents such as evaluation guidelines, resource materials
- provide consultancy and advice on program evaluation for other staff
- develop capability for evaluation by leading cluster-wide seminars and information sharing sessions on evaluation methodology
- advise the executive on the independence of the evaluation function from operational management.

CESE is able to draw on the research and evaluation expertise of the independent CESE Advisory Council to inform the development of the department's evaluation policy and procedures and to provide expert and peer reviews to ensure evaluations meet high standards of rigour, independence and integrity. The Procurement Directorate will establish a panel of pre-qualified consultants with specialised skills, expertise and experience to undertake independent research and evaluation in the education sector.

Steering Committees and Project Reference Groups

Steering committees are required for strategically significant evaluations and for other large and complex evaluations. A steering committee will be chaired by a member of the executive or a nominee of the executive. Membership may include representatives of the following groups: program/project managers and operational managers in portfolios; key stakeholder groups; independent experts with relevant content and/or evaluation expertise and CESE. The roles and responsibilities of steering committees are:

- review and approve the evaluation plan
- select and approve the independent evaluation team
- monitor and provide input to the evaluation
- provide feedback on draft evaluation reports
- provide assurance on the integrity and rigour of the evaluation design, process and the quality of the deliverables
- provide guidance on appropriate actions to be taken in response to evaluation findings and
- approve the final report for submission to the Executive.

Project reference groups may have similar composition to a steering committee but provides an advisory function.

7. Building evaluation capability

The People and Services Directorate is responsible for workforce capability and development. There are a number of specialists units within the department that have evaluation capability, e.g. within CESE, Policy Planning and Reporting Directorate in Schools Portfolio, Aboriginal Affairs Portfolio and the Commission for Children and Young People.

DPC and Treasury are also leading an Evaluation Community of Practice, which will target professional development activities, share evaluation findings and improve understanding of evaluation processes. These activities will be

targeted across all levels of the cluster, from Executives to program managers.

While capability development is critical, it is also important that staff adhere to the principle that evaluation should be independent of program management. Professional development activities should be targeted to provide staff with capabilities that are appropriate to their role. For example, program managers need to know how to design a program logic, collect relevant data and to ask the appropriate research questions when commissioning evaluation. Business unit managers may be involved in program reviews but should not evaluate their own programs to avoid the inherent conflict of interest it poses.

8. Link to legislation, guidelines and policies

DEC *5 Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017*
https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/how-we-operate/strategies-and-plans/corporate-plans/fiveyrs-strategic-plan.pdf

DEC corporate and strategic plans
http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/about-us/plans-reports-and-statistics/strategies-and-plans/corporate

NSW 2021 Plan
http://www.2021.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/NSW2021_WEB%20VERSION.pdf

DEC Evaluation Policy
http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/evaluation-policy

DEC Code of Conduct
https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/staff/ethical_behav/conduct/Code_guide.pdf
http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/About-us/Who-we-are/Policies-and-procedures/Policies-and-procedures

Delegations of authority under GIPAA for proactive and public release of government information
https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/admiserv/admipolp/delegate/gipaa/gipaa_index.pdf

Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluation*
http://www.aes.asn.au/join-the-aes/membership-ethical-guidelines.html

NSW Government Evaluation Community of Practice and online evaluation toolkit
http://evaluation.dpc.nsw.gov.au/
http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/programs_and_initiatives/policy_makers_toolkit/evaluation_toolkit
http://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/cpe

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
http://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/

Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007 issued by the National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Universities Australia
http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/r39.pdf

NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
NSW Government Evaluation Framework
http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/155844/NSW_Government_Evaluation_Framework_Aug_2013.pdf
Circular C2013-08 Program Evaluation and Review
http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/announcements/circulars/2013/c2013-08_program_evaluation_and_review

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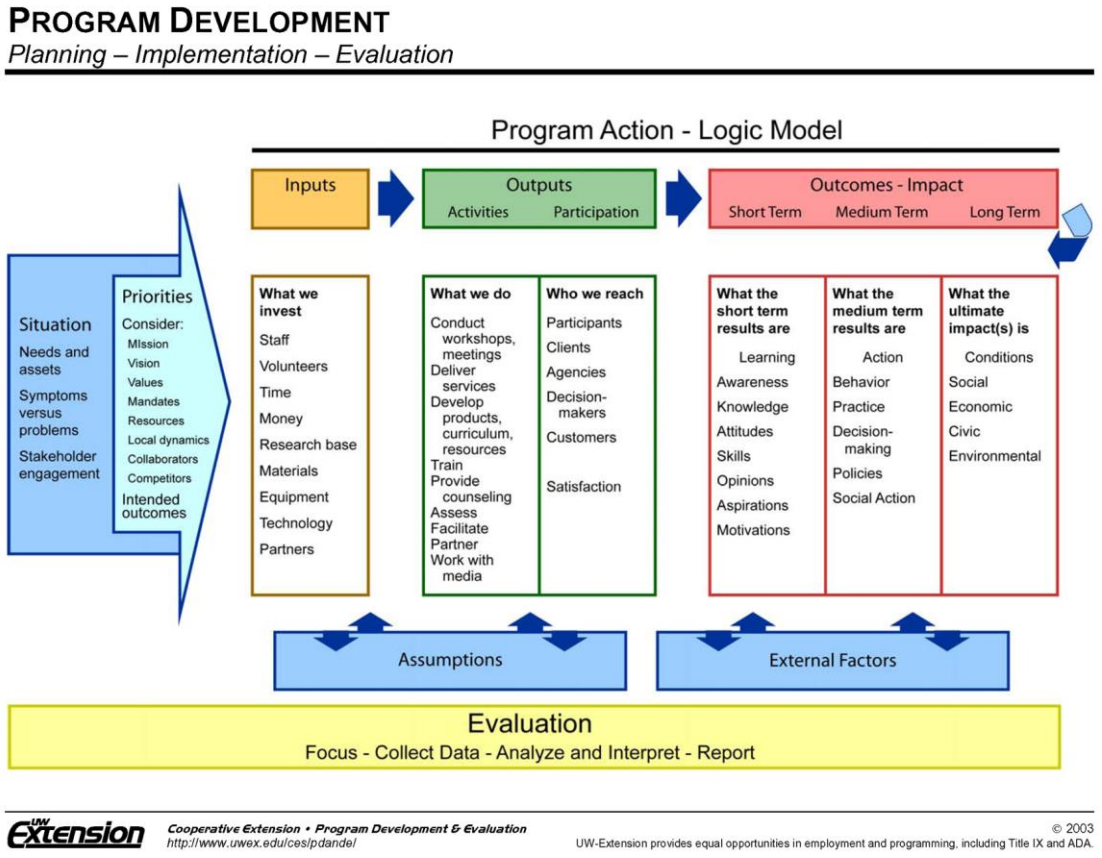
UNESCO. (2007). *Evaluation Policy.* Retrieved August 6, 2013, from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001501/150135e.pdf

Appendix 1: Program logic models

A program logic model uses a diagram to describe how a program is expected to bring about changes to achieve desired outcomes (Figure 5). The logic model can outline the context for the program – the **situation** and **priorities** such as national and state policy initiatives that are driving a reform agenda. The government's investment of funds or people are **inputs** that will be allocated to do activities for people such as students or an organisation or entity such as preschools or community centres and are identified as **outputs**. The model can clarify what **outcomes** or benefits are anticipated in the short, medium or long term. Longer term outcomes include the anticipated economic and social **impact** of the program. Logic models can also identify other influences on the program outcomes such as **assumptions** about the program or **external factors**. Examples of outcomes could include higher student achievement, better management practices or stronger community engagement. An evaluation could focus on measuring, where possible, the key outcomes to assess the impact of the program. More information on program logic models can be found:

- **Program Development**, University of Wisconsin
- **Evaluation toolkit**, NSW government
- **Better evaluation** website
- Funnell, S. and Rogers, P. (2011) *Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and Logic Models*, San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

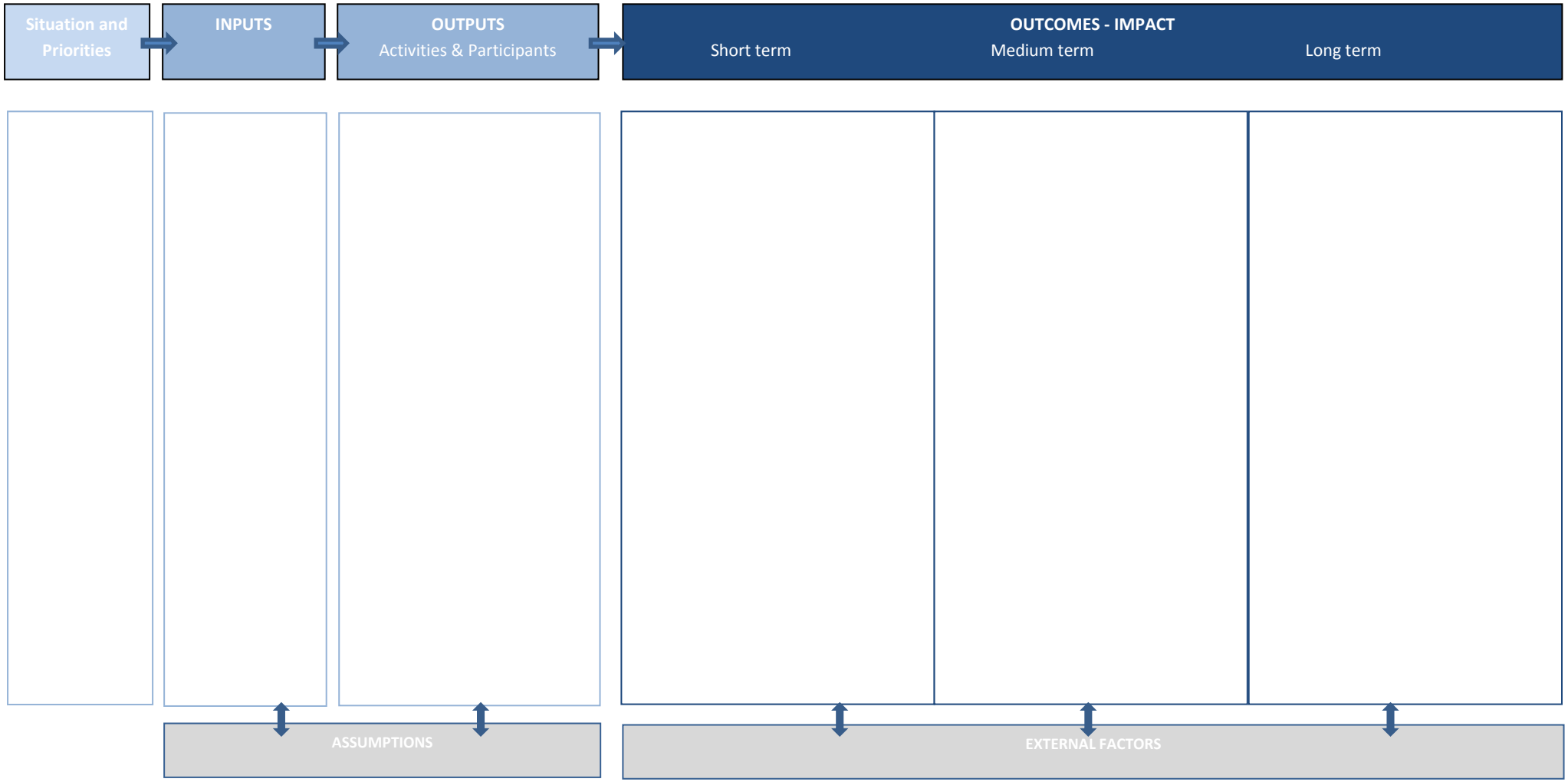
Figure 5: Program logic model [16]



[16] Taylor-Powell, E. (2005). Logic Models: A framework for program planning and evaluation. University of Wisconsin.

Appendix 1 (continued): Template for program logic model

Program Name:



For assistance using this template, please contact the **Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation**.

Appendix 2: Template for planning an evaluation or review

For assistance using this template, please contact the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Program	Brief description of program
Business unit	Program manager
Start date	Evaluator(s)
Finish date	Date of previous evaluation/review
Purpose of the evaluation/review	
Key questions to be answered in evaluation/review	
Methodology	
[e.g. survey, performance indicators, baseline data]	
Timeframe and resources for evaluation/review	
Start date	Finish date
Budget, human or material resources (internal or external)	Estimated cost
Consultation	
Stakeholders [internal and external]	Governance [e.g. steering committee]
Privacy and ethics	
[ethical considerations]	
Risk management strategy	
Potential risk factors to the success of the evaluation	Strategies for mitigating the risks
Report	
Format	Completion date
Primary and secondary audiences for the findings	Decision on public release

Appendix 3: Rolling evaluation schedule template for Education & Communities Cluster

Rolling Evaluation Schedule – Education & Communities Cluster						
Agency/authority:	**Department of Education and Communities (DEC)**				**Financial Year:**	
Portfolio/Office:						

Schedule prepared by: Name: Position:

Business Unit e.g. directorate, entity, school	**Program name**	**Annual program budget ($000)**	**Program termination date or ongoing**	**Program Scale ***	**Planned/actual completion date of evaluation**	**Evaluation undertaken by**

*Refer to the *NSW Government Evaluation Framework August 2013* for more information

Scale
Tier 4 - Mandatory Evaluation
Tier 3 - Evaluation Expected
Tier 2 - Agency discretion
Tier 1 - Review

Evaluation undertaken by:
Internal to agency/authority
Internal to Education & Communities Cluster
Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
Centre for Program Evaluation, Treasury
External to Government

For assistance using this template, please contact the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation.

Appendix 4: Glossary

Term	Definition
Baseline	Information collected before or at the start of a program that provides a basis for assessing subsequent progress and impact of a program.
Cost Benefit Analysis	Analysis that determines the net benefits of a program accruing to society and whether the net benefits outweigh the costs of providing the program. The analysis quantifies in monetary terms as many of the costs and benefits of a program as feasible.
Cost-Effectiveness Analysis	Analysis that compares the costs of different methods that are attempting to achieve the same or similar outcome to determine which is the most efficient way.
Counterfactual	The situation or condition that would have occurred had the program or intervention not taken place. Impact evaluation seeks to obtain a good estimate of the counterfactual, usually by comparison with sites or situations that were not exposed to the program (sometimes described as control groups).
Economic evaluation	Economic evaluation involves calculating the costs and benefits associated with a program to answer questions of value for money.
Effectiveness	The extent to which a program achieves its objectives.
Efficiency	Evaluation intended to improve performance, most often conducted during the implementation phase of projects or programs.
Evaluation	A systematic and objective process to make judgments about the merit or worth of one or more programs, usually in relation to their effectiveness, efficiency and/or appropriateness.
Formative evaluation	Evaluation intended to improve performance, most often conducted while a program is developing to identify aspects that could be improved to achieve better results.
Independent evaluation	An evaluation carried out by persons/organisation that is free of the control of those responsible for the design, implementation and management of the program.
Inputs	The financial, human, and material resources provided for a program.
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Quantitative or qualitative variable that provides a simple and reliable way to measure actual results achieved as a result of the program compared to expected results.
Monitoring	A systematic process of collecting data and reporting on specified performance indicators, usually against planned targets. Monitoring is typically used to describe outputs and give an indication of progress in a program.
Outcome	The result that is achieved or the effect attributable to the program.
Outcome evaluation	Evaluation that assesses whether the program is meeting its stated objectives and achieving its intended results.
Outputs	The activities, products or services that are produced by a program.
Process evaluation	Evaluation that assesses how the program is delivered and can be used to identify what is working well or what could be improve to inform ongoing adjustments in delivery.
Program	A set of activities managed together over a sustained period of time that aims to deliver an outcome for a client or client group.
Program logic	A management tool that presents the logic of a program in a diagram to describe the overall program by considering the inputs and outputs needed to achieve the intended outcomes in the short, intermediate or longer term.
Program review	A process that is typically quicker and less methodically rigorous. Reviews focus more on operational assessments of progress in achieving program objectives, often to inform continuous improvement.
Self-evaluation	Evaluation by those who are managing the design and/or delivery of a program as part of quality assurance and continuous improvement.
Summative evaluation	Evaluation intended to provide information about the worth of the program when it has been operating for enough time to demonstrate results.