



CONNECTING
GOVERNMENT

Whole of Government Responses
to Australia's Priority Challenges

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDES

MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

4

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PREFACE

I am pleased to present this important Management Advisory Committee Report on *Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges*.

My strong perception is that the Australian Public Service (APS) performs well, compared to other public sectors around the world, in working across the organisational boundaries of bureaucracy. Every day, in many ways, we bridge successfully the demarcations of officialdom that can undermine successful policy development and delivery. But we cannot be lulled into a self-satisfied complacency. Challenges remain. More than ever before, agencies must continue to find new and better ways to work together to deliver results for the Australian Government and the community.

There are many reasons that we should work in a whole of government way. Not least is the fact that every major challenge of public administration—ensuring security, building a strong economy, coping with demographic change and crafting social policy—necessarily requires the active participation of a range of central and line agencies.

Australians rightly demand the delivery of government programs and services in a seamless way. They should also expect that, behind the scenes, all the resources of government will be brought to bear in the search for innovative solutions to the complex challenges of developing public policy.

It is important that commitment to a whole of government perspective is not misinterpreted as a call for 'group think'. Governance has been improved by the fact that public policy is an increasingly contested terrain. The challenge is to ensure that the collective decision-making of the Australian government is based upon the best informed articulation of the challenges faced and a strategic assessment of the relative merits of different approaches to how they might be addressed. For this, a comprehensive whole of government approach is required.

Connecting Government goes beneath the surface of the 'coordination' that the APS strives to achieve. It examines the many different and sometimes competing imperatives that contribute to successful whole of government work and seeks to learn from our successes and failures.

The report does not believe that effective solutions lie in moving around the deckchairs of bureaucratic endeavour. Rather it reinforces the need to continue to build an APS culture that supports, models, understands and aspires to whole of government solutions. Collegiality at the most senior levels of the service is a key part of this culture.

Portfolio secretaries and agency heads will be responsible for driving cooperative behaviours and monitoring the success of whole of government approaches. This has many elements. They will be required to ensure that their staff understand that their role on interdepartmental committees or task forces is not to defend territory but to seek solutions in the national interest. They will be expected actively to champion whole of government projects and to model critical behaviours such as collegiality.

The report also highlights the need for agencies to recruit and develop people with the right skills. Relevant topics should be included in induction and training so that coordination, cooperation, negotiation and openness are truly valued. Agencies will be encouraged to give their high performing staff experience on whole of government projects and to support their participation with other agencies in such projects.

Commitment needs to be recognised. New service-wide awards will be offered to celebrate the best whole of government work. The success or failure of the APS in taking whole of government approaches will be reported through the State of the Service report.

Knowledge is a key to cultural change. A web presence will be established to encourage agencies to share information, expertise and ideas so that the increasing volume of research on the organisation of whole of government approaches can be collected once but used many times.

MAC will fail if its reports are quietly filed away under the heading 'Read on a Wet Sunday'. There are many more initiatives in this report which offer practical help to Australian government agencies in their efforts to continually improve the way they work across boundaries. The objective is to implement many more.

Whole of government is the public administration of the future. It offers links and connections to the global community of ideas, knowledge and understanding essential for the APS to face the governance challenges of the 21st century. It extols team-based approaches to solving the wicked problems that are endemic to public policy.

Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges is a valuable guide to participating effectively in that future.

I hope it makes a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Shergold', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Peter Shergold AM

DOES IT MAKE BUSINESS SENSE?

When used appropriately, whole of government approaches are likely to deliver better outcomes than uncoordinated approaches by separate agencies, but larger projects are likely to be more expensive.

There is no strict formula for deciding when to involve other Australian government agencies, or which ones, but the following two approaches are designed to help you make an informed decision. The first approach takes your own work as the starting point. The second approach takes the roles of other agencies as the starting point.

APPROACH A

Ask yourself the following questions about the key stages of the life cycle of your policy, program or service.

1. Policy development/planning: Would planning benefit from input from other agencies, or their core stakeholders?
 - Are you dependent on other agencies for key information or complementary action?
 - Will you need to demonstrate later that you consulted adequately?
 - Would representatives of affected groups be useful partners?
 - Are there disagreements on how best to address this issue?
 - Can your preferred policy approaches be offset by existing or proposed action by other agencies?
2. Implementation/delivery: Will you need help from other agencies with program or service delivery?
 - Does another agency service the same demographic group?
 - Would shared delivery produce economies of scale?
 - Would coordination with other agencies be appreciated by clients?
3. Accountability/reporting: Will more than one agency be required to report on results achieved?
 - Will reporting require information sharing?
 - Would positive or negative media interest affect more than one agency?

The more 'yes' answers you give to these questions, the more likely it is that you have a whole of government project to manage, and other Australian government agencies will need to be involved.

APPROACH B

Consider the different roles that Australian government agencies have, and what would trigger the need to involve them.

Type of agency	Trigger for involving them
<i>Central agencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major issues require cross-portfolio coordination • Top-down approach is adopted—for instance, the government may have decided on a joint approach • New/additional cross-agency funding is sought • There is a crisis that requires more than one department to respond • There isn't agreement on how to move forward
<i>Line agencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue directly impacts on the agency's functions or principal clients • Bilateral cooperation is needed • Achieving outcomes is dependent in some way on another agency • There is an existing delivery system (e.g. Centrelink)

Both approaches can be supplemented by considering the role that might be played by the key external stakeholders of all relevant agencies.

<i>State/Territory government agencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council of Australian Governments has agreed to a course of action • The issue requires a national, cooperative approach • A state or territory has a best practice example that might have relevance for other jurisdictions
<i>Peak bodies/external stakeholders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations are necessary, either for planning or implementation • Special expertise/knowledge is required • Bottom-up approach is adopted

RECOGNISING A WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT ISSUE

Whole of government issues are usually very complex. Solutions usually require a clear government mandate, and often involve an approach coordinated by numerous agencies and external stakeholders. Sometimes there can be great urgency—like managing a crisis. Other times they require sustained effort over many years.

THE BUSINESS BOTTOM LINE

The bottom line is that your decision to choose (or reject) a whole of government approach must make business sense. It must support government policy and deliver government outcomes.

WHAT STRUCTURE WORKS BEST?

SHOULD YOU INVOLVE OTHER AGENCIES?

See Good Practice Guide No. 1—*Does It Make Business Sense?* If the answer is ‘yes’ then you need to consider the best structure for this particular task.

WHAT IS THE BEST STRUCTURE FOR YOUR TASK?

The right culture and skills underpin all whole of government success. But by themselves they are not enough. Sometimes special organisational arrangements or processes are necessary to deliver whole of government outcomes efficiently and effectively. Please see Good Practice Guide No. 3—*Creating a Culture for Success* for advice about getting cultural factors right.

The types of tasks you might be involved with will determine the sort of structures best suited to your task.

Think about what kind of cross-agency coordination is needed to help to achieve your goals:

- Do you need to develop a single and agreed product? Is an end date important? Is it a single issue matter? An interdepartmental committee would meet this purpose.
- Do you need to achieve a difficult and complex outcome in a short to medium timeframe? Do you need the cooperation of other agencies to achieve this? Do you need a creative solution? A taskforce would be a good structure. If the outcome is longer-term then a joint team might be more appropriate.
- Are you developing a new service? Does another agency have a similar service, perhaps with an overlapping client base? Could that other agency deliver your service more cheaply or more conveniently for your clients? If so, an agency arrangement might be the best option.
- Are you dealing with a contentious and complex issue involving a range of stakeholders with a range of views? Is the symbolism of a new and separate agency important? If so, a frontier agency might be the best option.

Possible structures for the type of work

Match the type of task in step one, to the structural options in step two. Then check the box to see how well suited the structure is to the task.

Step One		What are the characteristics of your task?				
	<i>Policy development</i>	<i>Program design and review</i>	<i>Program management and service delivery</i>	<i>Cross-jurisdictional and cross-sector</i>	<i>Crisis management</i>	
Step Two		Decide on the structure that best suits your task				
<i>Interdepartmental committees</i>	H	M	L	M	H-M	
<i>Taskforces</i>	H	H	H	H-M	M-L	
<i>Joint teams</i>	H-M	H-M	M	M-L	L	
<i>Agency arrangements</i>	L	L	H	M-L	L	
<i>Frontier agencies</i>	H	H	H	L	L	

L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

When it comes to crisis management, experience in Australia has shown that ‘hub and spokes’ coordination works very well. This is essentially a lead agency structure, with one department coordinating the efforts of several departments. Sometimes there is a need for more than one set of ‘hub and spokes’—in the case of the Bali bombing, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was the ‘hub’ for international efforts, and the Department of Family and Community Services was the ‘hub’ for the domestic response. See Good Practice Guide No. 7 for more on crisis management.

CREATING A CULTURE FOR SUCCESS

SHOULD YOU INVOLVE OTHER AGENCIES?

See Good Practice Guide No. 1—*Does It Make Business Sense?* to help you make a decision. If the answer is ‘yes’ then you need to consider how to create the best culture for success.

NO TWO ORGANISATIONS ARE THE SAME

Every organisation is different. There are many reasons for the differences, including differing types of work the organisations undertake and the subject matter they deal with. Of course every person within an organisation is different too.

You would not expect a small scientific agency to be the same as a large social policy program delivery department, or a central coordinating agency. They have different mixes of people and different cultures. These differences can be barriers to achieving whole of government results. They can also be a source of strength in delivering results if the organisation’s culture supports collaboration.

HOW TO CREATE THE RIGHT CULTURE

Everyone has their part to play. Culture and capabilities can be ‘make or break’ factors in determining the effectiveness of whole of government endeavours. Culture is the set of beliefs, behaviours, knowledge and information shared by a group of people. Capabilities, which are the sets of skills that individuals need to carry out their work, underpin culture.

Agencies can set the scene by making sure their corporate structures support collaborative approaches to their work.

Senior executive service (SES) employees have particular responsibilities. The Public Service Act requires them ‘to promote cooperation with other agencies’.

The challenge is to support what might be called a ‘networking or horizontal culture’. This requires systematic attention to things such as:

- readiness to think and act across agency boundaries
- teamwork
- flexibility
- openness to innovation and creativity
- the ability to capitalise on windows of opportunity, tolerate mistakes and manage risk
- the capacity to build strategic alliances, collaboration and trust
- adaptability to changing circumstances
- persistence

- encouragement of the expression of diverse views, and awareness of different cultures and appreciation of their strengths
- a capacity to balance the tension between short-term and long-term goals
- effective knowledge management.

There can be tensions between managing vertically (within the hierarchy of a department's structure) and horizontally (across agencies). Resolving these tensions requires explicit and consistent support from the top.

WHAT CAN INDIVIDUALS DO TO PREPARE?

Individuals can experience different perspectives and work cultures through things like:

- interagency and cross-agency networking opportunities
- seminars
- mobility and temporary placements into other agencies or project teams
- learning and development.

HOW WILL INFORMATION BE MANAGED?

SHOULD YOU INVOLVE OTHER AGENCIES?

See Good Practice Guide 1—*Does It Make Business Sense?* If the answer is ‘yes’ then you need to consider the best way to manage information for this particular task.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO MANAGE INFORMATION FOR YOUR TASK?

Building greater capacity for information sharing is rapidly becoming part of core business. Whole of government work requires us to be aware of:

- new ways of managing information, particularly information needs for multi-agency and whole of government activity
- barriers to information sharing and the difficulties in integrating administration systems
- approaches to improve the capacity of agencies to manage and share information, including the technology solutions that will assist this.

BEFORE YOU START YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:

- Have you identified information sharing and management needs? Are you capturing and maintaining your data in a way that facilitates reuse and sharing? Are there agreed principles, protocols or standards? What other agencies may require access to information now or in the future?
- Is your proposed information sharing approach appropriate—do your communication, information gathering and distribution methods meet the needs of the stakeholders/communities? What mediums will you use—for example, emails, newsletters, shared workspace, communities of interest? Is there an existing network that you can use?
- Have you considered security, access and privacy requirements? What are the issues and how can they be managed? Will there be protocols or standards?
- Are there costs to information sharing? Do the costs need to be shared? How will this be done?
- How will you know that information sharing is effective? How will you evaluate it?
- Have you talked to the other agencies involved and do they agree with how information will be shared?

If it is statistical work, it may be worth speaking to the Australian Bureau of Statistics about the concept of the National Statistical Service. Its aim is to:

- increase the availability, accessibility and usability of information derived from key administrative and survey data sets by applying sound statistical and data management principles and practices
- forge statistical partnerships to share knowledge and expertise.

Note: Working out the best way to manage information for the task will not guarantee its success. In fact, success in working with people from other Australian government organisations tends to be about getting cultural factors right, such as good leadership and personal skills. Please also see Good Practice Guide No. 3—*Creating a Culture for Success*.

WHAT BUDGET AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK WORKS BEST?

SHOULD YOU INVOLVE OTHER AGENCIES?

See Good Practice Guide No. 1—*Does It Make Business Sense?* If the answer is ‘yes’ then you need to consider the best budget and accountability framework for this particular task.

WHAT IS THE BEST BUDGET AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR YOUR TASK?

Before you start you need to think about the following:

Do you understand the budget framework and how it is made up? You need to know that:

- *outcomes* are results or impacts the government wants to achieve—for example, school systems provide their students with high-quality foundation skills and learning outcomes
- *outputs* are the goods and services produced by agencies on behalf of the government or external organisations or individuals—for example, infrastructure funding for the schools system
- *administered* items are revenues, expenses, assets and liabilities that the government controls, but which an agency manages on behalf of the government—for example, grants, subsidies, benefit payments.

The outcomes and outputs budget framework was introduced in 1999–2000, but it did not deal explicitly with the treatment of whole of government budget initiatives. The framework is, nonetheless, flexible enough to accommodate whole of government initiatives.

Which of the budget framework flexibilities best suits your whole of government task?

- *a single or common outcome* where agencies are jointly delivering a specific outcome
- *a purchaser–provider arrangement* where the lead agency purchases services from one or more agencies but remains accountable for the outcome towards which the activity contributes
- *a lead agency model* where all responsible agencies are appropriated funds in accordance with their outcome structure but a lead agency is nominated for coordination and reporting

or

- *a multi-agency package* where there may be no particular benefit from ongoing coordination and reporting.

You will need to talk to the other agencies involved and maybe include the Department of Finance and Administration (Finance) in your meeting. Here are some things to consider for that meeting:

- Will accountability be shared by more than one minister?
- Have you scoped the project and does it include all costs?
- What are the right performance measures? Do evaluations need to occur annually or over a longer period? Is there a need for responsible agencies to report separately—for example, in their Portfolio Budget Statement or annual report?
- Have you agreed on how you will share information with the other agencies involved?
- Have you talked to Finance to help you decide how to advise your minister?

MANAGING CONNECTIONS OUTSIDE THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE: THE NATURE OF ENGAGEMENT IN WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE HAS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE

A sound whole of government approach requires understanding how programs and policies will affect particular communities, social groups, sectors of the economy and/or regions. APS employees need to understand how the policies and programs delivered by different departments and agencies come together and impact on the general public.

Think about whether:

- the programs and policies from different departments are mutually supportive or whether they are duplicative or inconsistent
- key stakeholders and their communities of interest know about and value government policies and programs and whether they find them easy to access and use
- policies and programs allow scope for tailoring to individual, community, sectoral or regional priorities.

APS employees therefore require a good understanding of key stakeholders and their issues and an ability to engage them closely in the design and implementation of policies and programs. The capabilities required for whole of government activities are greater than for other government activities, and include:

- the ability to identify and analyse the widest possible range of views and to represent those views in advice to government
- skills in communicating and consulting with the public to assist with informed decision making
- sufficient experience and authority to interact with local communities and to make decisions on behalf of the agencies involved.

WHEN IS IT NECESSARY TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE APS?

Consultations, networking and liaison are time and resource intensive, so you need to decide how much, and what kind, of input from external stakeholders is necessary.

There are three initial questions to ask:

- Does your task have multiple government and non-government players potentially affected by the new policies and programs? If yes, then a whole of government approach to engaging external stakeholders will help in the development of policy advice that fairly reflects competing views and provides a balanced assessment of them.
- Do several government agencies deliver programs or services to a common or overlapping client base? If yes, then the government will need advice about the full range of programs and services to particular client groups and their impact.

- How can stakeholder views be presented in a balanced way? Stakeholder views may vary significantly, some may be more skilled than others in dealing with government, and the broader public interest may be too diffused to be heard clearly.

Be clear about the constraints on your project, the most common being the need for confidentiality, timeframes and budget. Your decision will reflect the balance between the importance of understanding the issues for external stakeholders and the constraints around the project.

Be aware that engagement with external stakeholders is always of close interest to ministers, and arrangements for such engagement need to be managed with the knowledge and confidence of ministers.

SELECT THE METHOD THAT SUITS THE PROBLEM AND THE STAKEHOLDERS

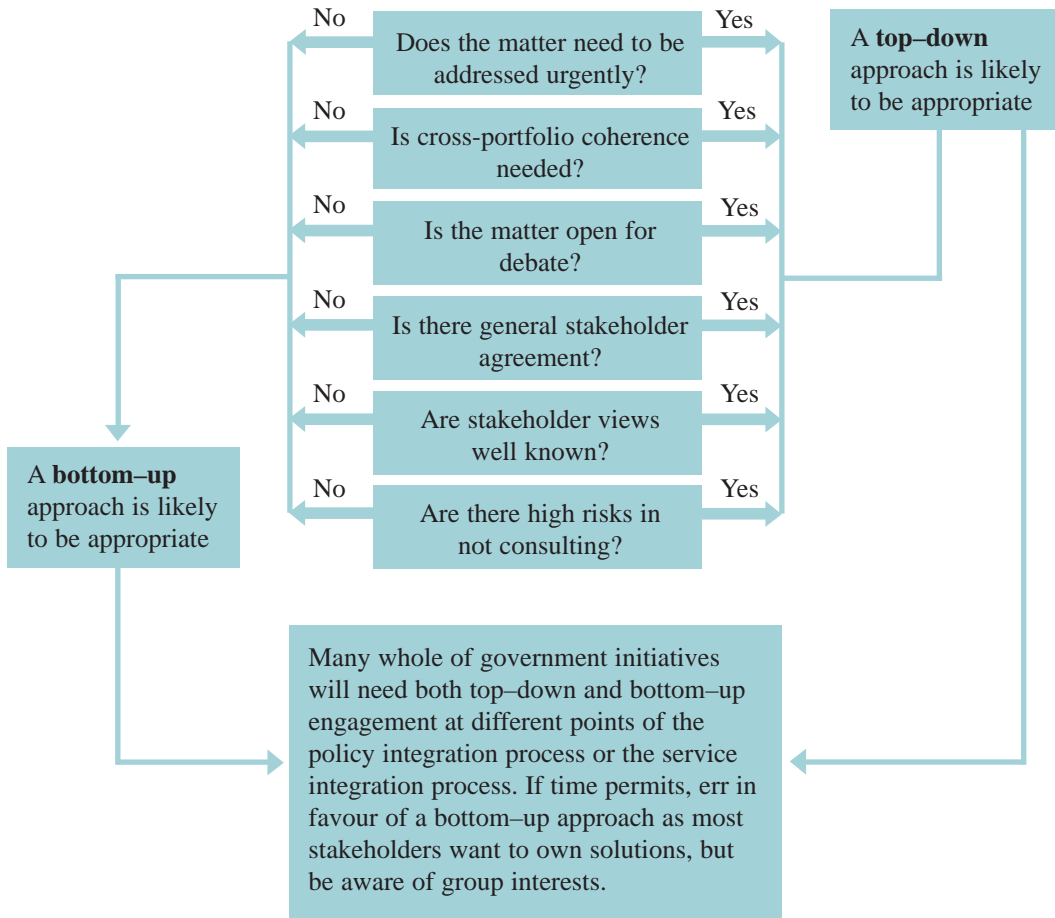
It can be useful to categorise ways of working with external stakeholders. One simple way to do this is categorising into a ‘top-down’ or a ‘bottom-up’ approach. These commonly used labels simply mean that either the external stakeholders drive the engagement (bottom-up) or government drives the interactions (top-down).

A bottom-up approach is likely to suit whole of government problems where the solutions require development and support by the external stakeholders.

The right solution to a problem might not be known. There might be many possible solutions and the one which will work best will be the one owned by the people affected.

Bottom-up approaches are sometimes called ‘capacity-building’ or ‘community development’ approaches because the external stakeholders initiate the appropriate solutions.

A top-down approach is suitable when the government needs to ensure consistency, safety, equity or other levels of control over the solutions. Responses to crises are a good example of when and where top-down approaches are essential.

Top-down or bottom-up approach to engagement**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CAN TAKE MANY FORMS, SUCH AS:**

- provision of information
- undertaking market research
- client satisfaction surveys
- formal consultations
- approaches through advisory groups or peak organisations
- engaging with key stakeholders on taskforces.

Different approaches suit different problems and different stakeholders, sometimes depending on the organisations and interests represented. Identifying which approach suits a problem is useful because taking the wrong approach can waste time, sour relationships, and jeopardise outcomes.

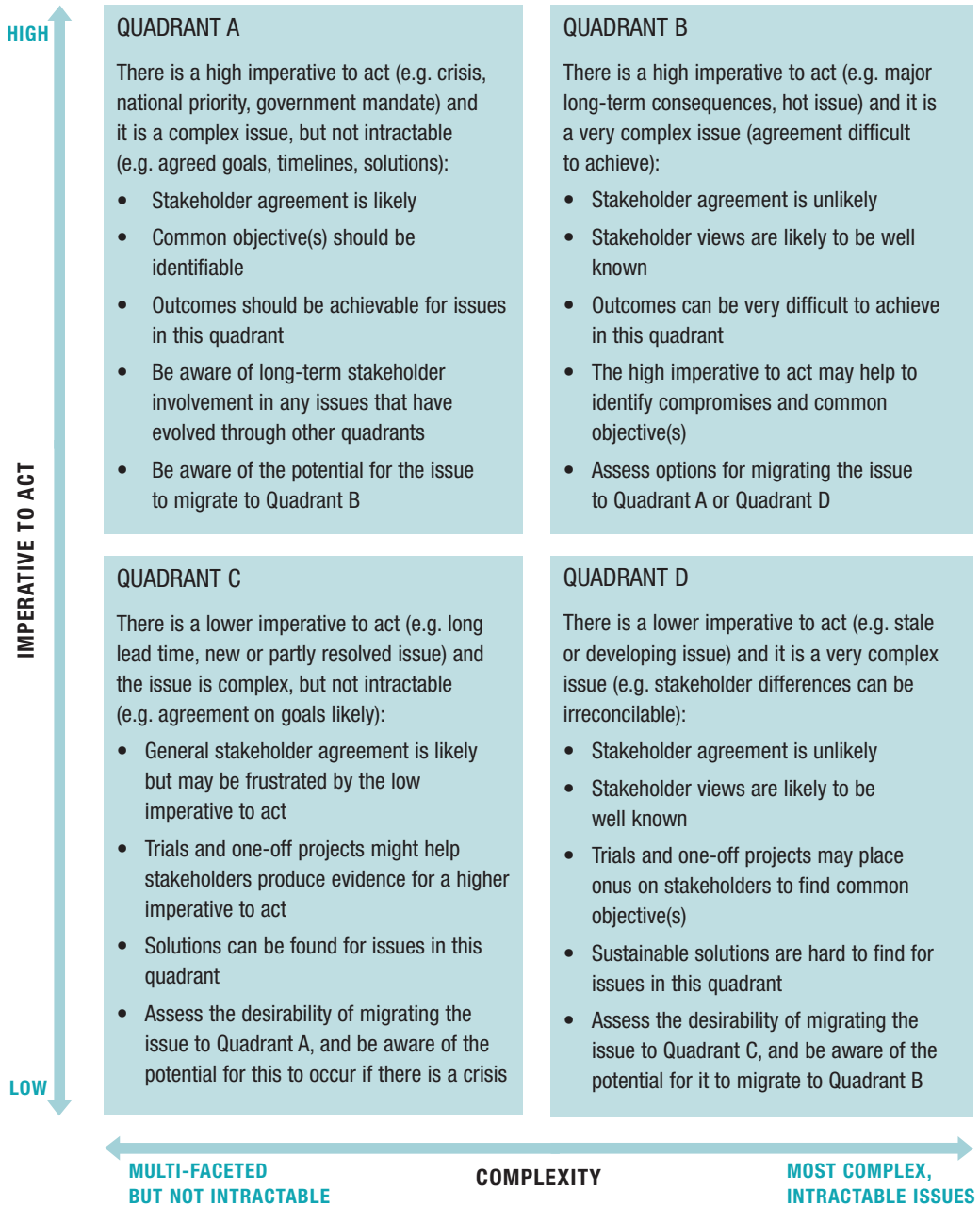
HOW COMPLEX IS THE ISSUE? WHAT COMMITMENT IS THERE TO ACT?

Engagement with external stakeholders is complex and involves balancing a range of interests. Achieving successful whole of government outcomes and engagement will be easier if there is a strong imperative for stakeholders to act. It is essential to understand that not all issues are quickly resolved—it depends on the imperative and importance of the issue to the government. Keep your task in perspective.

Balancing complexity with the imperative to act can be used as a guide to assess the likelihood of moving particular issues forward, as shown in the following table. This table assumes that whole of government issues involving external stakeholders are likely to be complex (routine, simple issues without external stakeholders are not included):

- Quadrant A issues have a high probability of being resolved successfully. They can be very complex but are not intractable.
- Quadrant B covers those whole of government issues which have high commitment levels and have proved difficult to address.
- Quadrant C issues have relatively little imperative for action, but fortunately are not intractable, increasing the chance of a successful resolution.
- Results are hardest to achieve in whole of government issues in Quadrant D. They are complex to the point of intractability, and there is relatively little imperative to do something about them.

Balancing complexity with the imperative to act



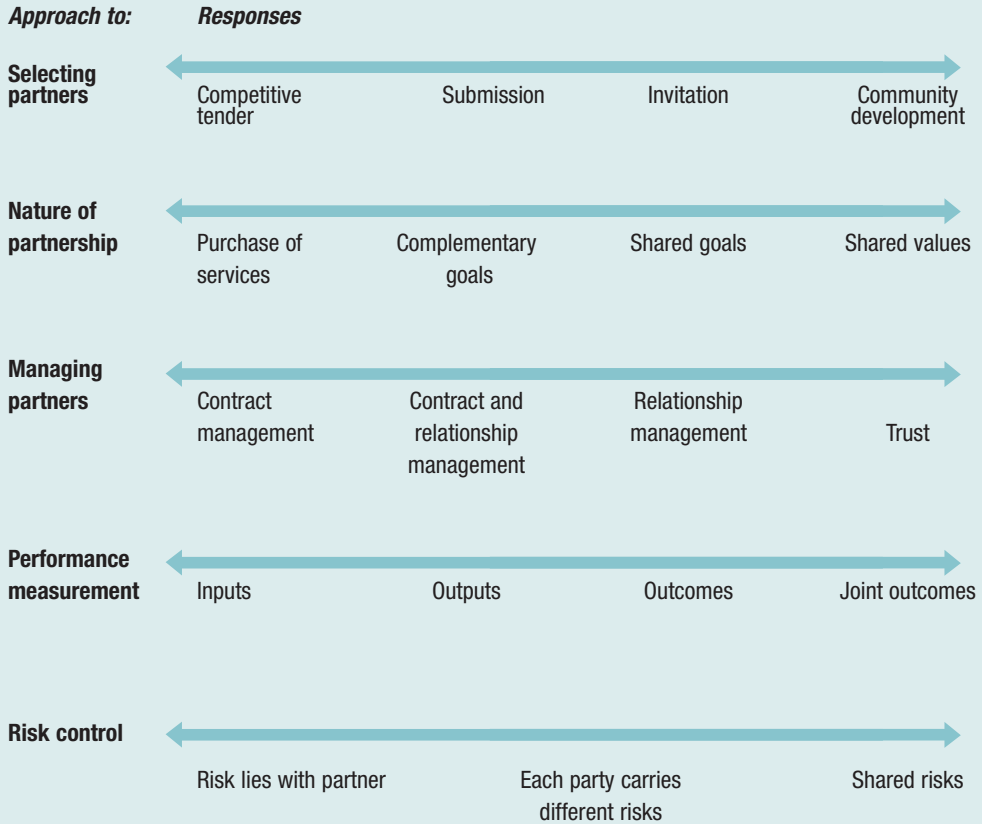
FORMAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE SOMETIMES MORE APPROPRIATE THAN ONE-OFF ENGAGEMENTS

Formal relationships and partnerships are important when government is entering into funding contracts and ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders to resolve specific issues. There may be merit in analysing the nature of the formal relationship with external stakeholders in terms of: the process for selecting partners; the nature of the partnership; how partnerships are managed; the performance measures in place; and the balance of risks each party carries. Possible approaches under each of these form a continuum:

- Under **selecting partners**, appropriate possibilities could involve the use of traditional competitive tenders; submission-based selections; invitations to participate; and community development approaches designed to work with a community in a way which they direct—i.e. bottom-up.
- The **nature of the partnership** can range from the more traditional purchase of service approaches through to arrangements based on complementary or shared goals. Sometimes the partnership might involve sharing the same values as the non-government organisation.
- **Managing partnerships** can take the form of contract management, contract and relationship management, relationship management only, or an equal relationship based on trust.
- In terms of **measuring performance** of a partnership, the range of options includes measuring inputs (such as how much money is being spent on Indigenous non-government health organisations), measuring outputs (such as the number of Indigenous health workers employed) or assessing outcomes (such as the extent to which Indigenous health improves). Sometimes both parties are in the project for the same outcomes.
- **Risk controls** are important in any external relationship. Commonly each party would carry different risks. The risk to government of a relationship not working might lie in the risk to government policy or reputation. The risk to a non-government organisation might be its financial viability. Sometimes risks are genuinely shared.

A guide to assessing stakeholder issues

Formal non-government relationships—possible approaches



HINTS FOR MANAGING CRISES

SHOULD YOU INVOLVE OTHER AGENCIES?

See Good Practice Guide 1—*Does It Make Business Sense?* If the answer is ‘yes’ then you need to consider the best structure for this particular task.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT IF YOU HAVE TO RESPOND TO A CRISIS?

Think about the following:

- Is there clear political will and authority to help you respond to the crisis?
- Do you need to create a crisis response team or some other structure to guide the response? See also Good Practice Guide No. 2—*What Structure Works Best?*
- Does everyone who will respond to the crisis know what their role is? Clarify this as soon as possible.
- Do you know the protocols for communication in a crisis? What is the formal chain of command so that information is properly distributed and decisions are appropriately decided?
- Do you have a media management team? Efforts at media management will be critical in shaping proactively your agenda for the following day—consider a dedicated team to address this.
- Can you find time each day to address emerging medium-term to long-term issues? It is important to be able to move into a recovery phase smoothly.
- Do you need to work with people outside the APS? If so, how are they best incorporated into the crisis response? Usually, state and territory governments and non-government organisations will be key players in responding to a crisis.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT BETWEEN CRISES?

- Have you debriefed on how everyone responded to the crisis? This is the best way to learn the salient lessons that mean the next crisis will be managed well. It is also important for everyone involved to download their experiences as a mechanism to relieve built-up stress.
- Does your agency have a crisis plan? It might be called a ‘business continuity plan’ or a ‘disaster recovery plan’. Are you familiar with it? Do you know your role under the plan?
- Has your agency tested its plan? Often agencies will simulate a crisis to keep their plans up to date.

- Do you know what financial responses your programs or agency can make in a crisis? This is an important part of a crisis response plan.
- Are you aware of the role of Emergency Management Australia in responding to crises? They hold whole of government plans. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade responds to overseas crises affecting Australians. Be familiar with who does what.

MAKING AN INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE WORK EFFECTIVELY

SHOULD YOU INVOLVE OTHER AGENCIES?

See Good Practice Guide No. 1—*Does It Make Business Sense?* If the answer is ‘yes’ then you need to consider whether an interdepartmental committee (IDC) is needed.

GOOD PRACTICES FOR INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEES

IDCs or other joint agency forums are very important for the coordination of responses to whole of government issues. Here are some thoughts about good practices that will help make IDCs work effectively.

Who should attend an IDC?

Representatives need to be able to contribute. They need to be knowledgeable enough to participate fully in discussions and be able to speak with the necessary amount of authority. Often this will require Senior Executive Service employees to attend IDCs—especially for the initial and final stages of the work. Sometimes, more than one person will need to go. Representation needs to be worked out on a case-by-case basis. The bottom line is that they need to be able to comprehensively represent their agency’s perspective.

The status of information and views

The status of information and views raised in meetings ought to be clear to everyone who is there. People would want to know, for instance, if a view is a department’s considered position or one that requires clearance—for example, by the minister. Similarly, people ought to be made aware of the status of factual information: is it reliable? comprehensive? agreed by others? Obviously, others should be advised as soon as possible of any errors that are found in the information that has been placed before the IDC. Also, people should be alert to any misinterpretations of their department’s information, and misunderstandings need to be clarified as soon as possible.

Preparing and clearing IDC reports

Any reports being prepared by the IDC must be factually correct and include the views of all participating agencies, including differences of opinion. The report should cover the range of practical options and highlight risks and opportunities. It should also reflect an understanding of relevant government policy, take a whole of government view and be completed within the required timeframes.

People who chair IDCs have special responsibilities, such as making sure that:

- there are adequate opportunities for dialogue between members—it is critical that issues are considered on the basis of the fullest possible knowledge of facts and opinions
- IDC members are provided with a brief record of each meeting, highlighting action required—this should be done as soon as possible, consistent with the timelines of the IDC
- any report produced by the IDC meets the standards set out above.

Lines of communication within agencies

Representatives on IDCs need to be able to communicate clearly and quickly with relevant people within their own agency. This includes seeking input from them and making sure all their views are properly aired at the IDC. Sometimes this might entail taking a subject matter specialist to a meeting. It is likely that the minister and agency executive should be notified:

- when an IDC report to ministers is imminent
- when an IDC is heading in a direction that might be of concern or interest
- where IDC recommendations might lead to important commitments
- when issues under consideration are of policy or political importance and sensitivity.

Leaving a paper trail

Whole of government issues being considered by IDCs will, by definition, be important. Everyone involved has a part to play in making sure a full paper trail of the IDC deliberations is left behind. This includes relevant discussions and actions taken outside the formal IDC process.

WHAT IF THERE'S AN INTERNATIONAL ANGLE?

International negotiations are a particular case where whole of government action is essential. Once entered into, international commitments are difficult to change. Effective coordination is required overseas where Australia must speak with one voice, and delegations often include employees from a number of different agencies.

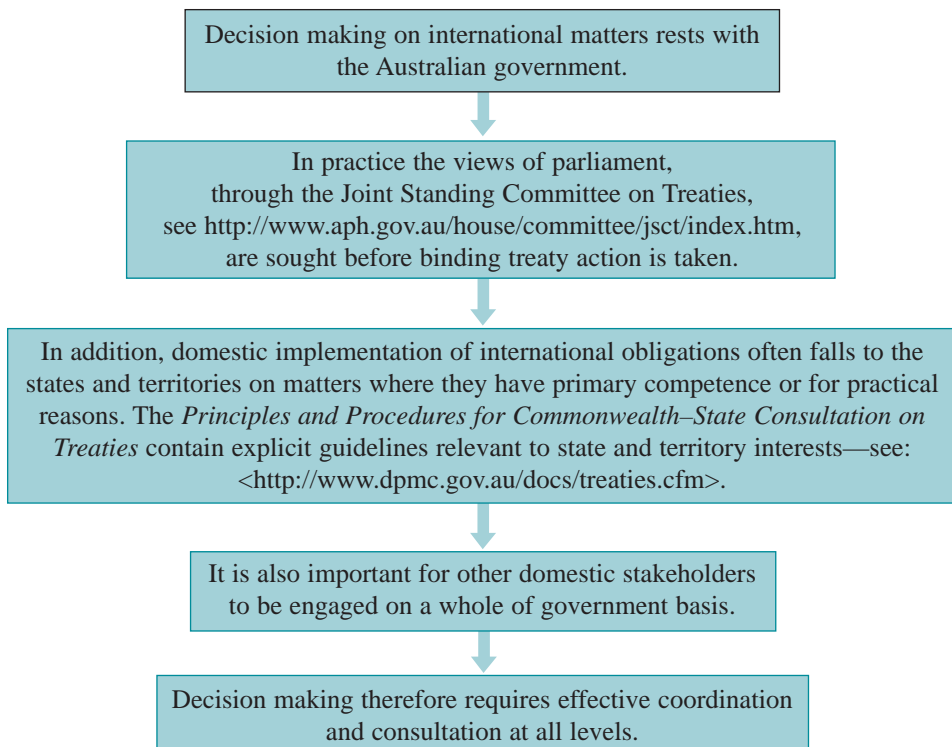
INCREASING LINKAGES

A whole of government approach is essential in preparing for such negotiations, particularly given the rapid growth of international agreements on subjects that have complex implications for a range of domestic policies and the increasing linkages between issues that are not always easy to see.

Australia's approach in a particular negotiation can impact on our relationships with other countries, on other negotiations and on domestic policy. Efforts by some countries to use international environmental negotiations to advance their trade agendas is one example.

Effective interagency coordination in preparing for negotiations has been a key element in Australia's ability to achieve positive international outcomes.

DECISION MAKING FOR AUSTRALIA



WHAT IS THE BEST STRUCTURE FOR COORDINATION?

See Good Practice Guide No. 2 for general advice on structure. However, international obligations carry some specific process issues:

- The lead agency for a particular meeting is responsible for coordinating consultation and preparation of the whole of government meeting brief, and ensuring that the delegation has the necessary negotiating authority. Note: Agencies other than the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) may have primary responsibility for international negotiations on a number of specific issues. Regardless of who the lead agency is, DFAT should be consulted in the case of all international negotiations, as it has overall carriage of Australia's external relations.
- Processes for coordination and consultation need to be designed to deal effectively with negotiations, especially in multilateral forums where we do not control the process and timelines, and where there is often the need to respond rapidly to developments.
- Agencies with primary carriage for a particular negotiation need to be aware of the potential sensitivities that might arise outside their portfolio's responsibilities. These can include
 - legal issues
 - trade issues
 - bilateral relationships.
- Agencies should also refer to the officials' handbook on treaties and treaty making—*Signed, Sealed and Delivered*—which provides detailed guidance on a range of matters relevant to negotiating international agreements and authorising delegations. See: http://www.dfat.gov.au/treaties/making/treaties_handbook.pdf.

Building a stronger culture of consultation on international activities is important, given the increasing linkages between international issues and domestic policy matters.

Processes designed to achieve whole of government outcomes on domestic policy issues—including Cabinet committees, secretaries' committees and traditional interdepartmental committees—are generally used to coordinate this work.