Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Guide to Preparing Implementation Plans

Cabinet Implementation Unit

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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to summarise the requirements for implementation plans that are required to be lodged with the Cabinet Implementation Unit.

We encourage agencies to refer to these guidelines in developing their implementation plans. Remember that a step by step approach is not essential to the process - planning is an iterative process, and multiple iterations of the planning process are necessary. We encourage you to consult with us while documents are still at draft stage.

You may also find the Better Practice Guide on the Implementation of Programme and Policy Initiatives and the materials supporting Gateway reviews useful.

The deliverables and milestones included in the implementation plans lodged with the Unit form the baseline information for ongoing monitoring of a measure's implementation and for informing the Prime Minister and Cabinet about progress through the Cabinet Implementation Unit reports.

Implementation plans should be:

- succinct, but not to the point that important information is buried
- jargon free – they should be capable of being understood by everyone using them
- based on a sound programme logic, presenting a clear line of sight from the original proposal and the government's expectations, to the inputs and how they will contribute to the achievement of those expectations; the outputs to be delivered; why and how those outputs are expected to deliver the outcomes sought, and the assumptions made about those links; and how this delivery chain and its supporting assumptions will be evaluated
- clear on timeframes and project phases, especially where there are interdependencies with other programmes or measures or critical requirements such as the passage of legislation or negotiations with the States and Territories
- clear on the decision pathways forward – often both the objectives and the means to achieving those objectives are uncertain. Implementation plans need to recognise the unknowns as well as the knowns, and explain how and when the unknowns will be addressed.

1. Project Definition

This section of an implementation plan should provide answers to the following questions:

- **What** is this project aiming to achieve?
- **Why** is it important to achieve it?
- **How** will we know if we have got there?

Most of this information can usually be drawn directly from existing documentation developed during the project initiation phase. **This section sets the framework for dealing with the "expectations" part of the objective "on time, on budget and to expectations".**

1.1 Policy Objective/Outcome

Please outline:

a) the approved policy objective;

b) the policy context or environment, including the underlying need or problem, related policies currently in place and any previous policies, cross-jurisdictional or cross-portfolio issues, the legislative and regulatory environment, and key research and information that will influence the policy direction;

c) approvals to date including enabling legislation, relevant decisions by government and work already completed; and

d) the policy solution, delivery model or strategy for achieving the approved policy objective – this may be a brief statement of how the outputs will be delivered, how these outputs will achieve the desired outcome (policy objective) and how this outcome aligns with the Government's strategic policy agenda, the agency's Business Plan and outputs/outcomes framework.

Note For Cross Portfolio Measures: where multiple agencies are involved in implementation of a measure, this section should clearly show which agencies are responsible for the various aspects of the policy solution.

1.2 Benefits Statement

The purpose of this step is to describe measurable benefits expected to flow from the policy, enabling agencies to demonstrate that intended outcomes are being achieved. The Benefits Statement should provide a clear description of the intended beneficiaries and expected benefits of the policy measure. Indirect benefits should only be included if they are to be evaluated as part of the policy objective.

Please describe:

a) The intended beneficiaries for each policy objective as accurately as possible (noting any assumptions, constraints or exclusions).

b) The benefits expected to be realised by specific project/policy deliverables:

- Direct benefits accrue to the intended beneficiaries of the policy such as the unemployed, small to medium size businesses, a particular environmental sector etc. Indirect benefits (or externalities) accrue to other beneficiaries such as the community and society more broadly.
- Some discretion is needed to decide whether or not to include the indirect benefits of a policy measure in the benefits statement. If the indirect benefits are an important part of the policy objective then they should be included in the statement of benefits.

Couch objectives in **SMARTA** terms:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time framed
- Agreed

Performance measures should adopt the right **FABRIC**:

- Focused on your department's/agency's aims and objectives, relevant to what you are aiming to achieve and the scale and complexity of the particular measure or package of measures;
- Appropriate and useful for those who will use these measures. Your performance measures should clearly link outcomes to your agency's work (establishing intermediate outcomes if final outcomes are subject to too many factors that are not directly in your agency's control);
- Balanced in their reflection of priorities and total effort;
- Robust - data should be clearly defined and collected consistently, measures should be easy to understand and use, data should be collected frequently enough to track progress, and quickly enough for the data to still be useful, measures should be reliable, comparable and verifiable;
- Integrated in existing performance management processes; and
- Cost-effective

Many agencies have difficulty separating out the success factors for the implementation process as opposed to success in terms of a measure's outcomes or impacts. It often happens that an implementation process is quite successful – everything happened on time and on budget – but the expectations of the government or the community weren't met; in other words, 'the operation was successful, but the patient died.' The implementation plan needs to articulate a framework in which the success of the implementation process can be monitored, but is linked to an evaluation of the overall outcomes.

1.3 Evaluation Methodology

This section should answer the question – **how** will we know if the policy objective has been achieved? What **method** will be used to measure this?

You are encouraged to consult the relevant policy area of PM&C in developing your approach to this.

Be mindful that the milestones tracked through the Cabinet Implementation Unit Reports will focus on outcomes, such as the expected impacts or level of user take-up, as well as the development of products, services and programmes and their roll-out.

The evaluation methodology should be designed having regard to the objectives and performance measures in your benefits statement.

The evaluation strategy should include a schedule showing when monitoring and evaluation will occur and who will be responsible for this. Where formal evaluations are undertaken, care should be taken to avoid conflicts of interest.

You may need to consider the importance of mid-term evaluations, interim progress reports or post-implementation reviews as a means of providing early feedback to government on progress towards success, and as a means of meeting accountability and transparency requirements. You may also wish to consider the adoption of internal Gateway processes as a way of ensuring continuing alignment between your project and the government's expectations.

The development of performance indicators to measure progress, both quantitative and qualitative, should be undertaken with care. If the skills to develop performance indicators are not part of the skill set of the proposed project team, then the project manager may wish to include 'indicator development' skills in the 'Resource' section. Performance indicators may be developed for both the policy as a whole, and for each phase or activity.

Agencies should provide supporting documentation for each indicator identifying information needed, collection cost and method, frequency of reporting, validity, reliability etc.

2. Governance

This section is one of the most important in the plan, because unclear governance arrangements pose a major risk to every other aspect of a measure's implementation. This section should never be 'tick and flicked' in a simple diagram – a picture cannot tell a thousand words about:

- how executive support for and commitment to the implementation will be maintained and supported, the most critical element in project success
- who is going to manage the various implementation processes;
- who they are accountable to and what they are responsible for;
- whether there are bodies outside the relevant business line, or the agency concerned, who have a formal decision making or advisory role; how this framework will operate;
- what rules and procedures for decision making will apply.

Governance arrangements should cover all internal agency reporting lines and lines of accountability, including relevant agency boards or executive committees.

External reporting lines and accountability mechanisms should also be identified, including any relevant ministerial councils, committees, cross-jurisdictional or cross-portfolio bodies.

This section should also identify the reporting processes in place to ensure that the Sponsor and any other relevant Executives are kept informed at regular intervals of progress and any issues emerging.

Please identify:

a) the project 'sponsor' – the senior executive officer within the agency responsible for ensuring delivery of the policy. Names and positions should be supplied.

b) the project 'leader' responsible for oversighting management of implementation.

c) the project 'manager' responsible for managing operations and the project team. This person may be the same as the project 'leader' in some cases.

d) the key accountabilities – for example the 'sponsor' may report directly to the agency head and minister, as well as to an internal agency executive committee, and to external advisory or steering groups; the project manager may report to the project 'leader' or directly to the 'sponsor' but may also be accountable to an ad hoc working group or task force.

This may be illustrated in an organisational chart or in a table such as the following:

Governance Role	**Responsibility of:**	**Accountable to:**		
Government	Minister for…	COAG Working Group	Ministerial Council	
Sponsor	Agency, Position	Joint Steering Committee	Minister	Agency CEO, Executive Board
Leader	Agency, Position	Inter-Departmental Committee	Sponsor	Agency Risk and Audit Committee
Manager	Agency Position	Project Steering Committee	Leader	Sponsor

Note for Cross Portfolio Measures: Ideally, a lead agency should be agreed with a mandate for identifying a project sponsor with overall governance responsibility across agencies. At a minimum, the lines of accountability between agencies should be transparent, with the roles and membership of any steering committees clearly laid out together with the nature and frequency of reporting processes between agencies.

3. Scope/Deliverables

This section should list in tangible terms all the products and services to be delivered.

A **deliverable** is a measurable, tangible, verifiable output, result or item that must be produced to complete a project or part of a project.

For each deliverable, you should list the milestones that need to be achieved in order to achieve that deliverable. (A milestone is an important check point along the way that tells you if you are on track to delivery. "Establishing a section" or "having a meeting with the States and Territories" are generally insufficient indicators of progress as they say little about whether the completion of these activities contributes to the overall measure being implemented).

Every deliverable has a cost. Where possible the cost for each deliverable and milestone should add up to form the project budget.

If the project budget is a critical indicator of progress – for example, in the case of a procurement project – you should specify how the work will be done within budget and how work will be reported: for example, percentage complete, actual versus projected outlays and so on.

Your plan should also list the resources needed to achieve each deliverable.

The plan should explain what activities will be undertaken to deliver the project, and what activities the project will not be doing as well as any related activities. It defines the boundary of the project manager's responsibility and the activities that the project manager has to undertake within that boundary, with associated deliverables.

The plan needs to identify related activities that are outside the scope of the project manager, and are the responsibility of other parts of the agency or of external agencies – this is an important opportunity to establish expectations on who is doing what from the outset of the project.

A commonly used template for mapping out scope is as follows:

IS in Scope		**IS NOT in Scope**		**Responsible Manager/Agency**
Activity	Deliverables	Activity	Deliverables	

4. Implementation Schedule

This section should clearly outline what the project will be delivering and when. It sets the framework for dealing with the "on time" part of the objective "on time, on budget and to expectations".

The Implementation Schedule determines and defines the major phases of work that will be undertaken to achieve the desired policy objective/s and the associated deliverables. It documents a logical sequence of events over time to progress the policy from concept to delivery. It provides a

foundation for the remainder of the implementation plan, including the work breakdown structure which will detail the related activities and tasks, responsibilities and timeline.

For most policy initiatives, major phases of work will overlap, run concurrently or sequentially and explaining these interrelationship and interdependencies is an important task for the planners. For example, development of performance measures and an evaluation strategy should proceed concurrently with other 'set-up' work since different skills and therefore people are likely to be required. On the other hand, getting guidelines or eligibility criteria approved may depend on completion of an extensive consultation phase.

Project phasing is an important way of dealing with uncertainties. For example, it is a fact of public sector life that systems development will often have to proceed in advance of all the policy issues being sufficiently nailed down to allow detailed business specifications to be developed. Similarly, issues around technology or functionality may be unresolved at the time the plan is being developed.

These are issues that need to be articulated here and in the risks section, particularly in identifying issues that are unresolved at the time - the plan needs to identify how those issues will be resolved, when and by whom.

The Implementation Schedule should provide the following information in a clear, easy to read format:

- Project Phases
- Deliverables associated with each phase
- Major Activities for each deliverable
- Key milestones
- Who is responsible for delivery of each major activity, and
- Any dependencies.

You should ensure the Implementation Schedule has been checked by portfolio business and programme delivery managers to ensure that targets are achievable and appropriate.

Note for Cross Portfolio Measures: A global Implementation Schedule which integrates the key activities of all the participating agencies and their sequence, together with any interdependencies, is a minimum requirement of cross portfolio Implementation Plans. Typically this is the document against which progress will be monitored and assessed for reporting through the Cabinet Implementation Unit.

5. Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)

The work breakdown structure follows on from the Implementation Schedule and provides the detail behind each key activity showing tasks, deliverables and allocated resources including staff. WBSs vary depending on the complexity and type of project undertaken. There is no single format that must be adopted, as long as there is a clear line of sight between the Implementation Schedule, scope and WBS. For complex projects, a WBS will extend over many pages.

Key *phases* of work usually form the first-level element in the WBS, followed by the component elements of *activities* and *tasks* at the second and third levels. A further breakdown is possible with lower level tasks being regarded as phases or projects in their own right. Project resources such as staffing, IT and funding can be allocated at the activity / task level of the WBS.

The level of detail on these lower level activities should be no more than is required to assign responsibilities, timeframes and resources. The WBS should also identify dependencies where one piece of work depends on the completion of another.

A WBS may be provided in tabular format. This form lends itself to more detailed project management software. Alternatively, a high-level WBS may be provided as a tree diagram. Agencies are free to choose a format that suits their need.

6. Resources

6.1 Budget

The budget section involves the allocation of administered and departmental funds against key project deliverables. This section sets the framework for dealing with the "on budget" part of the objective "on time, on budget and to expectations".

The principle underlying this section is cost control. This section will enable agencies to effectively track expenditure over time and provide early warning of likely overspend / underspend or possible savings. In some cases, expenditure will be a critical indicator of progress.

It is critical that the budget reflects **whole of life** costings for the measure concerned and clearly distinguish departmental and administered items as well as distinguishing capital and operating expenses. Budgets should indicate:

- Departmental items/expenses allocated to project deliverables, such as:
  - staff resources (ASL – average staffing level),
  - legal advice,
  - other corporate services such as cost of updating internal financial management systems,
  - IT development if this is part of core business,
  - cost of convening advisory/reference groups or steering committees, and
  - costs of managing any tender process.
  - payments against contract milestones, based on expenditure forecasts,
  - cost of running pilot projects or prototype programmes,
  - cost of collecting baseline data eg consultancy costs,
  - cost of market testing or consultative processes if administered funds have been bid for and allocated for this purpose, and
  - costs of convening tender panels, advisory/reference groups or steering committees.
- Administered expenses such as grants, as these may be an important indicator of progress

6.2 Non-Financial Resources

a) Review the scope and work breakdown structure and identify the resources that are critical to the successful implementation of the measure. Critical resources are those which are vital to the success of the measure, and may include staff with the special skills, consultants, a co-located office venue, ICT equipment, transportation, data / information systems etc.

b) Determine whether the resource is available internally, and if so outline a strategy to manage or acquire it for the required duration.

c) If a critical resource is unavailable internally, determine whether it is available through other Australian Government agencies and if so outline a strategy to manage or acquire it for the required duration.

d) If it is necessary to purchase a resource externally, this should be identified in the contracting and procurement section described below. A business case may need to be prepared to justify the procurement strategy;

e) Scope the actual resource requirement including an initial cost estimate and link to deliverable(s) and risk management plan.

f) Summarise the information in a resource management strategy, linking to high level policy outputs (see example at Figure 4 below). Availability and quality of critical resources should be identified and assessed in the risk management and quality assurance sections.

g) Where appropriate, ensure resource issues are reflected in relevant sections of the Plan such as risk management, contracting and procurement, quality assurance, work breakdown, and funding.

Figure 4: Example of a resource management strategy

Critical resource	Critical to: (Activity/Phase Deliverable)	Strategy to manage or acquire critical resource	Duration (days or dates)	Est. cost

6.3 Procurement Plan

This section of the implementation plan will only be necessary for projects where there is substantial buy in of expertise or capital items. Projects that do not involve a high level of procurement expenditure should simply indicate that this requirement is not applicable.

The Procurement Plan should document:

a) Policy deliverables to be procured by proposed agreement or contract etc.

b) Strategies for negotiating and managing agreements/contracts.

c) If there is need for staged delivery and desirability of testing the deliverables.

d) Whether a purchase-provider arrangement is being considered and if so:

- timings for release of documentation to the public, tender and contract finalisation, contract period;
- the procurement method (specific purpose payments, expressions of interest, request for price/quote, request for tender);
- the funding model (ie milestone payments);
- supplier selection processes such as tender evaluation and contract negotiation, and tender evaluation criteria; and
- arrangements for ongoing contract management including review and evaluation.

e) Probity issues should be covered in the Quality Assurance section.

f) Where appropriate, link also with risk management, resources, quality assurance and stakeholder engagement sections.

7. Risk Management

The risk management section is one of the most important parts of an implementation plan. By understanding the potential risks which may affect the implementation of a policy measure, agencies can reduce the likelihood or consequence of unpleasant surprises that may jeopardise the achievement of policy objectives. Risks may arise as a consequence of:

- changing circumstances and new developments,
- further refinement of project planning,
- changes to the scope of the project, and
- discussions/negotiations with the client/stakeholder.

The design and implementation of the risk management plan will be influenced by the objectives of the policy and the governance arrangements within each agency. Although most agencies undertake risk management exercises associated with policy implementation, there are differing levels of rigour with which agencies undertake, oversight and document risk assessment and associated strategies to manage risk.

To be effective, risk management needs to be an ongoing and meaningful element in the management of the plan. The plan needs to do more than a 'tick and flick' exercise at the commencement of the project; it needs to identify who is responsible for reviewing risks on a regular basis, and how this will be done.

Agencies should ensure that risks to achieving the desired policy outcome as well as risks to the successful implementation of the project are identified separately. This links back to the two elements of success to be evaluated in the plan, viz the success of the implementation process and the success of the overall measure in terms of the outcomes or impacts aimed for.

Most agencies have their own risk management framework in place with associated templates. Where this is the case, these templates should be used for this section of the Plan. For those agencies without an existing framework further information and sample templates can be found in the Guide to Preparing Implementation Plans on the CIU pages of the PM&C website.

Regularly review risk assessment

It is important to ensure risk management plans remains current and becomes a regular aspect of the performance reporting and review of a project, with responsibility for particular risk mitigation activities assigned to individuals who are accountable to the programme or project owner.

Throughout the course of implementation, risk identification should continue to occur to take account of changing circumstances so the risk plan should identify who is responsible for its maintenance and at what points it will be reviewed. For example, risks should be reviewed prior to the release of tender documentation, prior to formal approval to proceed to implementation, and in conjunction with periodic reporting.

Note for Cross Portfolio Measures: The particular risks associated with multiple agency involvement should be reflected in the risk management strategy.

8. Stakeholder Management

The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy addresses the often vital role of engaging, informing and managing stakeholders in the achievement of public policy. It seeks to ensure that key stakeholders and their interests are identified and strategies are developed to engage them.

Where a stakeholder strategy includes a major communications campaign this should be reflected in the scope and work breakdown structure of the implementation plan.

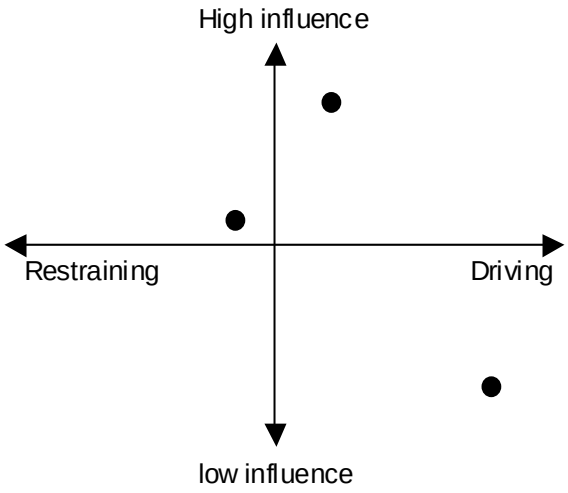
Stakeholders who must be consulted in order to ensure the effective implementation and delivery of the policy measure include, among others, those with prime carriage of implementation and delivery such as the delivery arms of portfolio agencies or private sector organisations where purchaser-provider arrangements are planned.

There are two key steps in developing a Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

Step 1 – Identify key stakeholders and their views

Identify the people and organisations that may be able to significantly influence the policy objective or success of any of the phases of the measure.

Analyse the positions (including values and expectations) of key stakeholders. You may wish to use the diagram below to plot stakeholders by their level of influence and support for the measure.



Step 2 – develop strategies for engaging stakeholders

The next step is to develop strategies for engaging, informing and managing key stakeholders.

Consider the purpose of communicating with each stakeholder. Is it to:

- build rapport,
- convey intentions,

- ask for feedback / input,
- provide them with information,
- build credibility,
- understand their perspective, and
- seek buy-in.

a) What commitment / input do you want from stakeholders and what messages do you need to impart to them?

b) What nature and level of contact is necessary? Consider indirect and direct contact, and if the latter, at what bureaucratic level is contact most appropriate? Would the measure benefit from a communications campaign? What tools and/or communications activities (ie, newsletter, website, public forums, briefings to the Minister) should be used?

The strategy should make clear the intent and logic of consultation with key stakeholders. These should, of course, support the achievement of policy objectives as stated in the scope statement and be adequately costed in the work breakdown structure.

Most agencies have their own stakeholder management and communications framework in place with associated templates. Where this is the case, these templates should be used for this section of the Plan. For those agencies without an existing framework, you may wish to use some variant of the plan at Figure 5.

Figure 5: Example of a stakeholder management strategy

Stakeholders	Their views in respect of the policy	Your strengths in managing these views	Your vulnerabilities with reference to these views

9. Quality Assurance

Quality assurance means assuring the integrity and probity of all processes undertaken to implement the policy on time and on budget. It also involves monitoring progress against milestones and within budget.

a) List deliverables involving significant quality assurance processes such as management of contracts, statutory reporting requirements, regulatory / legal / professional standards,

performance / achievement indicator development, survey design, research methodology and technical specifications.

b) Where appropriate link to agency-based audit, probity and risk management resources, Chief Executive Instructions, relevant legislation and mandated standards eg the FMA Act.

c) Where appropriate identify external QA processes that may assist or which are mandatory, such as internal or external Gateway review processes.

d) This section should also include a description of who will be responsible for ensuring the quality of particular deliverables, including management of risk.

e) Also ensure links with other sections of the Plan, where appropriate, such as resources, contracting and procurement, scope (governance) and funding.