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Performance Audit

Evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

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Canberra ACT
18 June 2019

Dear Mr President
Dear Mr Speaker

In accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*, I have undertaken an independent performance audit in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The report is titled *Evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs*. Pursuant to Senate Standing Order 166 relating to the presentation of documents when the Senate is not sitting, I present the report of this audit to the Parliament.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's website — <http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Grant Hehir'.

Grant Hehir
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

AUDITING FOR AUSTRALIA

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Summary and recommendations

Background

1. Program evaluation (commonly referred to as ‘evaluation’) can be defined as the systematic and unbiased assessment of the efficiency, effectiveness or appropriateness of government policies or programs (or parts of policies or programs). Under the enhanced Commonwealth performance framework, performance monitoring and comprehensive evaluations are identified as key mechanisms that entities can use for reporting on their performance through their annual performance statements.¹

2. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C or the department) has been the lead agency for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs since 2013. With the introduction of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in 2014, 27 programs were consolidated into five broad programs under a single outcome, with \$4.8 billion initially committed over four years from 2014–15. The Australian National Audit Office’s (ANAO’s) performance audit of the IAS (Auditor-General Report No.35 2016–17) noted that the department did not have a formal evaluation strategy or evaluation funding for the IAS for its first two years.²

3. In February 2017 the Minister for Indigenous Affairs announced funding of \$40 million over four years from 2017–18 to strengthen IAS evaluation, which would be underpinned by a formal evidence and evaluation framework.³ In February 2018 the department released an IAS evaluation framework document, describing high level principles for how evaluations of IAS programs should be conducted, and outlining future capacity-building activities and broad governance arrangements.⁴

Rationale for undertaking the audit

4. There is strong interest from Parliament and the community in ensuring funding provided through government programs achieves intended outcomes. Effective performance measurement and evaluation is critical to determining whether these outcomes are being achieved.

5. The audit was undertaken to provide assurance that the design and early implementation of the department’s evaluation framework for the IAS has been effective. It also provided an opportunity to assess the early impacts of the framework on evaluation practices and inform its ongoing management.

Audit objective and criteria

6. The objective of the audit was to examine the effectiveness of the design and implementation of the department’s evaluation framework for the IAS in achieving its purpose to

1 Department of Finance, *Resource Management Guide No. 130: Overview of the enhanced Commonwealth performance framework*, July 2016, p. 9.

2 Auditor-General Report No.35 2016–17 *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, pp. 11 and 63–64.

3 N Scullion (Minister for Indigenous Affairs), ‘\$10m a year to strengthen IAS evaluation’, media release, Parliament House, Canberra, 3 February 2018.

4 PM&C, *Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 2.

ensure that evaluation is high quality, ethical, inclusive and focused on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

7. To form a conclusion against this objective, the ANAO adopted the following high level criteria:

- Has the department's evaluation framework been designed to support the achievement of the Government's policy objectives? (Chapter 2)
- Is the department's evaluation framework being effectively implemented and managed? (Chapter 3)
- Are evaluations being conducted in accordance with the department's evaluation framework to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? (Chapter 4)

Conclusion

8. Five years after the introduction of the IAS, the department is in the early stages of implementing an evaluation framework that has the potential to establish a sound foundation for ensuring that evaluation is high quality, ethical, inclusive and focused on improving the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

9. Following substantial delays in establishing an evaluation framework, the department is now designing a framework that has the potential to support the achievement of the Government's policy objectives by strengthening evaluations under the IAS. The design of the framework has been informed by recognised principles of program evaluation, relevant literature, previous evaluation activity and stakeholder feedback. The framework could more clearly link evaluation to the Government's objectives for the IAS and other relevant strategic frameworks such as Closing the Gap.

10. The department's implementation and management of the IAS evaluation framework is partially effective. Management oversight arrangements are developing, and evaluation advice provided to program area staff has been relevant and high quality. The department has not developed a reliable methodology for measuring outcomes of the framework and its evaluation procedures are still being developed.

11. As the department is still developing procedures to support the application of the IAS evaluation framework, it is too early to assess whether evaluations are being conducted in accordance with the framework. The department's approach to prioritising evaluations should be formalised by developing structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk. The department has taken recent steps to: mandate early evaluation planning; publish completed evaluations; and ensure findings are acted upon.

Supporting findings

Design of the Framework

12. From its initial policy commitment to develop an evaluation framework for the IAS by June 2014, the department set several deadlines for finalising the framework that were not met. In 2017 the department established a dedicated evaluation program under the IAS and committed

to establishing a new evaluation framework. By July 2018 most elements of the IAS evaluation framework were in place.

13. The development of the framework was informed by relevant literature, including other entities' evaluation strategies and recognised program evaluation principles, and the limited evaluation activity previously undertaken in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs. The department undertook consultation on the framework and incorporated stakeholder feedback into its design.

14. The extent to which the IAS evaluation framework aligns with relevant strategic frameworks is mixed. The framework document includes references to the enhanced Commonwealth performance framework and a future whole-of-government evaluation strategy for policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, it provides limited detail of how evaluations under the framework will assess contribution to Closing the Gap or whether the Government's policy objectives for the IAS are being achieved.

Implementation and Management of the Framework

15. The department has established an implementation process for the IAS evaluation framework, which could be improved through more regular reviews of its project activity schedule. Implementation has included a range of activities designed to improve evaluation quality and build evaluation capability.

16. While its performance criterion is relevant, the department has not developed a reliable methodology for measuring the longer-term outcomes of the framework. The department's performance targets for the IAS evaluation framework focus on the delivery of short-term outputs.

17. The department is developing procedures and tools for evaluation activities but they are not yet fully accessible or comprehensive. It has facilitated discrete evaluation training activities and evaluation advice provided to program area staff has been relevant and high quality.

18. The department's management oversight arrangements for the IAS evaluation framework are maturing. A mechanism for monitoring evaluation findings and management responses is being developed.

19. There are early indications that the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework may be developing a culture of evaluative thinking within IAG. Developing a plan for how framework implementation activities will lead to the desired changes in maturity would assist the department in achieving its future maturity levels.

Application of the Framework

20. The department has implemented a process for prioritising evaluations under the IAS evaluation framework through development of its annual evaluation work plan. Formalising this process by developing structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk and conducting a strategic analysis of gaps in evaluation coverage would aid the department in employing a consistent and robust approach to prioritising evaluations.

21. From October 2018 the department mandated integrating evaluation strategies into the design of all new or refreshed policies and programs and developing evaluation strategies for

existing programs prior to conducting evaluations. Prior to this, evaluations were not consistently planned at an early stage of program development.

22. The department has some processes in place to support the design of respectful, independent and ethical evaluations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs. The development of additional guidance and business processes would help to clarify requirements and embed these principles.

23. Although the department has committed to increasing its focus on impact evaluation, it is too early to assess whether evaluations under the new IAS evaluation framework will be impact-focused and evidence-based.

24. The department is working to increase compliance with the IAS evaluation framework requirements to publicly release evaluation reports or summaries and develop management responses. Evaluation findings have been used to support decision-making and improvements in service delivery in four IAS programs.

Recommendations

Recommendation no.1
Paragraph 3.12 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet ensure its performance information for Program 2.6 is supported by a reliable methodology for measuring the longer-term outcomes of better evidence from the evaluation framework.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no.2
Paragraph 3.21 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet develop a comprehensive and easy to navigate set of procedures to support the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

Recommendation no.3
Paragraph 4.10 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet formalise its evaluation prioritisation process by developing structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk and conducting a strategic analysis of gaps in evaluation coverage.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

Summary of entity response

25. The proposed report was provided to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The department did not provide a summary response. Its full response is reproduced at Appendix 1.

Key messages for all Australian Government entities

26. Below is a summary of key messages, including instances of good practice, which have been identified in this audit that may be relevant for the operations of other Australian Government entities.

Performance and impact management

The audit highlighted a number of messages about program evaluation, including:

- Evaluation is a critical element of establishing accountability for program performance against objectives and providing insight to ensure ongoing improvement in program impact. Therefore, an evaluation framework needs to enable an assessment of achievement against objectives and sharing of evaluation outcomes.
- Good evaluation practice includes:
 - Considering the evaluation approach during the design phase of a program.
 - Considering the budget and resources required to conduct the evaluation and report on its findings.
 - Establishing mechanisms to share evaluations such that similar programs can learn from evaluation findings.
 - Documenting follow up actions as a result of evaluation findings with key personnel held to account for delivering on the actions/recommendations.
 - Establishing quality assurance and control mechanisms to ensure that evaluations conducted are unbiased.
 - Embedding a comprehensive approach to evaluation practice, such as training, guidance, follow up and governance/oversight arrangements, to enable an evaluation culture to be established.
 - Publishing evaluation outcomes such that accountability and transparency is enhanced for stakeholders.

Audit findings

1. Background

Program evaluation

1.1 Program evaluation (commonly referred to as ‘evaluation’) can be defined as the systematic and unbiased assessment of the efficiency, effectiveness or appropriateness of government policies or programs (or parts of policies or programs). Common types of evaluation include process, outcome, impact and economic evaluation. Evaluation forms an important part of the policy cycle, as it can provide insights and suggestions to inform refinements to policies or programs or the design of future interventions. Evaluation also plays a key role in accountability, by providing a means for entities to report to the Government, Parliament and other stakeholders on whether their use of public resources is delivering on objectives and providing benefits.

1.2 Evaluation is closely related to performance monitoring; they can be considered complementary activities. Performance monitoring involves measuring and reporting progress against output and outcome targets (or key performance indicators), whereas evaluation provides a more in-depth assessment of performance. Under the enhanced Commonwealth performance framework, introduced through the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), performance monitoring and comprehensive evaluations are identified as key mechanisms that entities can use for reporting on their performance through their annual performance statements.⁵

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program evaluation

1.3 Over the past decade there has been commentary on the coverage and robustness of monitoring and evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs.⁶

1.4 For example, the issue was raised in the Department of Finance and Deregulation’s 2009 *Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure*, which was commissioned to assess how well Australian Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and whole-of-government coordination arrangements were placed to achieve the Government’s objectives, particularly the Closing the Gap targets. The report stressed the need for a more rigorous approach to program evaluation at a whole-of-government level, including:

- better planning and resourcing of evaluation activity in the design of new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs (such as putting in place an appropriate evaluation strategy, developing program logics⁷, and establishing data collection mechanisms and baseline measurements);

5 Department of Finance, *Resource Management Guide No. 130: Overview of the enhanced Commonwealth performance framework*, July 2016, p. 9.

6 This report generally uses the term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ to refer to Australia’s Indigenous peoples. The term ‘Indigenous’ is used where quoting another source or where it forms part of the name of an entity or program.

7 A program logic is a representation of how an intervention will produce its intended outcomes (that is, its theory of change). Often it will depict the hypothesised causal links between program inputs, outputs and short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes.

- more integrated and better coordinated approaches to performance monitoring and program evaluation;
- more strategic priority-setting and coordination of evaluation effort (such as looking at interactions between programs and the relative efficiency and effectiveness of different approaches);
- greater independence in evaluation teams; and
- the use of more rigorous evaluation methods.⁸

1.5 A 2011 review by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse of the overarching themes for successful programs in overcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage found:

- there was a lack of high-quality quantitative evaluations; and
- when quantitative evaluations were conducted, they often did not include comparison groups that would enable the impact of programs or strategies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage to be determined.⁹

1.6 In October 2012 the proceedings of a meeting hosted by the Productivity Commission on the role of evaluation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy noted:

Participants argued that it was necessary to have a coherent framework for evaluating Indigenous policies and programs... There was general agreement that evaluation plans should be embedded (and funded) in the design of programs, a practice that should be regarded as 'a serious part of the policy process' but is more common in other countries than in Australia. The lack of assessment or evaluation has not only resulted in significant gaps in the Australian evidence base, but has also contributed to 'a litany of poor policies being recycled'.¹⁰

1.7 Subsequently, the Productivity Commission's *National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Assessment 2013–14*, published in November 2015, argued that there was extensive focus on monitoring broad outcome targets relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, but little evidence of what works to bridge outcome gaps.¹¹

Evaluating the Indigenous Advancement Strategy

1.8 In September 2013 responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs was transferred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (the department or PM&C) through a machinery of government change, and 27 programs consisting of 150 administered items, activities and sub-activities from eight separate entities were moved into the department. With the introduction of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in 2014, the 27 programs were

8 Department of Finance and Deregulation, *Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2010, pp. 369–70.

9 Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, *What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne and Canberra, 2011, p. 6.

10 Productivity Commission, *Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation*, Roundtable Proceedings, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2013, p. 12.

11 Productivity Commission, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement Performance Assessment 2013–14*, November 2015, p. 161.

consolidated into five broad programs under a single outcome, with \$4.8 billion initially committed over four years from 2014–15.

1.9 The Australian National Audit Office’s (ANAO’s) performance audit of the IAS (Auditor-General Report No.35 2016–17) found the department did not effectively implement the strategy. The audit report included four recommendations, to which the department agreed, focusing on improving IAS grant administration processes, performance measurement and the operation of its Regional Network. The report also noted that the department did not have a formal evaluation strategy or evaluation funding for the IAS for its first two years.¹²

1.10 In 2017 the Minister for Indigenous Affairs announced funding of \$40 million over four years from 2017–18 to strengthen IAS evaluation. The media release noted that this funding would support a multi-year program of evaluations, underpinned by a formal evidence and evaluation framework to strengthen reporting, monitoring and evaluation at a contract, program and outcome level.¹³

1.11 From 2017–18 a new IAS program was created (Program 2.6) for evaluation and research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and programs. The IAS program structure and program objectives are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Indigenous Advancement Strategy program structure, 2018–19

Program	Objectives
2.1 Jobs, Land and Economy	Get adults into work, foster Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business and assist them to generate economic and social benefits from effective use of their land, particularly in remote areas.
2.2 Children and Schooling	Get children to school, particularly in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, improve education outcomes, including measures to improve access to further education, and support families to give children a good start in life.
2.3 Safety and Wellbeing	Ensure that the ordinary law of the land applies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and ensure they enjoy similar levels of physical, emotional and social wellbeing enjoyed by other Australians.
2.4 Culture and Capability	Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain their culture, participate equally in the economic and social life of the nation and ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are capable of delivering quality services to their clients, particularly in remote areas.
2.5 Remote Australia Strategies	Ensure strategic investments in local, flexible solutions based on community and Government priorities.
2.6 Evaluation and Research	Improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by increasing evaluation and research into policies and programs impacting on them.
2.7 Program Support	Departmental support program to the six Indigenous Advancement Strategy programs, reflecting the Government’s commitment to reduce red tape and duplication and ensure resources are invested on the ground where they are most needed through the principle of empowering communities.

Source: PM&C, *Portfolio Budget Statements 2018–19, Budget Related Paper No. 1.14, Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio*, Canberra, 2018, pp. 40–46.

12 Auditor-General Report No.35 2016–17 *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, pp. 11 and 63–64.

13 N Scullion (Minister for Indigenous Affairs), ‘\$10m a year to strengthen IAS evaluation’, media release, Parliament House, Canberra, 3 February 2017.

Indigenous Advancement Strategy evaluation framework

1.12 After undertaking public consultation in late 2017, the department released an IAS evaluation framework document in February 2018. The framework document is high-level and principles-based, describes how evaluations of IAS programs should be conducted, and outlines future capacity-building activities and broad governance arrangements. It states that the goals of the IAS evaluation framework are to:

- generate high quality evidence that is used to inform decision-making;
- strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in evaluation;
- build capability by fostering a collaborative culture of evaluative thinking and continuous learning;
- emphasise collaboration and ethical ways of doing high quality evaluation at the forefront of evaluation practice in order to inform decision-making; and
- promote dialogue and deliberation to further develop the maturity of evaluation over time.¹⁴

1.13 The department's Policy Analysis and Evaluation Branch¹⁵, within the Indigenous Affairs Group (IAG), is responsible for leading the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework, including developing an annual evaluation work plan, managing strategic evaluations and providing expert advice to IAG program areas on evaluation. IAG program areas are responsible for conducting the majority of program evaluations under the framework. To receive funding for evaluations under Program 2.6 they must approach the evaluation branch and gain approval from the IAG Program Management Board.¹⁶ As at April 2019 the evaluation branch had an average of 15.4 full-time equivalent staff working on evaluation.

Rationale for undertaking the audit

1.14 There is strong interest from Parliament and the community in ensuring funding provided through government programs achieves intended outcomes. Effective performance measurement and evaluation is critical to determining whether these outcomes are being achieved.

1.15 The audit was undertaken to provide assurance that the design and early implementation of the department's evaluation framework for the IAS has been effective. It also provided an opportunity to assess the early impacts of the framework on evaluation practices and inform its ongoing management.

14 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 2.

15 As the name of the branch responsible for evaluation support within the Indigenous Affairs Group has changed a number of times since 2013, for clarity this report will refer to the evaluation branch.

16 The IAG Program Management Board was established in 2015. It comprises senior officers from IAG and is chaired by the First Assistant Secretary, Program Office. Its role is to make decisions and provide advice to IAG program areas and the IAG Executive on the implementation of programs, particularly the IAS. IAG program areas can also fund evaluations and reviews from other IAS programs.

Audit approach

Audit objective, criteria and scope

1.16 The objective of the audit was to examine the effectiveness of the design and implementation of the department's evaluation framework for the IAS in achieving its purpose to ensure that evaluation is high quality, ethical, inclusive and focused on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1.17 To form a conclusion against this objective, the ANAO adopted the following high level criteria:

- Has the department's evaluation framework been designed to support the achievement of the Government's policy objectives? (Chapter 2)
- Is the department's evaluation framework being effectively implemented and managed? (Chapter 3)
- Are evaluations being conducted in accordance with the department's evaluation framework to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? (Chapter 4)

1.18 The audit focussed on evaluation activities conducted by the department since the commencement of the IAS in July 2014, and the development of its evaluation framework over this period. It did not examine evaluations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs conducted by other Australian Government agencies or the states and territories.

Audit methodology

1.19 The audit methodology included:

- examining departmental records related to the establishment of the IAS evaluation framework;
- analysis of documentation relating to recent program evaluations conducted by the department; and
- interviews with departmental staff in the evaluation branch and IAG program areas.

1.20 The audit was conducted in accordance with the ANAO auditing standards at a cost to the ANAO of approximately \$335,000.

1.21 The team members for the audit were Daniel Whyte, Lynette Tyrrell, David Lacy, Iain Gately, James Woodward and Deborah Jackson.

2. Design of the Framework

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (the department's or PM&C's) evaluation framework was designed to support the achievement of the Government's policy objectives for the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).

Conclusion

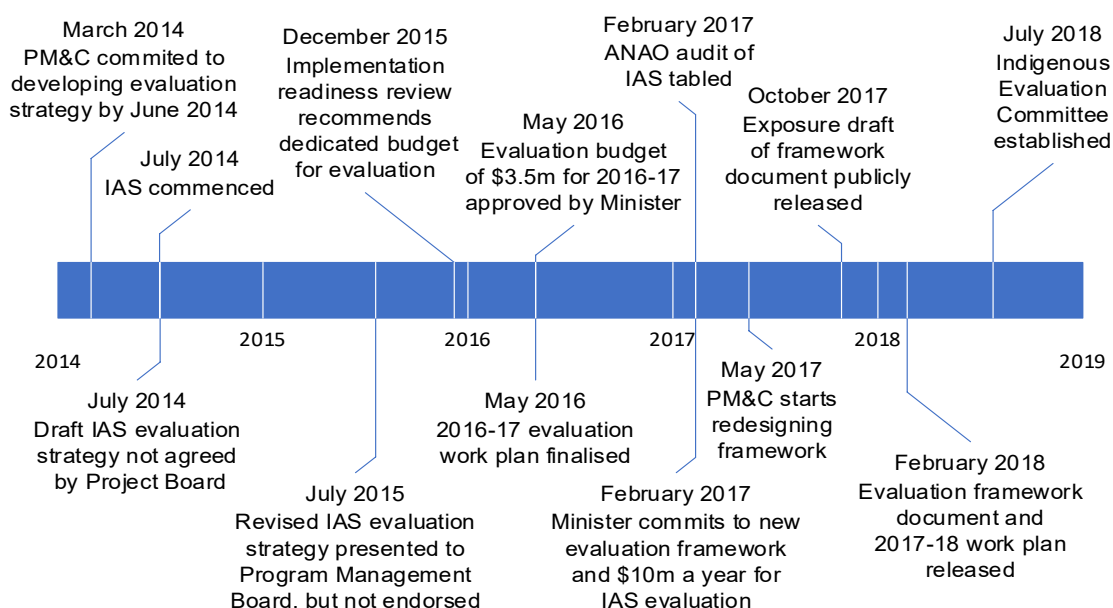
Following substantial delays in establishing an evaluation framework, the department is now designing a framework that has the potential to support the achievement of the Government's policy objectives by strengthening evaluations under the IAS. The design of the framework has been informed by recognised principles of program evaluation, relevant literature, previous evaluation activity and stakeholder feedback. The framework could more clearly link evaluation to the Government's objectives for the IAS and other relevant strategic frameworks such as Closing the Gap.

Were timeframes for the design of the framework met?

From its initial policy commitment to develop an evaluation framework for the IAS by June 2014, the department set several deadlines for finalising the framework that were not met. In 2017 the department established a dedicated evaluation program under the IAS and committed to establishing a new evaluation framework. By July 2018 most elements of the IAS evaluation framework were in place.

2.1 This section describes the department's progress in designing the IAS evaluation framework from 2014 to 2018. A high-level timeline for the design of the IAS evaluation framework is shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Timeline of the design of the IAS evaluation framework



Source: ANAO analysis.

Initial work on establishing an IAS evaluation framework

2.2 In March 2014 the department developed an implementation strategy for the IAS in which it committed to developing an evaluation and performance improvement strategy by June 2014, which would be agreed by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs (the Minister). This commitment stated that the strategy would: focus on timely performance measurement and testing how and why interventions work; incorporate a rolling annual plan of priority evaluations; and be overseen by an evaluation committee.

2.3 The evaluation branch presented a draft evaluation and performance improvement strategy to the Indigenous Affairs Reform Implementation Project Board¹⁷ (the board) in July 2014. The briefing package included a high-level project plan outlining activities that would be completed in late 2014, such as:

- establishing an evaluation committee;
- finalising the strategy and consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream stakeholders prior to its implementation;
- finalising the first rolling evaluation work plan; and
- developing business rules (such as policies and procedures relating to evaluation quality and ethics approval).

2.4 The board did not agree to the strategy and, noting a lack of detail about activities, requested that a revised framework be brought to its next meeting in late July 2014. A revised framework was not presented at the board's next meeting; instead the evaluation branch provided a revised schedule that indicated the draft rolling evaluation work plan would be developed and the evaluation committee established by August 2014. These timeframes were not met.

2.5 In July 2015 the evaluation branch presented a revised draft of the evaluation and performance improvement strategy to the newly-formed Indigenous Affairs Group (IAG) Program Management Board¹⁸ for information rather than endorsement. The agenda paper stated that: the branch would come back with a formal process for prioritising evaluations for 2015–16 in a multi-year plan; and, rather than establishing a separate evaluation committee, the board could fulfil this role under its terms of reference.

2.6 In November 2015 an implementation readiness review of the IAS by the Department of Finance recommended that PM&C allocate a dedicated budget for evaluation by June 2016. After consulting with program areas in late 2015, the evaluation branch developed its first rolling evaluation work plan in March 2016. The plan outlined 28 evaluation projects that were underway or expected to commence in 2016 or 2017. In March 2016, on the basis of the implementation readiness review recommendation and 2016 evaluation work plan, the department asked the Minister to agree to expenditure of \$7 million over 2016–17 and 2017–18 to fund identified evaluation projects, stating:

17 The Indigenous Affairs Reform Implementation Project Board operated in 2014. It comprised senior officers from the Indigenous Affairs Group and was chaired by the Deputy Secretary. Its role was to oversee the implementation of the IAS and other reforms being progressed by the IAG.

18 The IAG Program Management Board was established in 2015. It comprises senior officers from IAG and is chaired by the First Assistant Secretary, Program Office. Its role is to make decisions and provide advice to IAG program areas and the IAG Executive on the implementation of programs, particularly the IAS.

[The funding being sought] would only be a fraction of the funding level recommended internationally for evaluation which is in the range of 2–10% of programme funds. ... At some point the current situation will become untenable as it is not sustainable to continue to fund activities that lack a good evidence base.

2.7 In May 2016 the Minister approved a budget of \$3.5 million for 2016–17, but did not approve funding for 2017–18. Later in 2016 the Minister approved two additional evaluation projects, bringing the total evaluation commitment for 2016–17 to around \$4.5 million. An internal paper prepared in late 2016 noted: ‘Single year funding makes it impossible to plan and implement evaluations of larger programs as to do such evaluations well can take several financial years from concept to completion’.¹⁹

2.8 The ANAO’s performance audit of the IAS (Auditor-General Report No.35 2016–17) noted that the department did not have a formal evaluation strategy or evaluation funding for the IAS for its first two years.²⁰

2018 IAS evaluation framework

2.9 Following the ANAO’s performance audit of the IAS, in February 2017 the Minister announced funding of \$10 million a year from 2017–18 to strengthen IAS evaluation.

2.10 With a new IAS program to support evaluation, dedicated multi-year funding and a commitment to underpin evaluation with a formal framework, the department commenced work on redesigning its evaluation framework in May 2017. A paper to the IAG Executive Board in June 2017 outlined an intention to undertake consultation with stakeholders in July 2017 and publicly release a framework document and 2017–18 evaluation work plan in August 2017. The paper also indicated consideration be given to establishing an independent Indigenous Evaluation Committee.

2.11 In August 2017 the department provided a draft evaluation framework document, which had been developed in consultation with key stakeholders, to the Minister for noting. The brief stated that the framework document would be released as an exposure draft for three weeks in September 2017. The final framework document was to be provided to the Minister for approval at the end of September prior to its public release. Release of the exposure draft was delayed pending the Minister’s noting of the brief, and it was published on the department’s website for public consultation from 10 to 30 October 2017.

2.12 In October and November 2017 the department finalised the 2017–18 evaluation work plan and gained authority from the Minister to approve the procurement of evaluation services under Program 2.6. It also reviewed submissions and updated the evaluation framework document during November and December 2017.

2.13 In January 2018 the department briefed the Minister that the framework document and work plan would be released on 22 January 2018 and provided copies of the final documents for information. The brief asked the Minister to agree to annual funding of \$150,000 from Program 2.6 to support the establishment of an Indigenous Evaluation Committee. The Minister signed the brief

19 PM&C, ‘Options Paper — Evidence and Evaluation’, unpublished, no date, p. 3.

20 Auditor-General Report No.35 2016–17 *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, pp. 11 and 63–64.

on 27 February 2018. He did not agree to fund the committee²¹ and instructed the department to seek his approval for the membership of the committee.

2.14 The framework document and work plan were released on the department’s website on 28 February 2018. The Minister agreed to the membership of the Indigenous Evaluation Committee and an annual budget of \$100,000 in April 2018. The Committee membership was announced in July 2018.

2.15 In summary, following the Minister’s 2017 announcement, the department has delivered most key elements of its evaluation framework (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Delivery dates for 2018 IAS evaluation framework elements

Framework element	Date
Dedicated budget for IAS evaluations announced	February 2017
Formal evaluation framework published	February 2018
Annual rolling evaluation work plan first published	February 2018
Indigenous Evaluation Committee members announced	July 2018
Business rules and procedures for evaluation developed	Ongoing

Source: ANAO analysis.

Has the framework been informed by relevant literature, previous evaluation activity and stakeholder feedback?

The development of the framework was informed by relevant literature, including other entities’ evaluation strategies and recognised program evaluation principles, and the limited evaluation activity previously undertaken in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs. The department undertook consultation on the framework and incorporated stakeholder feedback into its design.

Relevant literature

2.16 The department made a decision early in the design process that the evaluation framework would be principles-based, and in June 2017 informed the Minister that it would be based on ‘international best practice’. The final framework document included nine ‘best practice principles’, grouped into four broad criteria: relevant, robust, credible and appropriate (see Appendix 2 for a full description of the principles).

2.17 The ANAO analysed the department’s evaluation principles and found they had been informed by recognised program evaluation principles and other Australian Government entities’ evaluation frameworks:

²¹ The Minister instructed that the department would fund the cost of the committee.

- all principles align with recognised evaluation principles²²; and
- seven principles (integrated, evidence-based, impact-focused, transparent, independent, timely and fit-for-purpose) were adapted from principles outlined in evaluation strategies published by other Australian Government departments in 2015.²³

2.18 In addition, the published framework document cites a number of relevant publications, including:

- guidance material from the Department of Finance, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the ANAO;
- evaluation textbooks and publications on evaluation methods produced by international organisations; and
- academic articles on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program evaluation.

Previous evaluation activity

2.19 Following the machinery-of-government changes in late 2013 that saw the department take responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, an internal review of its inherited programs found:

[30 per cent] of the activities transferred into PM&C had been evaluated in the past five years, and only 12 per cent of activities reported having evaluation strategies in place. The fragmentation of programmes exacerbated the evaluation limitations, with 35 per cent of the evaluations provided being only partial evaluations. Only 20 per cent of activities mapped had full evaluations.

More than 50 per cent of the evaluations conducted were process focused evaluations as opposed to outcome evaluations. Of the outcome evaluations, only 30 per cent showed mostly positive outcomes. This equates to only seven per cent of activities being able to show they were achieving mostly positive results against stated objectives.²⁴

2.20 In addition, an internal options paper developed by the department in late 2016 identified two issues with its approach to evaluation under the IAS: a need for evaluation reports and government responses to be made public in a timely way; and lack of ongoing certainty of funding.

2.21 The department has sought to address these issues in its design of the IAS evaluation framework through:

- the ‘integrated’ principle — which includes a focus on early evaluation planning;
- the ‘impact-focused’ principle — which promotes the use of impact evaluation;
- the ‘transparent’ principle — which requires all evaluation reports or summaries to be made publicly available and senior management to provide responses to evaluations, with proposed actions recorded and followed up; and
- the provision of a dedicated budget of \$10 million a year for evaluation.

22 Principles and standards examined include: American Evaluation Association (AEA), ‘AEA Guiding Principles — 2018 Update’, 2018; Australasian Evaluation Society, *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*, July 2013; and Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, ‘Program Evaluation Standards Statements’, 2011.

23 These frameworks are the then Department of the Environment’s *Evaluation policy 2015–2020* and then Department of Industry and Science’s *Evaluation strategy 2015–2019*.

24 PM&C, ‘Indigenous-Specific Programmes: Internal Review Report’, 10 February 2014, p. 8.

Stakeholder feedback

2.22 During July and August 2017 the department invited comment on the draft framework from identified ‘critical friends’:

- five evaluation specialists from Australian universities;
- three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies/organisations — the Lowitja Institute, National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples and Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council; and
- four Australian Government entities — the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, ANAO²⁵, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Productivity Commission.

2.23 In addition, as noted in paragraph 2.11 above, an exposure draft of the framework was published on the department’s website for public consultation from 10 to 30 October 2017. The department invited approximately 120 organisations or individuals to provide comment on the exposure draft and received 10 submissions, primarily from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and academic evaluation specialists.

2.24 While the department did not maintain complete records of its consultation, there is evidence that stakeholder feedback informed the final design of the framework. Key changes that were made to the framework document in response to stakeholder feedback include:

- creating a separate ‘ethical’ principle under the ‘credible’ criterion;
- increased reference to respect for the values and aspirations of, and collaboration with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
- a commitment to establish an independent evaluation committee, based on the model of the Department of Foreign Affairs’ evaluation framework for aid programs.

2.25 Further, stakeholders commented on the need for greater clarity on: implementation arrangements, particularly on how increased collaboration with and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be operationalised; and how the framework relates to the Closing the Gap framework and evaluating the IAS as a whole. The department considered this feedback, and added a requirement that all evaluations under the IAS build in appropriate collaboration processes, but it did not address the comments on the broader policy context in revisions to the framework document.

Does the framework align with relevant strategic frameworks?

The extent to which the IAS evaluation framework aligns with relevant strategic frameworks is mixed. The framework document includes references to the enhanced Commonwealth performance framework and a future whole-of-government evaluation strategy for policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, it provides limited detail of how evaluations under the framework will assess contribution to Closing the Gap or whether the Government’s policy objectives for the IAS are being achieved.

25 The ANAO declined to provide detailed comment on the evaluation framework document due to the potential to create a threat to its independence in conducting future performance audit activities relating to the IAS.

Alignment with the IAS

2.26 An evaluation framework for a major strategy, such as the IAS, should outline how it will support an assessment of whether the Government's policy objectives for the strategy are being achieved. Evaluations should consider the extent to which policies or programs are successful in achieving their stated objectives. They should also consider whether policies and programs are aligned with and contribute to the Government's higher-level objectives (for example, Closing the Gap).

2.27 As noted in paragraph 1.12, the IAS evaluation framework document is a principles-based document that describes how evaluations of IAS programs should be conducted. It states that the framework is designed to ensure evaluations are 'focused on improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians' and 'make a positive contribution to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.²⁶ However, it provides little detail about how evaluations under the framework will facilitate an assessment of whether the Government's policy objectives for the IAS are being achieved. In addition, the IAS evaluation framework document does not include any references to the Government's five key priority areas for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program investment²⁷ or the IAS program objectives or outcomes.

2.28 The department's 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan, published in December 2018, outlined a proposed project to develop a strategy to assess the 'system effectiveness' of the IAS. In line with this, in February 2019 the department engaged a contractor to develop an outcomes framework for Programs 2.2 (Children and Schooling) and 2.3 (Safety and Wellbeing) by mid-2019, with the intention that it could be extended to apply across the IAS.

Alignment with whole-of-government frameworks

2.29 The ANAO's recent performance audit of Closing the Gap (Auditor-General Report No.27 2018–19) noted that the department's IAS evaluation framework document does not include any references to the Closing the Gap framework.²⁸ The document does not articulate how evaluations under the framework will assess the contribution of IAS programs to the Closing the Gap targets.

2.30 At the time the department was developing its IAS evaluation framework, the Australian Government did not have a whole-of-government evaluation-related strategy or framework to guide evaluation activities. Guidance on the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) enhanced Commonwealth performance framework provides a description of what evaluation is, typical approaches, and strengths and limitations, but does not outline any standards or requirements for evaluations undertaken within the Australian Government.²⁹ The department's

26 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 3.

27 The five priority areas are: ensuring children go to school, adults work, Indigenous business is fostered, the ordinary rule of law is observed in Indigenous communities as in other Australian communities, and Indigenous culture is supported.

28 Auditor-General Report No.27 2018–19 *Closing the Gap*, p. 59. The 2008 *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)* is a framework of objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance measures and targets that the Australian, state and territory governments committed to achieving to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

29 In response to a recommendation of the 2018 independent review of PGPA Act, the Secretaries Board is considering potential strategies to promote more effective and informed use of evaluation. As at April 2019 the Australian Government did not have a whole-of-government evaluation-related strategy or framework.

IAS evaluation framework document references the performance requirements under the PGPA Act, noting that monitoring and evaluation systems have complementary roles in generating evidence.

2.31 Through the 2017–18 Budget, the Government agreed that the Productivity Commission would develop a whole-of-government evaluation strategy for policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, overseen by a new commissioner with experience in this area. The IAS evaluation framework document states that it is ‘intended to align with the wider role of the Productivity Commission in overseeing the development and implementation of a whole of government evaluation strategy of policies and programs that effect Indigenous Australians’.³⁰ However, due to delays in the passage of legislation that would allow the appointment of a new commissioner and subsequent delays in appointing a commissioner³¹, the development of the whole-of-government evaluation strategy did not commence until April 2019. The proposed evaluation strategy is to be completed by July 2020 and include: a principles based framework for evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the identification of priorities for evaluation; and the development of an approach for reviewing agencies conduct of evaluations in accordance with the strategy.

30 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 2.

31 On 11 December 2018 the appointment of the Indigenous evaluation commissioner was announced, with a commencement date in April 2019.

3. Implementation and management of the framework

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (the department or PM&C) is implementing and managing its Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) evaluation framework effectively.

Conclusion

The department's implementation and management of the IAS evaluation framework is partially effective. Management oversight arrangements are developing, and evaluation advice provided to program area staff has been relevant and high quality. The department has not developed a reliable methodology for measuring outcomes of the framework and its evaluation procedures are still being developed.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO made two recommendations aimed at ensuring the department has: appropriate performance measures for the evaluation framework; and evaluation procedures to support framework implementation. The ANAO also suggested that the department more regularly review and update its project activity schedule and develop a plan for how it will achieve its desired future evaluation maturity levels.

Has the department established an implementation process?

The department has established an implementation process for the IAS evaluation framework, which could be improved through more regular reviews of its project activity schedule. Implementation has included a range of activities designed to improve evaluation quality and build evaluation capability.

3.1 To ensure the effectiveness of a new policy initiative, an implementation plan should be developed prior to the commencement of the initiative that clearly articulates how new processes, programs and services will be delivered on time, on budget and to expectations. Key areas for consideration include project scheduling and management, governance, stakeholder engagement, risk management, monitoring and evaluation, and resource management.³²

3.2 Between May and September 2017, during the period it was designing key elements of the IAS evaluation framework, the evaluation branch drafted several incomplete planning documents. These documents outlined planned timeframes for the design, consultation and public release of the IAS evaluation framework document and 2017–18 work plan, but did not include any subsequent implementation activities.

3.3 The framework document, published in February 2018, included commitments to implement various activities designed to improve evaluation quality and build the department's evaluation capability, including establishing an Indigenous Evaluation Committee (IEC), developing an online evaluation handbook complemented by internal support materials and publishing an

32 PM&C, *Cabinet Implementation Unit — Guide to Implementation Planning*, 2014, p. 2.

annual report on IAS evaluation activities. No timeframes were specified in the framework for the implementation of these activities, and, at the time of its publication, the department did not have an implementation plan outlining how these activities would be delivered.

3.4 The department advised the ANAO that its focus from late 2017 to early 2018 was on establishing the IEC, developing the 2017–18 annual evaluation work plan and establishing arrangements for administering Program 2.6, rather than planning for longer-term framework implementation.

3.5 In mid to late 2018 the evaluation branch completed several implementation planning activities, including developing a program logic, project plan and project activity schedule. The ANAO reviewed the project activity schedule and found all activities the department had committed to in its IAS evaluation framework document could be mapped to an associated activity in the schedule. The majority of these activities had either been completed or were underway. Although some elements of the project activity schedule were updated during the audit, some key activities in the schedule that the department informed the ANAO were underway were still classified as ‘TBA’ or ‘possible future activities’ and had not been assigned delivery timeframes. It would be good practice for the department to review and update its project schedule regularly to ensure the schedule provides an accurate plan for implementation.

Has the department established relevant and reliable performance measures for the framework?

While its performance criterion is relevant, the department has not developed a reliable methodology for measuring the longer-term outcomes of the framework. The department’s performance targets for the IAS evaluation framework focus on the delivery of short-term outputs.

3.6 As noted in paragraph 3.1, establishing appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the performance of a policy initiative is an important aspect of implementation planning. The IAS evaluation framework document includes three activities relating to assessing its performance:

- providing cross-cutting evaluations undertaken by the evaluation branch to the IEC for review and publishing the IEC reviews along with the evaluations³³;
- publishing an annual report on IAS evaluation activities that includes reviews of randomly selected IAS evaluations; and
- undertaking an independent meta-review of IAS evaluations after three years.

3.7 The department advised that IEC reviews of cross-cutting evaluations and the compilation of an annual report on IAS evaluation would focus on evaluations fully conducted under the framework. As no evaluations had been fully conducted under the framework at the time of this audit, the department had not commenced these activities.

3.8 The evaluation branch has also established performance measures at the departmental and divisional level for assessing the performance of the IAS evaluation framework (see Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). The Portfolio Budget Statement performance criterion is an effectiveness measure and

33 Cross-cutting evaluations examine multiple program areas.

is relevant to the Program 2.6 objective ('to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians by increasing evaluation and research into policies and programs impacting on Indigenous Peoples'³⁴), but the branch has not developed a reliable methodology for measuring performance against this criterion.³⁵ The majority of its performance targets and measures relate to the delivery of outputs (for example, publishing the annual work plan, establishing the IEC and delivering projects within agreed timeframes).

Table 3.1: Program 2.6 performance criteria for the IAS evaluation framework

Year	Performance criteria	Targets
2018–19	Increased understanding of whether IAS funding and policies are effective.	Publication of the Annual Evaluation Work Plan taking into account size, reach and 'policy risk' of the program or activity and the strategic need of the evaluation. Establishment of an Indigenous Evaluation Committee in 2018 to strengthen the quality, credibility and independence of evaluation activity.
2019–20 and beyond	Increased understanding of whether IAS funding and policies are effective.	Publication of the Annual Evaluation Work Plan each September taking into account size, reach and 'policy risk' of the program or activity and the strategic need of the evaluation.

Source: PM&C, *Budget 2018–19, Portfolio Budget Statements 2018–19, Budget Related Paper No. 1.14. Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio*, 2018, p. 45.

Table 3.2: Divisional performance criteria for the IAS evaluation framework

Year	Divisional level activity/key performance indicator (KPI)	Measurement
2018–19	Increasing the evidence base and supporting an evidence based culture Contribute to building the evidence-base so the Group is well-positioned to understand the likely outcome of government investment and using evidence to inform policy and ensure investment is well targeted and adaptable. KPI: The Prime Minister, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Cabinet and Executive and stakeholders are highly satisfied with the quality, relevance and timeliness of research and evaluation advice and support provided.	Policy research and evaluation projects are delivered within agreed timeframes. Evaluation Work Plan is approved and published by end Sept 2018. Attendance rates at IAG Seminars.

Source: PM&C internal documentation.

3.9 An internal audit report completed in May 2018 on the department's 2018–19 performance measures noted with regard to the measures for Program 2.6:

34 PM&C, *Budget 2018–19, Portfolio Budget Statements 2018–19, Budget Related Paper No. 1.14. Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio*, 2018, p. 45.

35 The Department of Finance's states that relevant performance information 'should clearly state who benefits and how they benefit from the entity's activities' and reliable performance information 'should use information sources and methodologies that are fit-for-purpose and verifiable'. Department of Finance, 'Quick Reference Guide — RMG 131 *Developing Good Performance Information*' [Internet], available from <https://www.finance.gov.au/resource-management/performance/> [accessed March 2019].

...the targets are outputs or deliverables rather than outcomes of Program 2.6. This is understandable given that Program 2.6 provides support to the other programs, but it may be beneficial to include an outcome focused criterion/target in the 2018–19 Corporate Plan.

3.10 The report included a recommendation that the department enhance its performance criteria and targets for Program 2.6 in its corporate plan, and suggested a potential target could be ‘the appropriate refinement of IAS policies and strategies based on the outcomes of evaluation and research, evidenced by case studies’. While the department agreed to the recommendation, it did not implement it. The department’s 2018–19 Corporate Plan only includes very high-level performance measures and does not include any performance criteria or targets for Program 2.6.³⁶

3.11 Establishing a dedicated Budget program for evaluation provides transparency about evaluation expenditure and enables high-level monitoring of its performance, providing relevant and reliable performance measures are developed. In line with the internal audit recommendation, the department should develop a reliable methodology for measuring the longer-term outcomes of the evaluation framework. If the methodology involves using case studies, it should ensure that it follows the guidance on using case studies as a reliable measure of performance outlined in Auditor-General Report No.17 2018–19 *Implementation of the Annual Performance Statements Requirements 2017–18*.³⁷

Recommendation no.1

3.12 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet ensure its performance information for Program 2.6 is supported by a reliable methodology for measuring the longer-term outcomes of better evidence from the evaluation framework.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: Agreed.

3.13 *The Department agrees there are evaluation capability, accountability and increased transparency objectives (associated with the Framework) that can be measured in the longer term. The Department is considering how best to measure such benchmarks so they provide meaningful information (i.e. a useful feedback loop) on how the Department’s evaluation culture evolves over time. The Department is in the process of developing its methodology for measuring longer-term outcomes of the Framework, with work expected to be completed by mid-2020.*

3.14 *An important consideration when developing these will be the complex policy space in which the IAS operates. When measuring the Framework’s effectiveness we will need to recognise the role of mainstream service delivery, the tax and transfer system and States and Territories. The role of the Framework is to assess the impact of the department’s policies and programs against their objectives.*

36 Auditor-General Report No.17 of 2018–19 *Implementation of the Annual Performance Statements Requirements 2017–18* included a finding that ‘PM&C’s 2018–19 Corporate Plan provides the Parliament and the public with limited insight into how the department intends to measure its performance compared to 2017–18’ (p. 57).

37 This guidance states that case studies should: be planned upfront; articulate an agreed objective; have defined scope/parameters; provide a clear target, baseline or standard; and include a clear methodology for collection, measurement and assessment. Auditor-General Report No.17 of 2018–19 *Implementation of the Annual Performance Statements Requirements 2017–18*, p. 69.

Has the department established appropriate procedures, tools, training and communications?

The department is developing procedures and tools for evaluation activities but they are not yet fully accessible or comprehensive. It has facilitated discrete evaluation training activities and evaluation advice provided to program area staff has been relevant and high quality.

Procedures and tools

3.15 To effectively embed better evaluation practices, an entity should provide guidance to staff on its evaluation approach that is supported by clear procedures and training. As discussed in Chapter 2, the development of business rules and procedures to support the evaluation framework is ongoing. The IAS evaluation framework document states that the department will develop:

- resource materials to support and encourage staff, service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to do and use evaluation in line with the core values and principles; and
- an online evaluation handbook complemented by internal support materials.

3.16 The department has commenced the development of an online handbook, which it expects will be completed by mid-2019. The handbook is expected to cover a range of different evaluation approaches and methodologies and will be aligned to the goals of the IAS evaluation framework.

3.17 The department also provides procedural guidance and technical evaluation documentation in its evaluation toolkit. The toolkit is accessible from the department's evaluation intranet site and comprises a range of documents including procedural guidance, tip sheets, templates, research articles and internal and external guest presentations. While the toolkit was developed prior to the release of the 2018 IAS evaluation framework document, some content has been developed or refined since in response to evolving business rules.

3.18 An August 2018 review, commissioned by the evaluation branch, noted that the development of procedural guidance had been an 'iterative process', which had caused some confusion for program areas, and the structure of the toolkit made it difficult to navigate. It also noted that there were gaps in the toolkit, as some business rules and procedures had not been finalised. The review recommended a new guidance document hierarchy and identified additional guidance documents that the branch should develop.

3.19 At the time of this audit, the actions recommended in the review had not been implemented and business rules and procedures were still being developed. In particular, there was not adequate guidance on:

- prioritising evaluations;
- collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the design, conduct and use of evaluations;
- managing independence of evaluators and evaluation teams; and
- using evaluations to support decision-making and improvements in service delivery.

3.20 The development of IAS evaluation guidance materials is included as an enabling activity in the 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan and the department advised that it was working to

develop interactive procedures to support evaluation activities. The department should ensure that adequate guidance is developed on all aspects of the IAS evaluation framework, including its best practice principles, to support the implementation of the framework.

Recommendation no.2

3.21 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet develop a comprehensive and easy to navigate set of procedures to support the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

3.22 *Work is underway in the Department to set procedures in place, with an emphasis on ease of navigation, comprehensiveness and capability building.*

Training

3.23 Since the release of the IAS evaluation framework in 2018, the evaluation branch has facilitated various training activities including:

- presenting a range of short evaluation training sessions targeted at evaluation branch and Indigenous Affairs Group (IAG) program area staff, covering topics such as evaluation terminology, impact evaluation, data analysis and the IAS evaluation framework; and
- contracting the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to deliver ethics training.

3.24 IAG program managers, interviewed by the ANAO in late 2018, provided feedback that their staff were attending the training provided by the evaluation branch and it was raising awareness about evaluation within their teams. The branch has not conducted analysis of the effectiveness of its training activities to assess whether it meets program areas' needs.

3.25 While the evaluation branch did not conduct a training needs assessment to inform the development of its evaluation training activities, it undertook some early planning on the potential content and structure of an evaluation training package. While the department advised the ANAO that the development of a training package that would support the diverse range of evaluation undertaken in IAG was challenging and resource intensive, it should develop training materials to support IAG staff in core activities such as developing an evaluation strategy or procuring evaluation services.

Communications and engagement

3.26 The evaluation branch finalised a communication and engagement framework in January 2019 that documents its current engagement activities and identifies further opportunities, such as establishing a seminar series, presenting evaluation findings at conferences and updating its intranet site.

3.27 The branch's primary engagement activity is the technical evaluation advice it provides to IAG program areas. For evaluations funded under Program 2.6, the branch's process is to review key evaluation procurement documentation (such as requests for tender, ethics reviews, tender assessments and draft contracts), focussing on assessing the methodological rigour of proposed evaluation approaches and value for money.

3.28 The branch conducts a ‘triage’ assessment to determine the team member best placed to assist with required evaluation work and uses a template to document its advice on areas for improvement to program areas. There is close alignment between the templates and the requirements of the evaluation framework. The evaluation branch tracks evaluation activities it is supporting in a SharePoint tool called the Evaluation Tracker. The advisor for each evaluation enters data in the tracker using a ‘code book’, which supports a standardised approach to data entry.

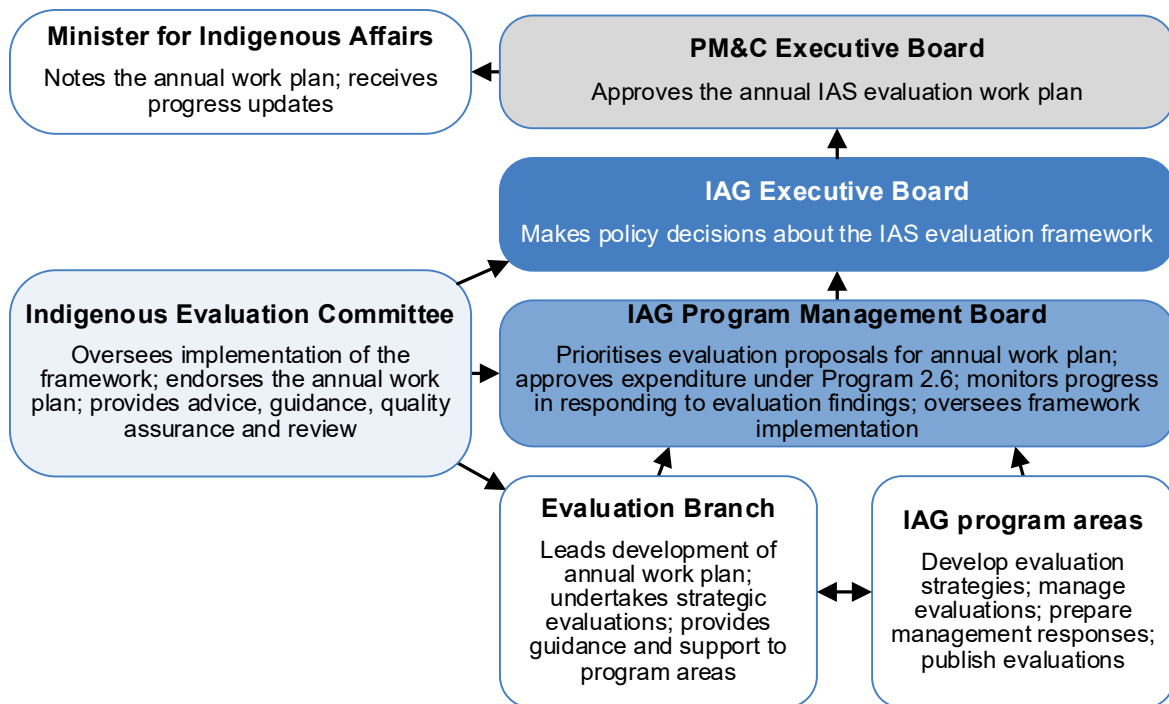
3.29 The processes used by the evaluation branch to provide, manage and track technical advice to program areas are appropriate given they align with the framework and are supported by documented and standardised processes. IAG program managers interviewed by the ANAO reported that the advice provided by the evaluation branch was responsive, high quality and aimed at building evaluation capability within IAG program areas.

Has the department established effective management oversight arrangements?

The department’s management oversight arrangements for the IAS evaluation framework are maturing. A mechanism for monitoring evaluation findings and management responses is being developed.

3.30 The IAS evaluation framework document states that clear governance is required to guide roles and responsibilities for IAS evaluation, including prioritising evaluation effort, ensuring evaluation quality, assessing implementation progress, supporting evaluation use and building evaluation capacity. The management oversight structure for the IAS evaluation framework is depicted in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Oversight structure for IAS evaluation framework



Source: ANAO analysis of departmental documentation.

Management oversight bodies

3.31 The evaluation framework document states that the PM&C Executive Board is responsible for approving the annual evaluation work plan and reviewing progress reports against it. There was limited evidence that the IAG Executive Board were involved in the oversight of IAS evaluation activities. The two key oversight bodies have been the IEC and IAG Program Management Board.

Indigenous Evaluation Committee

3.32 The IEC members were announced in July 2018 after the Minister for Indigenous Affairs approved its membership and budget in April 2018. Its terms of reference state that its objective is to strengthen the quality, credibility and influence of the evaluations of policies and programs led by the department through the provision of independent strategic and technical advice.

3.33 As at April 2019 the IEC had met three times and had endorsed the 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan. The IEC expressed concern in late 2018 that a number of completed evaluations referenced in 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan had not been published. (Compliance with the framework requirement to publish evaluation reports is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.)

IAG Program Management Board

3.34 The role of the IAG Program Management Board (the board) is to make decisions and provide advice to IAG program areas and the IAG Executive on the implementation of programs, particularly the IAS. The evaluation branch has been working to formalise and expand the role of the board in overseeing the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework and IAS evaluation activity. In February 2018 the branch presented a paper to the board seeking agreement to expand its terms of reference to include:

- supporting the development of the annual evaluation work plan;
- considering evaluation reports in order to integrate findings into policy and program improvement;
- monitoring progress of identified actions from management responses to completed evaluation reports;
- championing the use of evidence in policy development and service delivery; and
- providing oversight for the implementation of measures to support the framework.

3.35 While the board agreed to the proposal in February 2018, its terms of reference had not been updated to reflect the expanded role as at April 2019.

Monitoring evaluation findings and management responses

3.36 Since late 2018 the evaluation branch has been working to clarify roles and responsibilities for monitoring and enforcing compliance with aspects of the evaluation framework; in particular, the requirements outlined in the IAS evaluation framework document that:

all evaluation reports or summaries will be made publicly available ... [and]

senior management will provide responses to evaluations following completion, and identified actions will be followed up and recorded.³⁸

3.37 In October 2018 the evaluation branch presented a paper to the Program Management Board seeking its agreement that the Program Office (a separate division within IAG) be tasked with recording and monitoring evaluation findings and subsequent management responses in a central database to support the board's oversight role. The board agreed that it had a role in monitoring evaluation findings and management responses and asked the evaluation branch to submit a paper to the IAG Executive Board to ensure the right mechanism is developed to fulfil this function.

3.38 An internal audit of the IAS evaluation framework, completed in November 2018, also recommended that an action owner be identified for all IAS evaluation recommendations and that a formal process be developed for tracking and monitoring the implementation of actions arising from evaluations. The department agreed with the recommendation stating that the IAG Executive Board would decide the most appropriate mechanism for implementation.

3.39 Rather than submitting a paper to the IAG Executive Board, in April 2019 the evaluation branch gained approval from the Associate Secretary, the Chair of the IAG Executive Board, for the implementation of a range of activities to strengthen governance arrangements and the role of the IAG Program Management Board in policy development and evaluation oversight, including the tracking and reporting of agreed action items from management responses.

3.40 The department started tracking the status of action items arising from completed evaluations and action owners in a spreadsheet from February 2019, and it is scoping requirements for a more advanced system to capture evaluation findings and recommendations, and management responses.

Is a culture of evaluative thinking being developed within the Indigenous Affairs Group?

There are early indications that the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework may be developing a culture of evaluative thinking within IAG. Developing a plan for how framework implementation activities will lead to the desired changes in maturity would assist the department in achieving its future maturity levels.

3.41 One of the goals of the IAS evaluation framework is to 'build capability by fostering a collaborative culture of evaluative thinking and continuous learning'.³⁹ The framework seeks to build this culture of evaluative thinking through implementing activities under three streams: collaboration, capability and knowledge.

3.42 In May 2018 the evaluation branch developed a maturity model for the implementation of the framework. The maturity model describes the department's self-assessed level of evaluation maturity in June 2017 and outlines where it would like the maturity level to be in June 2019, June 2020 and June 2021, but does not explain how this will be achieved (the maturity model is shown at Appendix 3). By June 2019 the model anticipates that 'appreciation of the benefits of

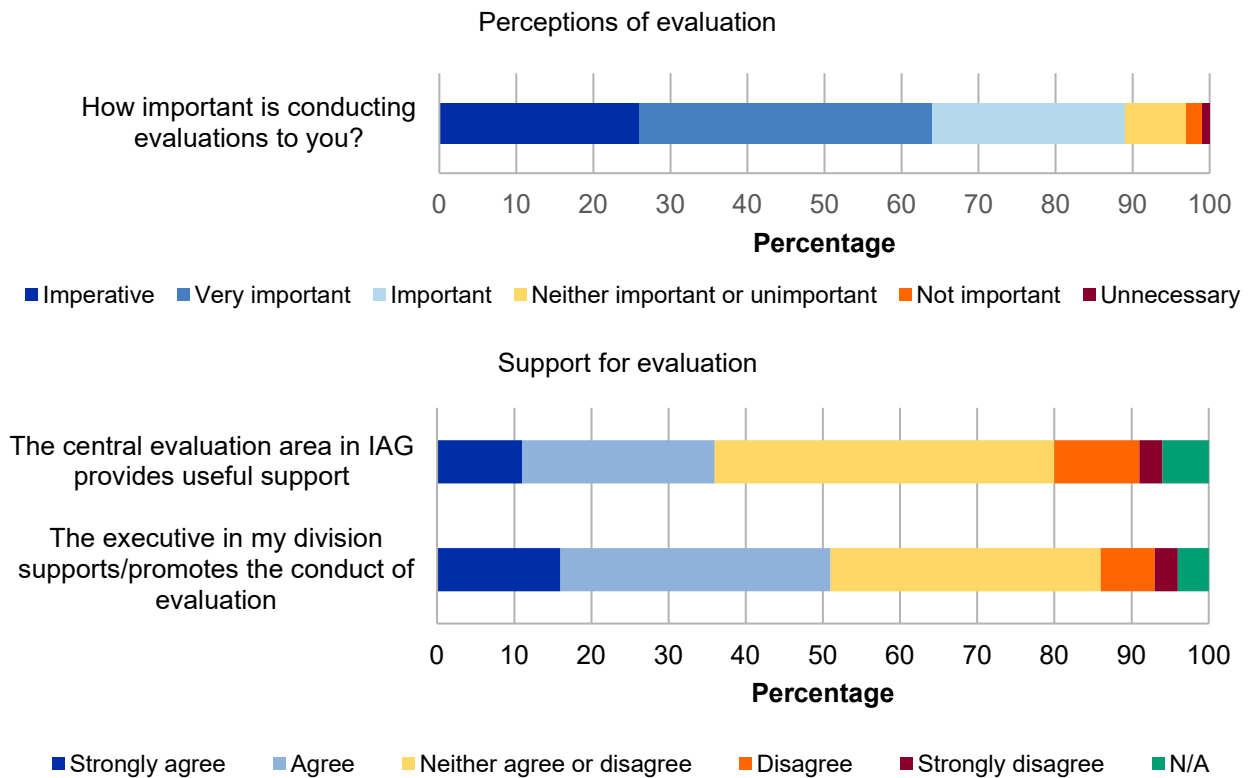
38 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 12.

39 *ibid.*, p. 2.

evaluation [would be] improving’ and ‘evaluation [would be] viewed as core business for the Group, not simply a compliance activity’.

3.43 To assist in understanding current levels of knowledge and awareness about evaluation, the evaluation branch conducted a survey of IAG program area staff from December 2018 to January 2019. The results for questions relating to support for and perceptions of evaluation indicate a majority of staff (89 per cent) see evaluation as important and roughly half (51 per cent) agree that senior executives in their division support or promote evaluation (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: IAG staff survey results on evaluation perceptions and support



Source: PM&C internal documentation.

3.44 The ANAO also conducted interviews with IAG program managers in late 2018. Most managers interviewed demonstrated an understanding of the value of evaluation, were aware of the evaluation framework and annual work plan processes and were able to provide examples of evaluations that were being conducted in their program areas.

3.45 Embedding an evaluative culture within an entity can take several years and requires appropriate resourcing, expertise in change management and strong commitment from senior management. Survey results and feedback from program areas suggests that the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework may be starting to generate the desired cultural change within IAG. Developing a plan for how framework implementation activities will lead to the desired changes in maturity would assist the department in achieving its future maturity levels.

3.46 The department’s dedicated evaluation funding, specialised evaluation support function and increased level of oversight of evaluation activities are positive indicators for future culture change.

4. Application of the framework

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether evaluation activities are conducted in accordance with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (the department's or PM&C's) Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) evaluation framework.

Conclusion

As the department is still developing procedures to support the application of the IAS evaluation framework, it is too early to assess whether evaluations are being conducted in accordance with the framework. The department's approach to prioritising evaluations should be formalised by developing structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk. The department has taken recent steps to: mandate early evaluation planning; publish completed evaluations; and ensure findings are acted upon.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO made one recommendation aimed at formalising the prioritisation of evaluation activities. The ANAO also suggested developing procedures to support the application of better practice principles.

4.1 Since the publication of the 2018 IAS evaluation framework document, the department's evaluations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs have been guided by a set of nine best practice principles: integrated, respectful, evidence-based, impact-focused, transparent, independent, ethical, timely and fit-for-purpose (see Appendix 2 for descriptions of the principles).

4.2 To assess the extent to which the department has been applying the principles, the ANAO examined departmental business processes and documentation, and conducted interviews with Indigenous Affairs Group (IAG) program managers. To obtain a baseline assessment of the application of the best practice principles prior to the implementation of the IAS evaluation framework, the ANAO analysed 29 evaluations or reviews listed in the department's 2018–19 evaluation work plan that were underway as at October 2018 or had been completed in 2017 or 2018 (a list of evaluations and reviews in the 2018–19 work plan and their status is at Appendix 4). Table 4.1 outlines the best practice principles examined in each sub-section of the chapter.

Table 4.1: Best practice principles examined in this chapter

Best practice principles	Chapter sub-section
Fit-for-purpose	Are evaluations being effectively prioritised by considering coverage, significance, contribution and risk?
Integrated; Timely	Are evaluations being planned at an early stage of program development?
Respectful; Independent; Ethical	Are evaluations being designed to be respectful, independent and ethical?
Evidence-based; Impact-focused	Are evaluations impact-focused and evidence-based?
Transparent; Integrated	Are evaluation findings being published and used to support decision-making and improvements in service delivery?

Source: ANAO.

Are evaluations being effectively prioritised by considering coverage, significance, contribution and risk?

The department has implemented a process for prioritising evaluations under the IAS evaluation framework through development of its annual evaluation work plan. Formalising this process by developing structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk and conducting a strategic analysis of gaps in evaluation coverage would aid the department in employing a consistent and robust approach to prioritising evaluations.

Prioritisation processes

4.3 Under the IAS evaluation framework's 'fit-for-purpose' best practice principle, the scale of effort and resources devoted to evaluations should be proportional to the potential significance, contribution or risk of the program or activity. In line with this, the IAS evaluation framework document states:

Prioritisation will consider significance, contribution and risk. Significant, high risk programs/activities will be subject to comprehensive independent evaluation. While evaluation priorities will be identified over four years, priority areas remain flexible in order to respond to changing circumstances.⁴⁰

4.4 Since 2016 the department's mechanism for prioritising evaluation activities has been through the development of three annual evaluation work plans:

- a 2016 work plan finalised in March 2016 and published on its intranet;
- a 2017–18 work plan published on its website in February 2018; and
- a 2018–19 work plan published on its website in December 2018.

4.5 From 2019–20, the department has committed to publishing its annual evaluation work plan by September each year.

4.6 While different processes were used to develop these work plans, each involved cataloguing existing evaluation activities and conducting a 'bottom-up' process to identify new activities. This process involved three steps: the evaluation branch consulting other areas of IAG to identify and develop evaluation proposals; the branch assessing the technical merit, significance, contribution and risk for submitted proposals; and oversight bodies considering and endorsing the draft plan.

4.7 The IAS evaluation framework document provides high-level definitions of significance, contribution and risk, but no detail on how to operationalise these criteria in a prioritisation process. The evaluation branch has draft internal working documents outlining prioritisation approaches used by other entities, but has not developed procedural guidance for the department. In interviews with the ANAO, IAG program managers reported that they did not have structured mechanisms for determining evaluation priorities within their program areas. Consequently, in identifying proposals for the annual work plan it is possible that key priority areas may be missed. Developing structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk would aid the department in employing a consistent and robust approach to prioritising evaluations.

40 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 11.

Evaluation coverage

4.8 The IAS evaluation framework document notes: ‘it is not possible nor desirable to evaluate all activities funded by the Department. Sometimes monitoring is sufficient’.⁴¹ It also notes the evaluation framework was designed to operate ‘in tandem’ with the department’s IAS performance framework, a separate internal framework maintained by the Program Office that covers the monitoring of all IAS grants.

4.9 At the request of the Indigenous Evaluation Committee (IEC), the department undertook analysis of the geographical spread of evaluations to inform its 2018–19 work plan. However, since the 2013 review discussed in paragraph 2.19, it has not undertaken a strategic ‘top-down’ review of its programs, administered items, activities and sub-activities to identify any gaps in evaluation coverage or determine which areas are of greatest significance, contribution or risk. Undertaking such an analysis, with structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk, would enable the department to have greater assurance that its evaluations are being prioritised appropriately.

Recommendation no.3

4.10 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet formalise its evaluation prioritisation process by developing structured criteria for assessing significance, contribution and risk and conducting a strategic analysis of gaps in evaluation coverage.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

4.11 The Department will continue developing its operational evaluation criteria to assist decision makers in their judgements about how to prioritise future evaluation efforts. This however will not be an overly prescriptive or onerous formal assessment and a level of judgement will always be required in priority setting. Any criteria should be designed to provide guidance on whether an evaluation is required, and if so help assess the feasibility of a quality evaluation (given any data, time or other constraints or opportunities). Evaluations should not be undertaken unless a quality evaluation can be assured. The objective is not to increase the number of evaluations undertaken, but to embed rigorous and evidence-based evaluation to inform good policy design.

Are evaluations being planned at an early stage of program development?

From October 2018 the department mandated integrating evaluation strategies into the design of all new or refreshed policies and programs and developing evaluation strategies for existing programs prior to conducting evaluations. Prior to this, evaluations were not consistently planned at an early stage of program development.

4.12 The IAS evaluation framework’s ‘integrated’ and ‘timely’ best practice principles state:
Evaluation planning is undertaken at the outset when policy and programs are designed.
[Integrated]

⁴¹ PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 11.

Evaluation planning is guided by the timing of critical decisions to ensure specific and sufficient bodies of evidence are available when needed. [Timely]⁴²

4.13 At its August 2018 meeting the IEC noted the importance of developing evaluation plans or strategies at the program design stage, in line with the department's best practice evaluation principles. Later in August 2018 the IAG Associate Secretary agreed that evaluation strategies would be required at the design phase for all new IAS policies and programs.

4.14 The evaluation branch informed the IAG Program Management Board and all IAG senior managers of the requirement in October 2018, noting that:

- all new or refreshed policies or programs under the IAS require a performance monitoring and evaluation strategy; and
- evaluations would only be funded under Program 2.6 for existing policies or programs if an approved evaluation strategy was in place.

4.15 In developing the 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan in late 2018, the evaluation branch asked IAG program areas to submit evaluation proposals for existing IAS programs. If an approved evaluation strategy was in place, the proposal was considered for inclusion in the work plan and could subsequently be approved for funding under Program 2.6. If an approved evaluation strategy was not in place, the program area was required to develop a strategy and could receive funding under Program 2.6 to support this. As a result of this new process, the 2018–19 work plan included one new evaluation project for an existing program and 15 new projects to develop evaluation strategies for existing programs. This indicates that evaluation requirements had not been considered at an early stage of program development for the majority of existing programs for which evaluation funding was sought in 2018–19.

4.16 As part of its interviews with IAG program managers, the ANAO sought to determine what processes were in place to ensure evaluation is considered during program design. Although IAG program areas did not have formal processes in place, they provided information on four existing programs (all of which pre-dated the framework) that had incorporated evaluation at early stages of their development: the Community Development Program; the Remote School Attendance Strategy; the Indigenous Procurement Policy; and the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program.

4.17 Since the release of the October 2018 policy requiring the inclusion of monitoring and evaluation strategies in all new and refreshed policies and programs, the department has complied with the policy. The Indigenous Youth Education Package, announced in February 2019, includes the procurement of a monitoring and evaluation strategy early in its design.

42 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 7.

Are evaluations being designed to be respectful, independent and ethical?

The department has some processes in place to support the design of respectful, independent and ethical evaluations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs. The development of additional guidance and business processes would help to clarify requirements and embed these principles.

4.18 The department's 'respectful', 'independent' and 'ethical' best practice principles state:

Collaborative approaches are strengths-based, build partnerships and demonstrate cultural respect towards Indigenous Australians. [Respectful]

Evaluation integrates diverse Indigenous perspectives with the core values to ensure findings are meaningful, relevant and useful to Indigenous communities and government. [Respectful]

Evaluators, while working with suppliers, and policy and program areas, will have some independence. [Independent]

Ethical practice meets the highest standards for respectful involvement of Indigenous Australians in evaluation. [Ethical]⁴³

4.19 The ANAO examined documentation for all 29 evaluations and reviews from the 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan that had been completed or commenced (see Appendix 4) to assess the extent to which key aspects of the 'respectful', 'independent' and 'ethical' best practice principles were considered in planning evaluation activities (see Table 4.2). All but four of these evaluations and reviews commenced prior to the release of the 2018 IAS evaluation framework document, so the results in Table 4.2 should be interpreted as a baseline assessment rather than an assessment of the application of the framework.

Table 4.2: Percentage of evaluations and reviews that considered aspects of the 'respectful', 'independent' and 'ethical' principles

Principle	Test	Evaluations	Reviews	Total
Respectful	Planning considered:	60%	50%	55%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboration with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples; • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander perspectives or values; and/or • an approach to demonstrating cultural respect. 			
	Planning considered potential threats to independence.	67%	43%	55%
Independent	Members of the evaluation/review team were from outside the program area.	100%	79%	90%
	Planning considered ethical review requirements.	93%	36%	66%

Source: ANAO analysis.

43 PM&C, *Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 7.

Respectful

4.20 As noted in Chapter 2, in response to stakeholder feedback on the exposure draft of the IAS evaluation framework document in late 2017, PM&C included increased reference to respect for the values and aspirations of, and collaboration with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and added a requirement that all evaluations under the IAS build in appropriate collaboration processes.

4.21 Of the 29 completed or commenced evaluation projects examined, 55 per cent had considered at least one aspect of the 'respectful' best practice principle during the planning process. Examples of 'respectful' processes include:

- running co-design workshops with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to develop evaluation methods;
- using culturally appropriate data collection methods;
- recruiting Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples as researchers or interviewers;
- adjusting a randomised selection method based on identified social or cultural barriers to participation; and
- ensuring the evaluation team consulted with as many clans or language groups as possible within the research area.

4.22 The department's evaluation maturity model (reproduced at Appendix 3) anticipates that by June 2019: 'Guidelines for collaboration with Indigenous people on design, conduct and use of evaluation findings [would be] integrated into usual practice'. However, at the time of this audit the department had not developed these guidelines.

4.23 The department is collaborating with the Australian and New Zealand School of Government on a project to create and share resources on supporting respectful practice when working on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program evaluations. The project commenced in May 2018, but at the time of the audit no resource materials had been developed.

4.24 In developing a comprehensive set of procedures for the IAS evaluation framework (see Recommendation no.2), the department should include guidance on conducting respectful evaluations and ensure evaluations under the framework meet this best practice principle.

Independent

4.25 Having independence within an evaluation team can help to ensure the evaluation provides an unbiased assessment of a policy or program. Further, actual or perceived threats to independence can undermine the credibility of an evaluation. For example, if an external evaluation contractor has previously worked for a service provider being evaluated or publicly expressed strong views on the policy area, these factors could be used to discredit evaluation findings. Consequently, it is important to identify potential biases and threats to independence and have processes in place to manage them. Such processes include procedures to declare threats to independence and implement mitigation strategies and independent quality review processes.

4.26 A majority (90 per cent) of the 29 evaluations and reviews examined involved teams that included evaluators from outside the IAG program area managing the policy or program being evaluated. In most cases the evaluation or review was conducted by an external contractor engaged by the program area. More than half (55 per cent) of evaluations or reviews had considered

potential threats to independence, usually through a requirement for contractors to disclose any conflicts of interest in responding to a request for quote.

4.27 While ensuring that there are some independent evaluators within an evaluation team can increase the credibility of an evaluation, evaluations conducted by external contractors may still be subject to influence.⁴⁴ The department could consider incorporating a requirement into its evaluation planning processes that evaluation team members declare any actual or perceived threats to their independence and mitigation strategies are implemented to address any identified threats.

4.28 As discussed in Chapter 3, the department is yet to establish the quality review processes it committed to in its IAS evaluation framework document, which would involve the IEC reviewing all strategic or cross-cutting evaluations and the evaluation branch reviewing a random selection of other evaluations and reviews. Establishing these review processes would also help to strengthen the credibility and independence of the department's evaluation activities.

Ethical

4.29 The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' (AIATSIS's) *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* include various principles for researchers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The principles include consulting openly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and negotiating a research plan that meets their needs and interests.⁴⁵ Ethics committee review can be an effective way of ensuring that considerations such as these are met in the design of an evaluation project.

4.30 A majority (66 per cent) of the 29 evaluations and reviews examined had considered the need for ethics committee review during planning. Of the 19 projects that had considered the need for ethics review, eight (42 per cent) sought and gained ethics approval; for six (32 per cent) the IAG program area or evaluation team determined an ethics committee review was not necessary as the evaluation or review was not high risk; for the remaining five (26 per cent) ethics approval was considered necessary but there was no evidence in the department's records that ethics approval had been sought.

4.31 In April 2018 the department established an arrangement with AIATSIS to support use of the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee for ethics clearances of Program 2.6 evaluations.⁴⁶ The department advised the ANAO that evaluation teams can continue to seek clearance from other relevant ethics committees, depending on the context of the evaluation (for example, where an evaluator is associated with a university).

44 Stufflebeam and Coryn state: 'Unfortunately, some evaluators set aside any commitment to the integrity of their evaluation services by catering to a client's desire for certain predetermined evaluative conclusions, regardless of a program's actual performance and outcomes. By delivering the designed conclusion, evaluators often position themselves in the good graces of the client.' DL Stufflebeam & CLS Coryn, *Evaluation Theory, Models, & Applications*, 2nd edition, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2014, p. 122.

45 AIATSIS, *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, 2012, p. 9.

46 The AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee comprises eight members appointed by the AIATSIS Council and must include at least four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. AIATSIS staff members are ineligible for membership.

4.32 As at April 2019, the evaluation branch was developing an ethics policy to ensure that all future evaluations under the framework are subject to external ethical review. Incorporating this policy into procedural guidance for the IAS evaluation framework (see Recommendation no.2) would help to ensure the department's evaluations uphold ethical standards.

Are evaluations impact-focused and evidence-based?

Although the department has committed to increasing its focus on impact evaluation, it is too early to assess whether evaluations under the new IAS evaluation framework will be impact-focused and evidence-based.

4.33 The department's 2016 evaluation work plan included a priority to '[increase] the quality and availability of quantitative evidence about impact on people or places using available data sources more effectively'. The 2018 IAS evaluation framework's 'evidence-based' and 'impact-focused' best practice principles state:

Robust evaluation methodologies and analytical methods are used to understand the effects of programs in real-world settings and inform program design and implementation. [Evidence-based]

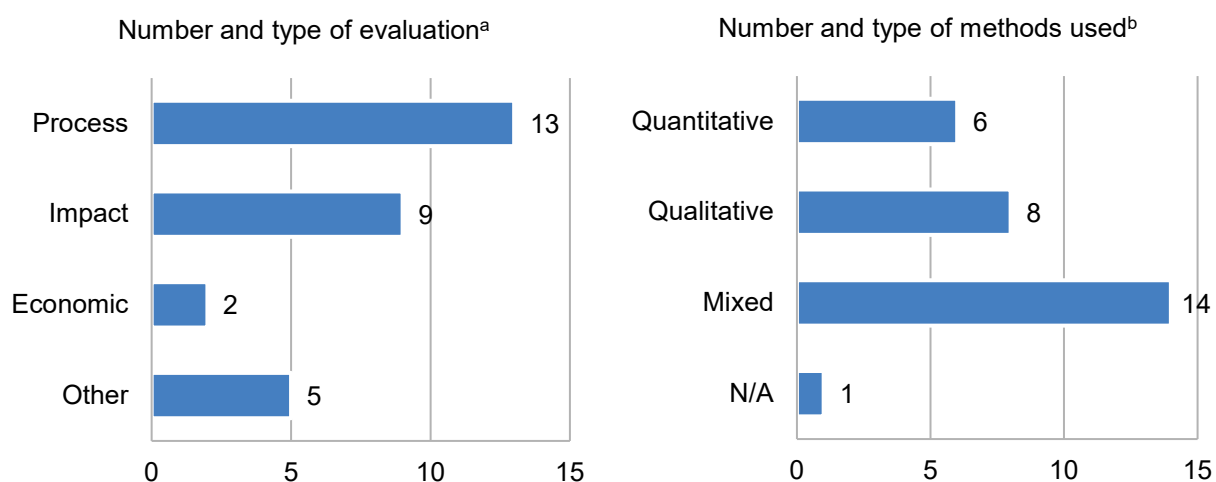
Evaluation is focused on examining the impact of IAS investment. [Impact-focused]

Evaluations rigorously test the causal explanations that make programs viable and effective across different community and organisational settings. [Impact-focused]⁴⁷

4.34 For the 29 completed or commenced evaluation projects examined (most of which commenced prior to the development of the 2018 IAS evaluation framework), the majority were process evaluations (45 per cent) or impact evaluations (31 per cent) (see Figure 4.1). A broad range of analytical methods were used in the examined evaluations and reviews: almost half (48 per cent) used mixed methods (that is, both quantitative and qualitative methods), whereas the remainder generally used either quantitative or qualitative methods.⁴⁸

47 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 7.

48 Quantitative methods involve analysing numerical data, such as administrative data collected by the program or data collected by researchers; qualitative methods involve analysing data collected through interviews, focus groups or other non-numerical methods; and mixed methods refers to combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

Figure 4.1: Number and type of evaluation and research methods used in evaluations and reviews

Note a: 'Process evaluation' investigates the effectiveness and efficiency of program delivery; 'impact evaluation' seeks to establish causal links between the program and any intended and unintended effects; 'economic evaluation' involves calculating the economic costs and benefits of a program; 'other' means not an evaluation (such as policy research or modelling).

Note b: N/A means it did not involve any research methods.

Source: ANAO analysis.

4.35 As shown in Table 4.3, 60 per cent of evaluations and 14 per cent of reviews focused on examining the impact of IAS investment. Few (21 per cent) evaluation designs involved establishing a counterfactual or comparison or control group to test program impact. As most of the examined evaluations and reviews commenced prior to the development of the 2018 IAS evaluation framework, these results should be interpreted as a baseline assessment.

Table 4.3: Percentage of evaluations and reviews examining program impact

Principle	Test	Evaluations	Reviews	Total
Impact-focused	There was a focus on examining the impact of IAS investment.	60%	14%	38%
	A theory of change was developed.	67%	21%	45%
	The design involved establishing a counterfactual or comparison/control group.	27%	12%	21%

Source: ANAO analysis.

4.36 The evaluation branch has run training workshops and seminars to support the use of appropriate evidence in evaluations, including on the use of data, data terminology and analysis of longitudinal data.

Are evaluation findings being published and used to support decision-making and improvements in service delivery?

The department is working to increase compliance with the IAS evaluation framework requirements to publicly release evaluation reports or summaries and develop management responses. Evaluation findings have been used to support decision-making and improvements in service delivery in four IAS programs.

Publishing completed evaluations and management responses

4.37 The IAS evaluation framework's 'transparent' best practice principle states: 'Evaluation reports (or summaries) will be made publicly available through appropriate, ethical and collaborative consent processes'.⁴⁹ In addition, the IAS evaluation framework document includes a requirement that: 'senior management will provide responses to evaluations following completion, and identified actions will be followed up and recorded'.⁵⁰

4.38 The department's 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan listed five evaluations or reviews that it had publicly released on its website, and thirteen that had been completed but were awaiting release. Following concerns raised by the IEC in late 2018 about the number of completed evaluations and reviews that had not been published, the evaluation branch contacted IAG program areas to determine the reasons for non-publication. Reasons provided included:

- waiting to brief the Minister (Community Development Program) or for the Minister to note the report before publishing (Closing the Gap review, School Enrolment and Attendance Measure evaluation and Indigenous Rangers and Protected Areas Fee for Service evaluation);
- the report contains commercial-in-confidence material (Indigenous Rangers Cost Analysis review and Review of Indigenous Entrepreneurs Fund — Business Advisors);
- agreement to publish needed from a third party (Aboriginal Employment and Training Activity evaluation and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders Program Pilot review);
- waiting for an internal policy and funding review to be completed (School Nutrition Program review);
- intending to publish an executive summary (Review of Regional Employment Targets under the Community Development Program, Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program, National Disability Insurance Scheme — East Arnhem Land Co-Design Project); and
- the review had not been completed (the Mental Health First Aid Training review).

4.39 While following up on reasons for non-publication, the evaluation branch also sought to determine whether program areas had prepared management responses in accordance with the

49 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 7.

50 *ibid.*, p. 12.

IAS evaluation framework requirement. Of the 18 completed evaluations or reviews listed in the 2018–19 annual evaluation work plan, the branch received responses in relation to nine:

- management responses had been presented to the IAG Program Management Board for two evaluations (Community Development Program and Remote School Attendance Strategy evaluations);
- management responses were being drafted by program areas for three reviews or evaluations (School Enrolment and Attendance Measure evaluation, School Nutrition Program review and Indigenous Rangers Cost Analysis review); and
- in the case of four published reports, program areas were not intending to prepare a management response as they felt the review or evaluation had pre-dated the framework requirement.

4.40 The department provided a brief to the Chief of Staff to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs in March 2019 advising that it intended to publish the remaining evaluation reports or summaries throughout March and April 2019. As at April 2019, three of the thirteen previously unpublished reports had been published (Community Development Program and National Disability Insurance Scheme — East Arnhem Land Co-Design Project evaluations and Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program review). In addition, management responses had been prepared and presented to the IAG Program Management Board for three evaluations (School Enrolment and Attendance Measure, School Nutrition Program, and National Disability Insurance Scheme — East Arnhem Land Co-Design Project).

4.41 As discussed in Chapter 3, the department is establishing a mechanism for monitoring evaluation findings and management responses and strengthening governance arrangements and the IAG Program Management Board’s role in enforcing compliance with framework requirements. This includes requirements for IAG program areas to present management responses to the Board within two months of finalising reports and publish reports on the department’s website within three months of finalising. There is currently limited procedural guidance available to IAG program areas on publishing evaluation reports and preparing management responses. In developing a comprehensive set of procedures for the IAS evaluation framework (see Recommendation no.2), the department should ensure that such guidance is included.

Using evaluations to support decision-making and improvements in service delivery

4.42 The IAS evaluation framework’s ‘integrated’ best practice principle states:

Evaluation supports learning, evidence-based decision-making and improvements in service delivery; it is not a compliance activity.

Findings from past evaluations inform policy decisions.⁵¹

4.43 As part of its interviews with IAG program managers, the ANAO sought to determine what processes were in place to ensure evaluation findings were used to support decision-making and improvements in service delivery. Although there were no formal processes in place (outside of the management response process discussed above), IAG program managers provided four instances of where evaluation findings had been used to inform program and policy development:

51 PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 7.

- guiding reforms to the Community Development Program;
- developing training for staff delivering the Remote School Attendance Strategy program (see Case Study 1);
- refinements to the Indigenous Procurement Policy; and
- facilitating improvements in collaboration and training in the delivery of the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program.

Case Study 1. Evaluation of the Remote School Attendance Strategy

A 2017 evaluation of the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) examined the behavioural motivations of parents and carers in relation to school attendance. A key finding of the evaluation was that 'one-size-fits-all' approaches were unlikely to be effective in improving school attendance. The report identified four different kinds of family types, with each requiring different kinds of support from the program:

- committed families — who are supportive of education, but occasionally need practical support to help get their children to school;
- protective families — want children to attend school, but often worry school (or the trip to and from school) is unsafe and so protect their children by keeping them home;
- unsure families — who believe cultural education is critical for their children, but are not convinced mainstream education can support culture, or that it will lead to a job; and
- disconnected families — who want their children to go to school, but do not always know how to get them there or who to ask for help.

In response to the evaluation findings, the department prepared a 'webinar' to train staff involved in the RSAS. The training explained the purpose of the evaluation, introduced the different family types and provided guidance on how to interact with and support them.

Surveys conducted before and after the training was delivered found:

- prior to training 92 per cent of participants had limited understanding of how best to follow up with families; and
- after training 100 per cent of participants had improved their understanding and 70 per cent indicated they would implement the new methods.

4.44 Case Study 1 provides an example of an evaluation that has been used to support decision-making and improvement in service delivery. As more robust evaluations are completed, there is an opportunity for the department to further embed better practices and share learnings across IAG program areas.



Grant Hehir
Auditor-General

Canberra ACT
18 June 2019

Appendices

Appendix 1 Entity response



Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

SECRETARY
DR MARTIN PARKINSON AC PSM

Ref: EC19-000444

Mr Grant Hehir
Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
PO Box 707
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Hehir

Thank you for your email dated 29 April 2019 and for providing a copy of the proposed audit report on evaluation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs (the Report), issued under section 19 of the *Auditor-General Act 1997*.

The Department notes the Report and its recommendations. I am pleased that the Report found there are many good features in the design of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework (the Framework), and that it has been informed by recognised principles of program evaluation, relevant literature, previous evaluation activity and stakeholder feedback.

A rigorous, evidence-based evaluation culture is critical to informing good program design practice. The Department is working to ensure a strong culture of quality evaluation continues to develop and underpins the design of future programs across the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

I am confident in my Department's approach, which is practical, methodical and sequenced. We have established a dedicated team focused on the design and implementation of the Framework. They will continue to develop tools and structures to increase evaluation capability across Indigenous Affairs Group. This includes ensuring we work across the Department and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to effectively guide program and policy development over the long-term.

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To have significant impact there needs to be long-term commitment to quality evaluations. As such, the Framework is not linked to any specific government agenda and is flexible enough to assess any government priorities into the future.

The Department's response to the Report's recommendations is at Attachment A. If you would like further information or clarification on the Department's overall response, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Troy Sloan, First Assistant Secretary, Legal, Employment, Environment and Evaluation Division on (02) 6228 6316 or via email at troy.sloan@pmc.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



21 May 2019

Appendix 2 The department's best practice evaluation principles

Criteria	Principles	
Relevant	Integrated	Evaluation supports learning, evidence-based decision-making and improvements in service delivery; it is not a compliance activity. Evaluation planning is undertaken at the outset when policy and programs are designed. Findings from past evaluations inform policy decisions.
	Respectful	Collaborative approaches are strengths-based, build partnerships and demonstrate cultural respect towards Indigenous Australians. Evaluation integrates diverse Indigenous perspectives with the core values to ensure findings are meaningful, relevant and useful to Indigenous communities and government.
Robust	Evidence-based	Robust evaluation methodologies and analytical methods are used to understand the effects of programs in real-world settings and inform program design and implementation. Appropriate data is collected to support evaluation.
	Impact focused	Evaluation is focused on examining the impact of Indigenous Advancement Strategy investment. Evaluations rigorously test the causal explanations that make programs viable and effective across different community and organisational settings.
Credible	Transparent	Evaluation reports (or summaries) will be made publicly available through appropriate, ethical and collaborative consent processes.
	Independent	Evaluation governance bodies have some independence from the responsible policy and program areas. Evaluators, while working with suppliers, and policy and program areas, will have some independence.
	Ethical	Ethical practice meets the highest standards for respectful involvement of Indigenous Australians in evaluation.
Appropriate	Timely	Evaluation planning is guided by the timing of critical decisions to ensure specific and sufficient bodies of evidence are available when needed.
	Fit-for-purpose	Evaluation design is appropriate to Indigenous values and considers place, program lifecycle, feasibility, data availability and value for money. Evaluation is responsive to place and is appropriate to the Indigenous communities in which programs are implemented. The scale of effort and resources devoted to evaluation is proportional to the potential significance, contribution or risk of the program/activity.

Source: PM&C, *IAS Evaluation Framework*, February 2018, p. 7.

Appendix 3 The department's evaluation maturity model

	Beginning (June 2017)	Developing (June 2019)	Embedded (June 2020)	Leading (June 2021)
Integrated	<p>Awareness of the benefits of evaluation is low.</p> <p>Evaluation is seen as a compliance activity and threat.</p> <p>Fear of negative findings and recommendations leads to a perception of 'mandatory optimism' regarding program performance.</p> <p>Insufficient resources allocated to evaluation activities.</p>	<p>Appreciation of the benefits of evaluation improving.</p> <p>Evaluation is being viewed as core business for the Group, not simply a compliance activity.</p>	<p>A culture of evaluative thinking and continual improvement is embedded across the department, with lessons learnt being acted upon.</p> <p>Evaluation is seen as an integral component of sound performance management.</p>	<p>Evaluations motivate improvements in program design and policy implementation.</p>
Respectful	<p>Some attention to benefit of evaluation to community in some studies, particularly employment in conduct of evaluation and return of results.</p>	<p>Focus on benefit of evaluation to community increasing in frequency and range of benefits considered.</p> <p>Guidelines for collaboration with Indigenous people on design, conduct and use of evaluation findings are being integrated into usual practice.</p>	<p>Evaluation practice involves some collaboration with Indigenous people on aspects of design, conduct and use of evaluation findings.</p>	<p>Standard evaluation practice involves: collaboration with Indigenous people on all aspects of design, conduct and use of evaluation findings.</p> <p>Approaches are strengths-based, build partnerships and demonstrate cultural respect.</p>
Evidence-based	<p>Data holdings and collection methods are insufficient or of poor quality.</p>	<p>Planning at program outset improves data holdings and collection methods.</p> <p>Developing skills and knowledge in applying robust research and analytical methods to assess impact and outcomes.</p> <p>Quality of evaluations is improving.</p>	<p>A range of administrative and other data is used in the assessment of performance.</p> <p>Robust research and analytical methods are used to assess impact and outcomes.</p> <p>Evaluations conform to agency standards.</p>	<p>The Group continually develops and applies robust research and analytical methods to assess impact and outcomes.</p> <p>Evaluation and performance measurement conforms to Independently determined standards of quality.</p>

	Beginning (June 2017)	Developing (June 2019)	Embedded (June 2020)	Leading (June 2021)
Impact-focused	<p>Pockets of impact evaluation with confusion about its definition.</p> <p>Low levels of use of program logic or theory of change mapping (i.e. program theory) for policy development or implementation design.</p> <p>Limited information available to determine the value gained from investment.</p>	<p>Appreciation of the value of articulating program theory, clarifying assumptions and desired impacts.</p> <p>Developing awareness of what signs of success are credible markers of progress.</p> <p>Engagement with existing evidence to map expectations against likely outcomes predicted by the evidence.</p> <p>Costs associated with program implementation are articulated to meet economic valuation standards.</p>	<p>Planning at program outset improves the availability of data holdings to facilitate impact studies.</p> <p>Effort to evaluate what difference we are making and whether investment is making a contribution to outcomes is a priority for program areas.</p> <p>Appropriate economic methods embedded within evaluations to analyse costs.</p>	<p>Standard evaluation practice involves: testing program theory and assumptions, measuring quantitative net-impact, collaboration on all aspects of design, and explanatory methods used in order to understand impact.</p> <p>There is a rigorously evaluated understanding of return on investment.</p>
Transparent	<p>Findings and recommendations held in program and policy areas.</p> <p>No follow up on the implementation of recommendations.</p>	<p>Findings and recommendations viewed as an opportunity to identify lessons learned.</p> <p>Evaluation findings and recommendations available in the research management system to improve the dissemination of lessons learned and inform policy development.</p>	<p>Findings widely disseminated and drive better performance.</p> <p>Website and guidance materials valuable resource for staff.</p> <p>Evaluation findings and reports are published where appropriate.</p>	<p>Findings are consistently used to optimise delivery and have influence outside the department.</p> <p>Materials provided to allow replication of evaluation results/findings.</p> <p>Evaluation reports are published in peer reviewed journals and presented at conferences.</p>
Independent	<p>Independent conduct and governance of evaluations is lacking.</p> <p>Evaluations are conducted and overseen by the policy or program areas responsible for delivery of the program.</p>	<p>There is an improved level of independence in the conduct and governance of evaluations.</p>	<p>All evaluations include an appropriate level of independence.</p> <p>Approaches to maintaining impartiality are usual practice.</p>	<p>The Group can publicly champion a high standard of impartiality</p>

	Beginning (June 2017)	Developing (June 2019)	Embedded (June 2020)	Leading (June 2021)
Ethical	<p>Ethics approval sought when necessary, depending on contextual requirements.</p> <p>Internal ethical checks focus on informed consent, and risk of harm.</p>	<p>Endorsement of ethical practice is sought as usual practice.</p>	<p>Ethical practice integrated into evaluation design, conduct and use.</p>	<p>Ethical practice meets the highest standards for respectful involvement of Indigenous Australians in evaluation design conduct and use.</p>
Timely	<p>Effort and resources are allocated in an ad hoc and reactive manner with little foresight.</p> <p>Developing performance information at the inception of a program is ad hoc and of variable quality.</p>	<p>Evaluation activity is coordinated. An Evaluation plan is in place and regularly monitored.</p> <p>Strategically significant and risky programs are prioritised.</p> <p>Planning for evaluation and performance monitoring is being integrated at the program design stage.</p> <p>All programs are assessed for being 'evaluation ready'.</p>	<p>The Group employs strategic, independent, risk-based, whole-of-Group criteria to prioritise evaluation effort.</p> <p>Evaluation Plans are updated annually and progress is monitored on a regular basis.</p> <p>Planning for evaluation and performance measurement is considered a fundamental part of policy and program design.</p> <p>All programs have program logic and theory of change, performance and evaluation plans in place.</p>	<p>The Group's approach to evaluation and performance planning is seen as an exemplar.</p> <p>All programs assessed as 'evaluation ready'.</p>
Fit-for-purpose	<p>Frequency and quality of evaluation is lacking.</p>	<p>Guidelines for prioritising and scaling evaluation activity are used.</p>	<p>Priority programs are evaluated. Evaluations use fit for purpose methodologies.</p>	<p>Evaluation effort is scaled accordingly.</p> <p>Specialist and technical skills well developed to apply appropriate methodologies.</p>

Source: PM&C internal paper.

Appendix 4 Evaluations and reviews listed in 2018–19 work plan

Name	Type	Status (as at October 2018)	Published
Aboriginal Employment and Training Activity	Evaluation	Completed	No
Aboriginal Families as First Educators Program	Evaluation	Commenced ^a	N/A
Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services	Evaluation	Not commenced ^b	N/A
Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program	Review	Completed	Yes
Closing the Gap	Review	Completed	No
Community Development Program	Evaluation	Completed	Yes
Family Violence Prevention Legal Services	Evaluation	Commenced	N/A
Girls Academies	Evaluation	Commenced	N/A
Indigenous Broadcasting	Review	Completed	Yes
Indigenous Cadetship Support	Evaluation	Not commenced	N/A
Indigenous Procurement Policy (Year One)	Review	Completed	Yes
Indigenous Procurement Policy (Year Three)	Evaluation	Commenced ^a	N/A
Indigenous Rangers and Protected Areas Fee for Service	Evaluation	Completed	No
Indigenous Rangers Cost Analysis	Review	Completed	No
Indigenous Scholarships	Review	Completed	Yes
Link Up Services Program	Evaluation	Not commenced ^b	N/A
Mental Health First Aid Training	Review	Completed	No
Models of Studying Away from Home	Evaluation	Commenced	N/A
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders Program Pilot	Review	Completed	No
National Disability Insurance Scheme — East Arnhem Land Co-Design Project	Evaluation	Completed	Yes
National Indigenous Critical Response Service	Evaluation	Commenced	N/A
Native Title Representative Bodies and Service Providers	Review	Commenced	N/A
Petrol Sniffing	Review	Commenced	N/A
Prescribed Bodies Corporate Training Program	Review	Commenced	N/A
Remote School Attendance Strategy	Evaluation	Completed	Yes
Review of Indigenous Entrepreneurs Fund — Business Advisors	Review	Completed	No
Review of Regional Employment Targets under the Community Development Program	Review	Completed	No

Name	Type	Status (as at October 2018)	Published
School Enrolment and Attendance Measure	Evaluation	Completed	No
School Nutrition Program	Review	Completed	No
Social and Emotional Wellbeing Investment	Evaluation	Not commenced	N/A
Strengthening the System Effectiveness of Early Childhood Investments	Evaluation	Not commenced ^b	N/A
Stronger Communities for Children Program	Evaluation	Completed	Yes
Sugar Reduction Strategy for Remote Community Stores	Evaluation	Not commenced	N/A
Testing Community Safety and Justice Outcomes using Randomised Controlled Trials	Evaluation	Commenced	N/A
Third Action Plan to Reduce Family Violence — Indigenous Specific Measures	Evaluation	Commenced	N/A

Note a: As at April 2019 these evaluations had been completed but not published.

Note b: As at April 2019 these evaluations had commenced.

Source: PM&C, *2018–19 Annual Evaluation Work Plan: Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, December 2018; status from ANAO analysis of internal departmental documentation.