



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

## Cabinet Implementation Unit Toolkit

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### Management strategy



#### The vehicle that delivers the plan

- Tailor the management approach and off-the-shelf project management tools to the needs of the initiative. Understand the balance between flexibility and control.
- Delivering on time, within budget and to expectations requires careful control of the project—it won't manage itself.
- Executive buy-in is critical over the entire life of a project.
- Keep an eye on the outcomes at all times—you don't want the result to be a successful operation where the patient dies in the recovery room.

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The Cabinet Implementation Unit within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet provides whole-of-government advice on implementation and delivery, with a focus on capability building, implementation assessments and progress reporting.

## Elements of effective management strategy

Management strategy encompasses managing a project, a program, or both. Considering management strategy during policy development is important because it provides an idea of whether timeframes and results are achievable within the proposed financial, human and technical resources. The management strategy also sets out key decision points in the process, which will indicate whether the governance framework and reporting and monitoring arrangements will deliver these goals.

These are the key elements of an effective management strategy:

- **Make sure the senior executives understand the role of project management:** Senior decision-makers need to know what it's really going to take to deliver the initiative. Ensure that they have the timely and useful information they need to make the decisions that drive the initiative and to manage associated risks.
- **Choose a project manager with the right skills:** Assuming the people who developed the policy are best placed to implement it can be a costly error: the skills and processes required for business as usual will often be insufficient to manage time, resources and outcomes for new initiatives. The team's skills and capabilities need to match requirements over the life of the initiative and through its different phases.
- **Think beyond tools and templates:** Effective delivery is about more than just applying a methodology and filling out templates. Good project managers understand the importance of a clear governance framework to drive decisions in response to information. They make good use of tools, but recognise that the tools are only as useful as the quality and timeliness of the information they deliver.
- **Think strategically:** Successful management strategy requires 'soft' skills, such as knowing how to motivate others and communicate effectively. A strategic sense of who needs to know what, when they need to know it and how their decisions will affect progress is essential.



NOTE: There are legislative and regulatory requirements relating to management for some Australian Government projects. A full list can be found at [www.agimo.gov.au/policy-guides-procurement/](http://www.agimo.gov.au/policy-guides-procurement/).

## Hurdles to an effective management strategy

While management strategy approaches will vary, there are some common pitfalls.

### Lack of executive buy-in

From the start, project managers need to ensure that relevant stakeholders (such as the senior executive and all involved APS staff) are engaged and understand the project management approach and methodology. Without this buy-in, information flows will soon become confused and over-hasty decisions will begin to be made, interdependencies will be ignored and risks will quickly become issues requiring active management. It's better to have the hard conversations at the beginning rather than later on when critical decisions are being made. If senior executives and involved APS staff don't have clear roles and responsibilities from the beginning, it will be hard to respond to the first thing that goes wrong.

### Loss of engagement during the initiative's life span

Maintaining engagement throughout the life of an initiative can be a challenge. Too often project management structures become time-consuming information updates. Project management tools need to add value to the project throughout its life—whether these are templates, information presentations or meeting schedules. These are some of the signs that you are losing engagement:

- Participants are not attending project meetings or are sending a junior substitute with no authority to take decisions.
- Key decisions are being made outside the project management framework.
- Templates, project plans and risk frameworks are not being updated regularly.

### Process-driven project management

People get bogged down in the processes and controls of project management. They follow procedures rather than actively using information collected and analysed through project management to generate action and inform decisions.

### Policy development undertaken without project management experience

In the short term it may seem easier to develop policy with a small dedicated team, but this can put long term results and outcomes at risk. A policy area will achieve better policy results through engaging or consulting with project management personnel. This may mean asking experienced staff (within the department or externally) to review key policy development documents through an implementation and project management 'lens'.

Even if the scope of a potential policy is yet to be agreed, talking to people with implementation experience in a particular area assists in developing accurate assessments of the proposed delivery approach, and of time, cost and risk.

### Failure to manage expectations

This feature of management strategy is underutilised. Project management identifies what is possible at a given level of risk, cost and time. Once identified, it is important that key stakeholders understand the constraints or risks associated with seeking different outcomes at lower cost or in

shorter timeframes. If you don't manage expectations well, the result can be inflated delivery expectations matched with insufficient resources.

## Strategies for success

There is no single factor that ensures a successful management strategy. However, there are some common elements that will assist in developing an effective management strategy.

### Tailor your chosen methodology

Effective project management helps to deliver initiatives on time, on budget and to the scope and quality anticipated. But there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The required outcomes of an initiative should drive the selection of the project management approach and methodology. While [PRINCE2®](#) and [PMBOK®](#) are among the most commonly used project management methodologies, there are a significant number of others. Tailor the tools from a methodology or multiple methodologies to suit the characteristics and desired outcomes of the initiative. You will need an understanding of the benefits, limitations and outputs of selected tools.

Ask these questions when selecting a methodology:

- Does my organisation already prescribe the application of a particular methodology?
- If yes, will that methodology be sufficient for my particular project?
- If no, to what extent will the new methodology complement my organisation's structure in terms of capability, decision-making, reporting and monitoring processes?
- How complex, dynamic or uncertain will project delivery be, taking into consideration the number of stakeholders, requirements, outcomes and expectations? Will the methodology chosen support the level of complexity that has been identified?

### Set up a project management office

Effective project management is becoming essential as government increasingly tackles issues that are highly complex, cross portfolios and jurisdictions and require delivery through numerous stakeholders. Establishing a dedicated project management office can help to more effectively manage and coordinate delivery.

### Access essential project management expertise

Project management is a skill that requires training and experience. This may mean recruiting or providing extra training. Alternatively, the Policy Implementation Network may be able to provide recommendations for areas within the APS that have particular expertise.

### Keep your plans flexible

Experienced project managers know that a reasonable degree of discretion will be required through the life of the initiative. They will need to be able to adjust the implementation plan for realised risks or unforeseen circumstances. Contingency planning plays a critical role in building in the flexibility early in a project management approach.

## Recognise phases of implementation

Use a well-developed set of milestones, gateways and/or phases to track progress and maintain confidence among key stakeholders. Phases may have a unique risk profile or require different skill sets or work intensity, so to keep the initiative adequately resourced, it's good to recognise when a new phase is underway. Clearly defined milestones and/or phases will also make interdependencies visible.

## Integrating your management strategy

Consider the following questions when developing the management strategy section for your implementation plan.

### Planning

- Who needs to be involved?
- What key skills should the project manager possess?
- What are the project phases?

### Governance

- Does the project management approach deliver appropriate and timely information to governance bodies?

### Engaging stakeholders

- Does the project management approach have the flexibility to adjust to stakeholder feedback throughout the life of the project?

### Risk

- Are there sufficient time and skills allocated to manage risk throughout the life of the project?
- Does the selected methodology allow for good risk management?

### Monitoring, review and evaluation

- How will you adjust your project management methodology to respond to monitoring, review and evaluation?

### Resource management

- Does the funding profile align with the delivery approach?
- What is the impact on resourcing if one phase lags or runs over budget?

## Resources and further help

Cabinet Office of HM Government, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-management-practice-portfolio](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-management-practice-portfolio).

*The United Kingdom Cabinet Office publishes and owns PRINCE2® as well as offering a number of other publications related to project management. Techniques published by the Cabinet Office are widely used in APS agencies.*

International Centre for Complex Project Management (ICCPM), [www.iccpm.com/content/cpm-competency-standards](http://www.iccpm.com/content/cpm-competency-standards).

*The ICCPM provides support and training as well as conducting research into current project management practices.*

Office of eGovernment 2008, *Project management fact sheet: Why project management?* Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet, November, [www.egovernment.tas.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/78187/Why\\_Project\\_Management\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.egovernment.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/78187/Why_Project_Management_Fact_Sheet.pdf).

*The fact sheet outlines when and why to use project management, including 10 reasons why projects fail.*

Office of eGovernment 2011, *Project management guidelines*, Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet, July, [www.egovernment.tas.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/147511/Tasmanian\\_Government\\_Project\\_Management\\_Guidelines\\_V7\\_0\\_July\\_2011\\_2.pdf](http://www.egovernment.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/147511/Tasmanian_Government_Project_Management_Guidelines_V7_0_July_2011_2.pdf).

*The document outlines what project management is and provides advice on how to apply the key principles.*

Project Management Institute 2013, *A guide to the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*, 5th edn, [www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org).

*The Project Management Institute is a significant professional organisation for project management, which offers training and courses.*

Remington, K & Pollack, J 2007, *Tools for complex projects*, Gower Publishing Ltd, Farnham, England.

*This publication examines complexity in projects and provides a framework that attempts to deal with that complexity.*

## Contact us

If you have any questions regarding implementation planning and delivery, please contact the Cabinet Implementation Unit:

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