Successful Implementation of Policy Initiatives

CHECKLISTS OF KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS
Active management

Considering implementation during policy design, leadership, inclusive approach, sound processes and effective use of resources.

Governance

A committed executive, supported by a senior responsible officer, provides the foundations for successful implementation.

Managing risk

A robust risk management framework will promote accurate, well-informed judgements and mitigation strategies. The analysis of risks should commence as the policy is being developed and should continue through the implementation process.

Engaging stakeholders

Effective stakeholder engagement starts with a clear objective for consultation, followed by the identification of people and organisations with a clear interest in the initiative.

The internet, social media and other communication methods now enable wider consultation than has occurred in the past, including beyond expert or interest groups.

Planning

Planning provides a ‘map’ of how an initiative will be implemented, addressing matters such as timeframe, dependencies with other policies or activities, program logic, phases of implementation, roles and responsibilities, resourcing, and compliance with legal and policy requirements.

A level of leadership, experience and skills commensurate with the sensitivity, significance and impact of initiatives should be applied to implementation planning.

Resources

Misalignment between resources and needs at the roll-out stage creates a significant risk that the implementation team will be unable to deliver the required outcomes in the required time period.

Potential constraints, such as the capability of information and communications technology systems and staff expertise, should be identified and dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity.

Monitoring, review and evaluation

Monitoring, review and evaluation processes provide a basis for the active management of the implementation. Establishing effective feedback loops enables the timely adjustment of the other building blocks to facilitate successful implementation.
# Key questions

## Essential preconditions and capabilities for successful implementation

- What process applies to ensure that implementation issues are considered and agreed when policy initiatives are being discussed?
- Have lessons from previous implementation initiatives been identified and taken into account in the design of this implementation?
- Does the top leadership group regularly discuss and review progress and performance of major initiatives?
- Where implementation involves several entities, are robust governance arrangements in place, with clear leadership and accountability? Are open and effective communication channels in place?
- Is the right person leading the project? Is implementation planning led by skilled and experienced personnel?
- Is there an entity-wide process to prompt action when things are likely to, or have, gone wrong and to avoid surprises for the Government?
- Are there regular and candid discussions with the responsible minister and the minister’s office about the progress of major initiatives?
- What advisory and quality assurance mechanisms are in place?
- Does the entity foster an environment where mistakes can be admitted? Are lessons of “what went wrong and why” fed back into the entity’s processes for the benefit of future initiatives?

## Considering implementation issues at every stage of policy design

- Are the means of, and barriers to implementation considered when policy initiatives are discussed?
- How is the priority of projects assessed against the other business priorities? Have resourcing adjustments been made if required?
- Are the policy and implementing entities fully aware of the Government’s objectives and priorities, including the drivers for the policy initiative or policy change, the anticipated benefits of the change and how success is to be measured?
- Have the views of key stakeholders been sought and considered?
- Has the implementers’ knowledge, experience and capacity to respond been taken into account during policy development?
- Is there a common understanding of the risk appetite for the initiative between the policy and implementing entities?
- Is the Government sufficiently informed of the risks, challenges and practical aspects of the policy that may have an impact on implementation, and the proposed responses?
- Are proposed commitments and announcements being checked for delivery implications before they are made?
- Are the timeframe and results promised realistic and consistent with estimates of resources?
- Where timeframe imperatives limit the opportunities to consider the breadth of implementation issues, how will implementation risks be dealt with?
- What processes are in place for the review and monitoring of implementation activities?
- What processes exist to ensure that appropriate contingency planning occurs for all significant projects?
- Are there uncertainties in assumptions made in formulating the policy that may have consequences for the success of implementation?
- Have appropriate record keeping and accountability mechanisms been established?
Governance

☐ Is a single senior responsible officer accountable for the delivery of the initiative and does the senior responsible officer have appropriate authority, skills, resources and support structures? Is he or she the ‘right’ person for the job?

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

☐ Are the governance arrangements between the various parties involved in the implementation appropriately formalised and documented? Does governance documentation identify the key plans and strategies necessary to help manage the initiative—such as a risk management plan, a stakeholder communication strategy, an implementation plan, and an evaluation plan?

☐ Are there whole-of-government dimensions to the delivery of the policy? If so:
  - Have the appropriate entities been adequately engaged?
  - Has a lead entity been identified and its role articulated and accepted by other entities?
  - Are coordination and sharing arrangements of sufficient breadth and robustness?

☐ Do arrangements reflect strong executive-level support so that people in the organisation know that ‘this matters’?

☐ Do the governance arrangements provide for adequate reporting and review mechanisms, including regular updates of risk assessments? Are significant issues and ‘bad news’ escalated as necessary, including to the responsible minister?

☐ Has consideration been given to identifying any relevant legislatively-based reporting requirements?

☐ To guard against situations where staff may become inured to problems, or de-sensitised to risk, have independent assurance or quality reviews been considered?

☐ Are all major initiatives underway in the entity subject to regular consideration by the CEO and the top leadership group?

☐ Where policy development and implementation involve negotiation and consultation with stakeholders, has appropriate attention been given to matters of conflict of interest?

Managing risk

☐ Have the benefits of applying systematic risk management practices to the initiative been communicated through the organisation?

☐ Has enough been done, early enough, to identify and appropriately treat implementation risks? In assessing risks, have both the likelihood and the consequences of risks been considered?

☐ Is there a shared understanding and acceptance of the risk appetite?

☐ Does the senior responsible officer have access to sufficient risk management capability to provide adequate assurance that risks to successful implementation will be managed proportionately and effectively?

☐ Was the Government appropriately briefed, at an early stage, about key implementation risks and proposed responses, including where there are uncertainties? Is this adequately documented? Is there adequate, ongoing and accurate reporting?

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

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

☐ For high-risk initiatives, does contingency planning include the analysis and assessment of options and exit strategies?

☐ What quality assurance mechanisms are in place?
Will implementation difficulties be identified promptly and reported?

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

**Engaging stakeholders**

- Is the purpose and benefit of stakeholder engagement during the implementation clear?
- Have the right stakeholders been identified?
- Has the cost-effectiveness of different communication channels been considered?
- Is a wide consultation process involving the use of social media beneficial?
- Has sufficient consideration been given to how stakeholder interactions will be managed during the implementation phase?
- Is there clear accountability for stakeholder engagement, including managing expectations?
- When is the best time for stakeholders to be engaged?
- How will the information obtained through stakeholder engagement be acted on?
- Is there a communication strategy for consulting with stakeholders?
- If government advertising is proposed, have relevant guidelines been considered and applied?
- Have staff been provided with guidance on identifying potential conflicts of interest? In particular, are there satisfactory arrangements to manage perceptions or instances of conflict of interest that may arise from consulting with stakeholders?

**Planning**

- Has sufficient and appropriate attention been given to structured implementation planning?
- Has implementation planning been given sufficient weight—it requires a strategic focus?
- Are staff with adequate planning skills and experience engaged to actively support the planning process?
- Has there been sufficient testing of proposed implementation arrangements?
- Have lessons from previous experience been considered in planning the implementation?
- Have critical implementation success factors been identified and given sufficient attention?
- Does planning involve program logic and cover critical dependencies and enablers?
- Has the role of any third parties been given sufficient attention in planning?
- Are timelines for critical steps, and the resources applied, realistic?
- Has sufficient attention been given to breaking implementation into manageable steps?
- Have adequate review points been put in place throughout the implementation cycle and what quality assurance measures are being applied?
- Has adequate attention been given to cultural and change management issues?
- Do planning arrangements adequately cater for managing change to the plan and requirements?
- Has consideration been given to contingency measures and their impact on the Government’s intended outcomes?
- Has consideration been given to how and when an evaluation of the initiative will be conducted? In particular, is it clear what ‘success’ will look like and how ‘success’ will be measured?

**Resources**

- Does the entity have the right resources, capabilities and skills to undertake the implementation? If not, can they be acquired in the timeframe required, or should consideration be given to full or partial implementation by another entity?
- Are there skilled and experienced people available to support the implementation team? If not, does the entity have access to appropriate external expertise?
Does each member of the implementation team understand and accept their personal roles and responsibilities? Are appropriate accountability practices in place?

Is there alignment between resources available and implementation imperatives?

Depending on the relative priority of this initiative, do resources need to be adjusted in other areas of the entity in order to ensure that this initiative is adequately resourced?

Has the issue of resource availability been adequately reflected in risk management plans, and, if necessary, drawn to the attention of the responsible minister?

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

Are information and communications technology (ICT) systems and resources sufficient to support the implementation? Are they secure?

Monitoring, review and evaluation

Are processes for monitoring, review and evaluation activities in place? Do these activities address the initiative’s progress against key implementation deliverables?

Are appropriately skilled resources available to support monitoring, review and evaluation activities? Have roles and responsibilities been clearly identified?

Are there robust key performance indicators in place? The criteria set out in ANAO Report No.21 2013–14, Pilot Project to Audit Key Performance Indicators may assist in assessing the appropriateness of an entity’s key performance indicators.

Has the design, collection and collation of data to support the measurement of performance been considered from an early stage? Is the approach adopted sufficient to meet any legislative or government reporting obligations?

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

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

Is the initiative part of a New Policy Proposal that is subject to the ICT Two-Pass Review process? If so, has adequate consideration been given to the documentation and lead times required?

Are risks to success reviewed at appropriate intervals, and are the results of these reviews provided to senior management and, as necessary, ministers?

Are appropriate escalation strategies in place?

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

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

In the case of cross-entity initiatives, have reporting responsibilities and requirements been identified?

Is the lead entity’s role supported by monitoring activities conducted by other entities? How is this integrated and assessed to provide a coherent picture?

Are there appropriate feedback loops to learn the lessons from the implementation? Are the feedback loops commensurate to the scale, risk and cost of the initiative?