

Program Evaluation

This circular sets out the over-arching requirements for the evaluation of existing and new programs. This circular applies to all General Government agencies and Government businesses. This circular supersedes and replaces the previous DPC Circular C2016-01 - Program Evaluation.

Summary

Government programs must be regularly examined to ensure they are achieving their intended outcomes and providing a net benefit to NSW. Program evaluation is an in-depth investigation to assess how well a program is working, typically examining a broader range of information on program performance and its context than is feasible to monitor on an ongoing basis. Program evaluation complements other forms of performance measurement.

It is important to develop a stronger evidence base of “what works” in the NSW context. As evaluation evidence is accumulated, it will inform service deliverers, policy makers and government decision makers. With the government’s adoption of outcome budgeting from 2017-18, there is now a consistent focus on programs, from performance monitoring, budgeting and reporting through to program assessment and policy and resource allocation decision making.

The following requirements for program evaluation should be read in conjunction with the latest NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines and other relevant policies, including the investor assurance frameworks and economic appraisal and cost-benefit requirements.

Agencies are expected to evaluate programs

All agencies are expected to conduct periodic evaluations of their programs, both existing and new, to assess their continued relevance, relationship to government and cluster priorities, and efficiency and effectiveness in delivering outcomes. Evaluations should be prioritised, planned and conducted in line with the NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines.

This circular applies to all General Government agencies and Government businesses.

This Treasury Circular supersedes and replaces the previous DPC Circular C2016-01 - Program Evaluation. The Circular largely applies to non-capital programs, as more established processes exist for capital programs.

Cluster evaluation schedules are required to manage evaluation activity

Clusters are required to report on completed, ongoing and planned evaluation activity to Cabinet’s Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) each year. Each cluster is required to individually prepare an annual schedule which represents a prioritisation of evaluation activity across the cluster. Treasury will collate these schedules to provide ERC with a holistic view of evaluation activity across the general government sector and to seek ERC approval of the combined cluster schedule for the new financial year.

The NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines set out criteria for program selection and prioritisation.

Annual cluster evaluation schedules should be provided to Treasury and are to include:

- a list of programs to be evaluated in the current financial year
- program funding details
- type of evaluation (process, outcome and/or economic)
- evaluation progress
- a list of program evaluations completed in the previous financial year
- a summary of findings for each completed evaluation, agency response and progress in implementing recommendations.

Evaluation findings should be proactive and publicly released

In line with the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009, agencies are mandated to proactively and publicly release the findings of program evaluations, unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.

NSW Treasury's Centre for Program Evaluation should also be provided with a copy of completed evaluation reports.

Evaluation should inform decision making

To improve the quality of information provided to government for decision making, from January 2018, all program-related submissions to Cabinet and its Committees which seek funding, including through the budget process, are to include details of:

- a) when the program was **last** evaluated or subject to another form of effectiveness assessment, the findings and recommendations, and the agency response; and
- b) when the program will **next** be evaluated or subject to another form of effectiveness assessment and when the evaluation planning will commence.

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Key resources:

[NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines](#)

Further Information: **Centre for Program Evaluation**
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