

The DIPR Framework – Guidance for Ministerial priority setting



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McKINNON INSTITUTE
FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP



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PART ONE – THE NEED FOR A FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In a dynamic operating environment with unrelenting and ever-changing pressures impacting decision making, Ministers require support in setting their course. By extension, that course will only be navigated successfully if their staff and their senior public service officials are part of the process.

The DIPR Framework is provided to assist Ministers, their senior staff and departmental leaders set priorities after considering a balanced suite of evidence and information. It is intended as guidance and can form part of a wider set of approaches and management frameworks for a Minister.

However, the Framework cannot replace the hard work of policy, implementation and engagement.

The Framework acknowledges the insights and progress made through both the Public Administration and Strategic Management fields of study, but it is ultimately based on the experience and insights of practice. Those insights have come from a range of current and former Ministers, Chiefs of Staff and Departmental Secretaries.

Used effectively, the Framework can improve the impact of Ministers and their government through the appropriate consideration of our long-term challenges in context, and the subsequent actions in pursuing a deliberate medium term response.

Ultimately, the Framework is guidance for better decisions – more timely, more effective, better aligned with partners, better informed and more transparent.

The MKI Agenda

The McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership is Australia's only organisation dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of political leadership through professional development for members of Australia's parliaments. Founded in 2019, it is a partnership between Monash University and the Susan McKinnon Foundation. The professional development programs are designed and delivered with academic rigour combined with pragmatic practitioner expertise.

The Institute is non-partisan and not-for-profit and offers professional development for members of all Australia's parliaments – at a Federal, State and Territory level.

The Institute's core belief is that outstanding political leadership is crucial in a world-leading, resilient democracy. Our leaders need to navigate an increasingly complex policy landscape.

The flagship program of the Institute is Advanced Political Leadership (APL).

It is Australia's first advanced leadership course for members of parliament who are potential ministers in the short to medium term. APL is a selective, cohort-based program that supports participants to reflect on the role of ministers in our governance structures, their personal leadership needs, and the strategic policy challenges Australia will face over the decade ahead.



The framework has been commissioned to provide guidance to future APL cohorts, but can potentially have a more general application for the Institute through its wider program portfolio and alumni engagement.

The need for a framework

The Framework attempts to respond to two specific problems.

Firstly, Ministers are more effective when they are deliberate in identifying and formalising their priorities, and they then work with their Office in pursuing them.

In doing so, it is possible for capable Ministers and their staff to set priorities without reference to the Department's evidence base on the challenges, nor their insights and strategic thinking. The priorities may then be unclear to the Department, or public servants end up trying to solve a different problem, or implementation and reporting of the progress in pursuing the Priorities is unaligned.

The lack of engagement and alignment is a missed opportunity for securing impact and progress.

The second and more significant problem, with greater consequence for the effectiveness and focus of public administration, is the absence of any form of strategic discussion and planning by Ministers.

In these circumstances, Ministers and their staff operate without deliberate prioritisation beyond delivering election commitments early in the electoral term. Daily activity is driven by tactical and administrative considerations – the media cycle, routine diary commitments and the paperwork and internal routines of Government.

This isn't just limiting the impact of the Minister – it is also a problem for public servants.

In the absence of a clear signal from the Minister on what is important, the Department will inevitably be responding equally to myriad demands of the Office. A "small target" strategy of a new Government exacerbates this problem.

Of course it is fundamental to the functioning of public administration that the delineation between the political actors (the Minister, their Office) and the public servants (and the public service generally) is both clear and maintained.

These are different roles with contrasting responsibilities. Party political matters are distinctly for the domain of the former group while implementation of decisions and stewardship matters are the domain of the second.

But even with these different but complementary roles, a lack of engagement and alignment is a missed opportunity for progressing a deliberate response to major policy challenges.



Why set priorities?

The pursuance of strategic priorities, as a small number of agreed significant outcomes, is not new in setting organisational strategy.

Examples from strategic management and public administrations are set out in this report.

The setting of priorities is something that the most effective senior ministers and first ministers routinely do.

This was confirmed by the consultations with former Ministers, public servants and ministerial staff.

Former Ministers and Prime Ministers have also put this view on the public record.

In an interview with the Institute of Government, the former UK Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for Culture and Media, and for Health reflected on the importance of priority setting:

“So, I was able to give him (my new Departmental Secretary) my objectives on a piece of paper and we had one meeting a week in each of those areas, each of those priority areas, which maintained a relentless focus. It was the first time the civil service had been asked to work that way and I think it was extremely effective. The civil servants were absolutely astonished to be asked to come to a weekly meeting with the secretary of state; it’s clearly not the way they had done things in the past. But coming from a business background, I couldn’t imagine any other way of trying to make sure that a priority happened, so we had a weekly meeting.

...Well, when I arrived at DH I was very open with them that I’d like to select a few priorities, but it’s going to take me a few months to work out what they are because I’m not read into the brief and I need to understand it. The first major issue I had to deal with was Mid Staffs [the crisis in care quality at Stafford hospital], ...which really became the patient safety agenda.

So that started off as being one of my four [priorities], and that was a fairly natural one. I then adopted one or two others that went by the wayside as time went on, but I focused very hard on. But mental health became a very big one. General practice, I spent a lot of time thinking about, and technology was another one that I focused on very hard. So, I had those four priorities and I stuck with those pretty much throughout my whole time.¹

Former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair emphasises the importance of both priority setting and the implementation (Blair 2024).

On priorities, he states – as Leader, and as Prime Minister, that setting priorities is critical:

To steer a course, governments need a plan. A 'plan' is not the same as a collection of desirable objectives or highfalutin visions. Helmut Schmidt, Chancellor of West Germany between 1974 and 1982, famously cautioned that politicians with visions should go and see a doctor.

A 'plan' is a route map for governing. It sets out the destination, the milestones and, above all, the priorities. It forms the 'why' and not simply the 'what' or 'how'. It focuses the mind of government; indeed in a certain sense it creates the mind of government.

...

¹ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/ministers-reflect/jeremy-hunt>



Crucially, it has to establish PRIORITIES: if you try to do everything you will likely end up doing nothing.

The plan should identify those things the Leader thinks are vital, that define success or failure for the project of governing, that show where energy will be principally directed, that reveal what the government is trying to keep and what it is determined to change.

On delivery, Blair states that the need for an implementation and monitoring process is equally critical:

It also requires a system that is geared to, focused upon and relentlessly pursuing delivery.

Thus, I became obsessed with what the French call le suivi. The follow-through. The move from vision to policy to implementation.

I mentioned earlier how in my second term in office we reorganised Downing Street and the centre of government to create more effective systems to deliver on core priorities.

...

Those priorities should be measurable, as objectives and key results (OKRs) are in the private sector. If you can't measure it, forget it – at least for Delivery Unit purposes.

...

While I was prime minister, I ran a session every month for each of the unit's priorities – at which the relevant government minister would be present – where the Delivery Unit team would make a presentation that set out what progress had, or hadn't, been made on the particular priority. I did this not only because I wanted to know what was happening, but because I wanted to demonstrate that the priorities were mine, that they were owned by me, and that the unit was doing my bidding and was accountable to me.

But this formalised setting of priorities by Ministers and Prime Ministers is far from the norm.



PART TWO – KEY CONTEXT FROM RELATED DISCIPLINES

The evolution of public administration and strategy setting

In considering the setting of priorities and then tasking the public service to pursue those priorities, the capacity of the bureaucracy to engage in the process and respond to the priorities is critical.

That capacity has been shaped by the successive waves of reform and change to the public sector. Those same reforms have arguably left a gap between politics and public administration; this framework can potentially bridge that gap.

The traditional public administration model, described as Weberian public bureaucracy and reflective of the Northcote Trevelyan reforms in the United Kingdom, had a number of distinguishing characteristics (Ferlie and Ongaro 2022):

- (i) Jurisdictions are fixed and official, ordered by rules, laws, and regulations
- (ii) Hierarchy is the main coordination mechanism,
- (iii) The management of the office relies on the written file,
- (iv) The occupation of offices is based on expertise and training
- (v) Personnel are employed on a full-time basis on the expectation of a lifelong career, and
- (vi) The administration of the office follows rules that are stable and can be learnt

After a century of operation in developed nations, including the expansion of the role of government and the growth of the welfare state, a critique of public sector efficiency and responsiveness developed that precipitated reforms that disrupted and reshaped the previously orthodox model.

New Public Management (NPM) became the umbrella term for a suite of reforms that disrupted this traditional approach.

Kettl (2000) identifies two broad models of NPM reform dating from the 1970s – the Westminster model, and in particular the reform programs in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and the American style "reinvention" program. He summarises the Westminster NPM approach as being "aimed at shrinking the size of government and imposing a market-style discipline". The United States approach, which was closely identified with the leadership of Vice President Al Gore had less emphasis on restructuring but "more sweeping administrative changes".

The subsequent wave of reform from the 1990s addressed some of the unintended consequences of NPM – including fragmentation, discoordination, inconsistency, accountability and authority, and embraced a more collaborative approach. It is described as Network Governance (NG) and New Public Governance. Distinguishing features include (Ferlie and Ongaro 2022):

- devolution of policy responsibility to subnational and strong regions
- greater multi-level governance
- the use of managed networks to reconfigure public service delivery
- greater engagement with civil society and the third sector
- the early emergence of "e government"
- the modernization of the machinery of government, and
- a move to evidence informed policy making.



The gap created by the reform of public administration is described by Donald Kettl (2000) (with added emphasis):

The global government reform movement has focused on two problems. One problem is policy, with roots in politics: What should government do? Can—or should-government be smaller? The policy questions revolve around value problems and depend on the political process to sort them out.

The other problem is administration, with roots in efficiency and effectiveness: How can government do what it does better? Can we do more with less and, in the process, improve the satisfaction of citizens? The administrative questions revolve around management reform and depend on improving the management process-especially traditional bureaucratic authority...

Citizens, and many elected officials, often fail to distinguish between deciding what to do and determining how to do it better. Of course, often there is no practical distinction between such political and administrative issues. Government is what government does. Government reform hinges on deciding which of these processes to change to improve what government does.

The application of strategic management to the public sector and particularly the discipline of Public Administration has evolved in parallel to 50 years of reform and change to the practice of public administration, and at points has interrelated.

Poister and Strieb (1999) define the application of strategic management to the public sector as

...managing a public agency from a strategic perspective on an ongoing basis to ensure that strategic plans are kept current and that they are effectively driving other management processes. Strategic management requires the following:

- 1. continual monitoring of the "fit" between the organization and its environment and tracking external trends and forces that are likely to affect the governmental jurisdiction or agency;*
- 2. shaping and communicating to both internal and external audiences a clear vision of the type of organization the governmental unit is striving to become;*
- 3. creating strategic agendas at various levels, and in all parts of the organization, and ensuring that they become the driving force in all other decision making; and*
- 4. guiding all other management processes in an integrated manner to support and enhance these strategic agendas.'*

Many observations of the applicability of strategic management to Public Administration reference New Public Management (NPM), such as the suggestion that strategy is considered from a "managerialist perspective". (Stewart 2004)

The difference between the orthodox strategic management context of the private sector with a non-profit (and by extension, government) context is defined by the discipline's significant figure of Peter Drucker (1989):

...nonprofits do not base their strategy on money, nor do they make it the center of their plans, as so many corporate executives do. "The businesses I work with start their planning with financial returns," says one well-known CEO who sits on both business and nonprofit boards. "The nonprofits start with the performance of their mission".

Boyne and Walker (2004) mark the contrast by stating

In contrast to the case in the private sector, strategy need not be viewed as a "weapon" that is used to defeat rivals in a competitive struggle (Greer and Hoggett 1999). Rather, strategy can be interpreted more broadly as a means to improve public services, whether these are provided by one agency or whole networks of organizations (Boyne 2003).



They also provide a useful definition of a strategy process – “how objectives and actions are selected or formulated. The outcome of this process is strategy content itself”.

The setting of direction or a course of action by a political leader can also be described as political leadership. The assertion of greater political control over direction and demanding responsiveness from public service leaders were aspect of “political management reforms”, a subset of NPM. Those specific reforms included contract employment for senior officials and the appointment of partisan personal staff.

Tucker (1995) explains the “directive” function of political leadership:

First, leadership has a diagnostic function. Leaders are expected to define the situation authoritatively for the group.

Second, they must prescribe a course of group action, or of action on the group's behalf, that will meet the situation as defined. They must formulate a plan of action designed to resolve the problem in a manner that will serve group purposes. These, of course, may in practice be the purposes of some particular element of the group that equates its own aims with those of the group as a whole.

Third, leadership has a mobilizing function. Leaders must gain the group's support, or predominant support, for the definition of the group situation that they have advanced and for the plan of action that they have pre-scribed. We may describe these functions as diagnostic, policy formulating, and policy implementing.

In *Ministerial leadership: Practice, performance and power*, Andrews (2024) notes the choices Ministers – in the UK context at least – have in their early days.

Frequently at the beginning of a parliament, new ministers have clear views as to what they want to do, based on manifesto commitments, priorities of the prime minister or first minister, or a coalition programme for government. But ministers do not necessarily know precisely what they want to do with a department or a policy area when they arrive, and sometimes that requires intellectual confidence to avoid rushing into long-range decisions.

...(Ken) Clarke believed that as your confidence in post develops, you will decide on your priorities:

After six months, you need to have some idea of what it is you want to do whilst you are in this portfolio. Is there anything that needs to be done? If there is, in your opinion, how do you make that your agenda? How are you going to produce a bit of change, a bit of movement and so on? Because you have got to move on from being slightly shocked and overwhelmed by events to actually being in charge and having some idea of where, at least, you are trying to go and what you are trying to do. That is quite difficult and I have seen people appointed to jobs where they really never got out of the rabbit in the headlights stage from the moment they arrived. (Clarke 2016: 12)

Clarke is outlining a sense-making process (Weick 1995) that takes some time, depends on interactions with others, and requires the confidence that a minister will be in post for a reasonable length of time...

The profile of strategic management approaches in the public sector has developed significantly over recent years.

Hansen and Ferlie (2014) noted that “it is only recently that strategic management has received attention within the public administration literature and the field is still developing.”



They also discuss the limits of applying strategic management to public sector organisations, and note the particular limits created by a lack of administrative autonomy, performance-based budgeting and market like conditions.

Reeves et al (2023) provide a more contemporary observation, stating that “strategy has started playing an important role in the public sector...in different countries, across domains, and at the local, regional, and national levels” and that “a new paradigm in public administration has emerged: the modern government as a “strategic state.”

They note that the UNDP and the OECD have adopted this Strategic State paradigm as a basis for analysis and advice to governments.

Bryson (2010) identifies the potential benefits of strategic planning for the public sector. These include:

- Promotion of strategic thinking, acting, and learning,
- Improved decision making,
- Enhanced organizational effectiveness, responsiveness, and resilience,
- Enhanced effectiveness of broader societal systems,
- Improved organizational legitimacy, and
- Direct benefits for the people involved.

As a warning, Bryson adds that “of course, there is absolutely no guarantee that any of these potential benefits will accrue”.

Strategic Foresight

Strategic Foresight including “Futures” has emerged as a methodology within the public sector to support better policy development and decision making. Its emergence has aligned with Network Governance focus on evidence based policy development.

The Australian Government has recently released a *Futures Primer* to “inform present-day policy strategy and decision-making” (PMC 2024). It provides an overview of Futures methodologies and how it can be used by public servants.

The Singapore Government’s Centre for Strategic Futures was first established in an earlier iteration in 1995 as the Scenario Planning Office within the Department of Prime Minister. The current Centre was established in 2009 “as a futures think tank within SPO to focus on issues that may be blind-spot areas, pursue open-ended long-term futures research, and experiment with new foresight methodologies.”²

The New Zealand Public Service Act³ requires departmental chief executives to provide a long-term insights briefing to the appropriate Minister at least once every 3 years. It must occur “independently of Ministers” and provide information into public of “information about medium- and long-term trends, risks, and opportunities that affect or may affect New Zealand and New

² <https://www.csf.gov.sg/who-we-are/>

³ <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0040/latest/whole.html#LMS106159>



Zealand society” and “information and impartial analysis, including policy options for responding to those matters.”

American public sector agencies also undertake strategic foresight activities, with a significant increase over recent years (Scoblic 2021). A 2018 study⁴ found use of strategic foresight across 19 agencies with those agencies coming disproportionately from the national security community.

Delivery

The discipline of delivery in the public sector is highly navigated terrain, and many Westminster governments have experimented with Delivery Units and related project management methodologies. The same basic principles apply to the pursuance of specific priorities by a Minister.

A useful summary of those principles of effective delivery is provided by the most significant figure in public sector delivery, Sir Michael Barber (Barber 2020):

Once you’ve done some planning, you will need to know—as frequently and meaningfully as possible—how well you’re doing at implementing the plan and achieving the results it promises. This is the purpose of a delivery routine: a regularly scheduled and structured conversation between you and your accountable leaders to review progress against your goals, discuss and solve major challenges, and make decisions to drive delivery forward. These routines, brokered and managed by your delivery leader using the tools in this chapter, will create a consistent sense of urgency for your system to deliver results.

Your time, and the seriousness with which you take your delivery routines, are the single greatest investment you can make in ensuring your delivery effort’s success. At the same time, a well-structured set of delivery routines is the greatest gift your delivery leader can give you: a consistent view of progress, with key decisions and questions teed up for you every time, no matter what other distractions are on your desk at the moment.

This delivery focus is strongly associated with the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The Blair Government’s Delivery Unit – led by Michael Barber – was introduced at the same time as a range of New Governance reforms including the devolution and modernisation of Government machinery, a focus on evidence, and a critical reliance on networks of Departments and leaders within the Government. (Barber 2007)

However, Barber’s approach has been categorised as an NPM approach that does not consider the misalignment of public service leaders with frontline staff, or a lack of alignment of external stakeholders:

“According to Barber, implementation problems can be solved if executive leaders clearly set out the policy goals and communicate the program theory and then carefully plan the implementation process and create a clear ‘line of sight’ based on regular performance reporting. Without denying the usefulness of intensified communication up and down the implementation chain, this solution to implementation problems appears a bit naive in the face of the power struggles between the executive level and the frontline staff that might disagree with

⁴ Joseph M. Greenblott, Thomas O’Farrell, Robert Olson, and Beth Burchard, “Strategic Foresight in the Federal Government: A Survey of Methods, Resources, and Institutional Arrangements,” *World Futures Review* 11, no. 3 (2019), 245–66



the new policies for professional or political reasons and therefore might engage in shirking or outright sabotage. Opposition to policy implementation may also come from recalcitrant user groups or stakeholders. Failing to address the political conflicts and power struggles that undermine implementation... overlook an essential part of the picture. (Peters et al 2022)



Relevant tools and approaches of Strategic Management

Ferlie and Ongaro (2022) provide an overview of the schools of strategic management, beginning with the early origins in industrial economics, and the relevance to public sector settings.

<i>School</i>	<i>Exemplary texts</i>	<i>Key public and not-for-profit sector texts</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Strategic Design and Planning	Chandler (1962); Ansoff (1965); Andrews (1971)	Bryson (1988, 2018); Fretzel et al. (2000)	It can be adapted for public sector conditions (but note high politicization; pluralist power relations).
Strategic Positioning School	Porter (1980, 2004)	Porter and Teisberg (2006) – USA health care; Vining (2011)	Historically, private sector based and difficult to apply in public sector settings; may be more applicable within strong quasi markets; may still require adaptation.
Mintzberg, Learning, Emergent Strategy and Organizational Context	Quinn (1980); Mintzberg (1983); Mintzberg and Waters (1985)		Strong application to public sector settings; professionalized bureaucracy and adhocracy.
The (Public and Social) Entrepreneurial School	Mintzberg (1973)	Pettigrew (1979)	Strategy making in smaller scale settings; role of the founder of an innovative social setting; can apply to some social enterprises; it can also apply to core bureaucracies (e.g. EASA case) under certain conditions.
The Cultural School	Pascale and Athos (1981); Peters and Waterman (1982); Deal and Kennedy (1982)	Pettigrew (1979)	Japanese influence; reaction against structure; quality wave; it is significant both for commercial and public services organizations.
Resource-Based View	Penrose (1959); Wernerfelt (1984)	Harvey et al. (2010); Casebeer et al. (2010)	Knowledge-based view of strategy; widely applicable both to commercial and public services organizations.
Corporate Governance School	Jensen and Meckling (1976); Fama and Jensen (1983); Lorsch (1989); Charkham (1994)	Ferlie et al. (1996) (empirical study of UK NHS Boards)	A strong influence on NPM reforms; applicability to public services organizations broadly dependent on transformative effects of administrative reforms in the jurisdiction.
Network-Based and Collaborative Models of Strategy	Amin (1994); Child et al. (2019)	Rhodes (1997); Huxham and Vangen (2000); Newman (2001); Osborne (2010b)	A major strand in public management, puts emphasis on strategy as boundary-spanner and search for collaborative advantage.
Strategy as Process	Pettigrew (1985); Pettigrew and Whipp (1991); Van de Ven et al. (1999)	Pettigrew et al. (1992); McNulty and Ferlie (2002); Ferlie et al. (2013)	Broadly similar analytical logic can be applied to both sectors; both experiencing enhanced pressures for strategic change.
Strategy as Practice	Johnson et al. (2003); Jarzabkowski et al. (2007); Johnson et al. (2007)	Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002)	Similar analytical logic applied to both sectors.
Public Value School	Moore (1995)	Benington and Moore (2011a)	Developed as a public sector model of strategy but influenced by other more orthodox models.

Figure 1 – Key models of strategic management – Ferlie and Ongaro (2022)

While it is an early school, the Design School uses two analytic techniques of potential relevance to a Ministerial priority setting framework – the PESTEL analysis and the SWOT analysis.

The PESTEL considers the key environmental across domains – namely, politics, economics, sociological factors, technology, the environment, and law.

Evans (2020) notes that some strategy practitioners have added ethics to create STEEPLE.

By contrast, the SWOT analysis is the circumstance of the specific organisation, in an internal/external and positive/negative set of binaries – strength and weakness (Internal), and opportunity/threat (External).

The most applicable framework across the strategic management discipline is the Strategic Change Cycle, as developed by Bryson (2017). Bryson is considered part of the Strategic Design and Planning School (Ferlie and Ongaro 2022).

Key elements applicable to the ministerial framework include the action of seeking a formal agreement to pursue a process; the securing of a mandate; the inputs of both the internal and external environments; and the structured formulation of strategy elements.



Within the formulation of the strategy elements, Bryson's five-step process focuses on the identified issues – including restraints and difficulties of implementation – before settling resolution of strategic issues. It then requires the development of actions under each element.

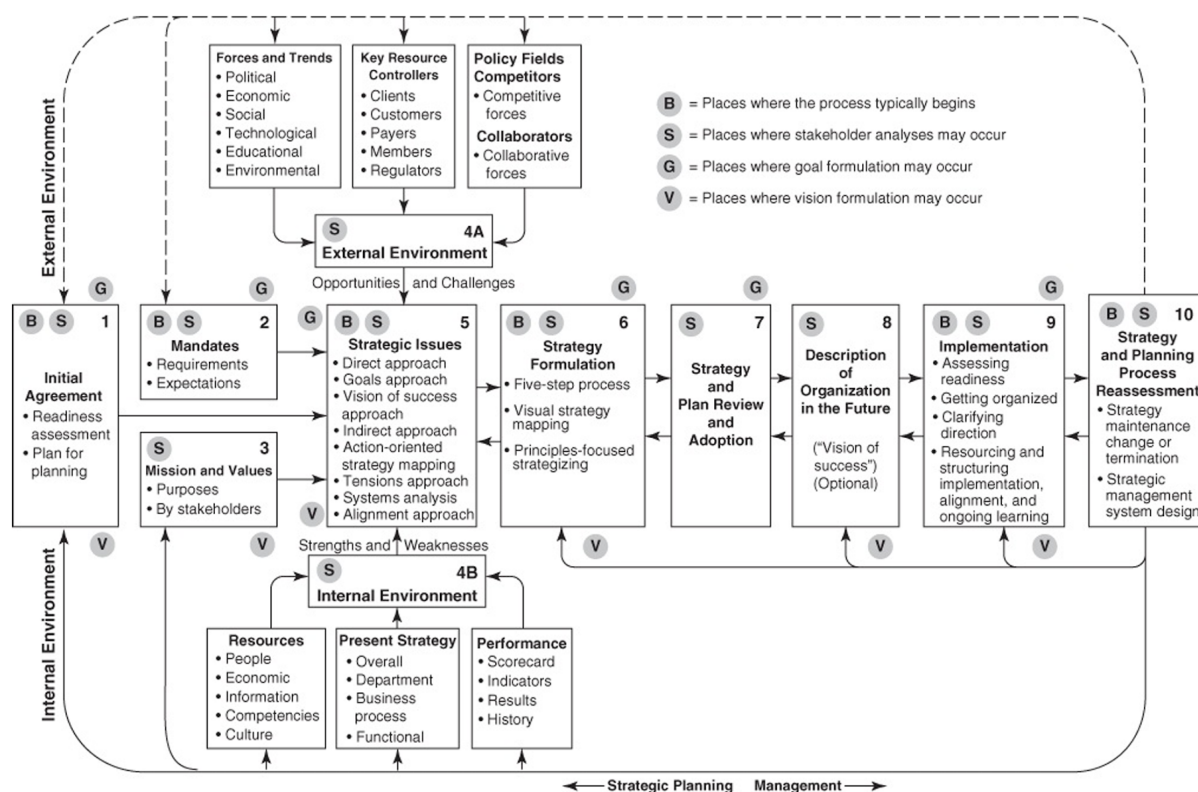


Figure 2 – The Strategic Change Cycle, as developed by Bryson (2017).



PART THREE – KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN CREATING A FRAMEWORK

Constraints of setting strategic direction

In developing and implementing a set of Priorities for a Minister – as promoted by this framework – there needs to be an acknowledgment of the political limitations placed upon them.

Ministers and their Office are not organisational and legal entities in their own right, but they are part of something more significant. They form part of a government, an enduring legal institution well understood by the public and key actors.

More specifically, Ministers – in a Westminster context – are part of a Cabinet or Executive that operates as a collective, with specific responsibility for consultation, confidentiality and collective decision making. Those decisions then publicly bind each member.⁵

Departments are typically created by enabling legislation, but often with a constitutional basis related to their Minister. These legal creations routinely lose and gain responsibilities to other Departments, and from time to time existing Departments are formally abolished, or new Departments created.

Administrative Orders outline the specific responsibilities of Ministers, Departments. The Secretary (the Department's CEO) provides leadership and management, as required by related legislation, regulation and guidance issued by the centre of Government.

Ministers' own requirements to consult with colleagues, and to bring matters to cabinet, are typically set out in a Cabinet Handbook.

Ministers do have powers that are legislated or at least codified that limit their direct control, and they also have responsibilities defined by formal and informal standards.

The Prime Minister (or Premier) may also have specific or general views on a Minister's portfolio which impact upon the choices potentially made. The Cabinet or Ministry may have also set an overall direction or agreed a process that impacts on the portfolio.

Furthermore, limitations caused by Budget circumstances, the demand for positions in the legislative or Cabinet work pipeline, and the capacity and capability of the Office and the Department can have significant consequences for the ability of a Minister to chart a course.

The consequence for Ministers is that they have less capacity to pursue some typical elements of strategy, including the development of Mission or Vision, or values. But within their responsibilities, a Minister can identify and respond to key issues (and opportunities) within an understood operating framework.

The exact extent of that responsibility and scope – their ability to make a particular decision or position in a particular way – will be different for each government. As a consequence, initial engagement with the political centre is critical before any priority setting process is commenced.

⁵ For an example, see the Cabinet Handbook – Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australia) 2024b



It would be politically unwise – and likely contrary to their requirements under their cabinet handbook – for a Minister to separately position their own Vision and Mission (Collis and Rukstad 2008) and articulate specific values different to the government. It would potentially undermine their ongoing role in the Executive.

Requirements to set a strategic direction

Many Australian jurisdictions require Government departments and agencies develop and publish a strategic plan or a plan like document.

The Australian *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* requires Commonwealth entities to prepare a corporate plan. The plan is published in accordance with a set of formal guidelines, including how activities relate to the Government's key priorities and objectives.

In Victoria, Ministerial Instructions issued under the *Financial Management Act 1994* require the regular publication of a document that sets the strategic direction and priorities of the specific agency.

Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania all place similar requirements on public agencies.⁶

Not all Westminster jurisdictions have such requirements.

For instance, the United Kingdom has no legislated requirement for Departments of State to produce priorities or strategic plans, although there have been instances where a Department has produced such a document – such as DEFRA in 2006⁷. The UK did have Single Departmental Plans and then Outcome Delivery Plans ([link](#)) however, but their use was jettisoned after the conclusion of the Johnson premiership in 2022.

The Maude Review (2023) in the United Kingdom identified the need for a setting of objectives by Ministers and departments in Recommendation 7.17:

7.17 Ministers in charge of departments should publish an annual short statement of their objectives for the year ahead. When a new minister is appointed the statement of objectives must be published within two months of appointment. The minister's Permanent Secretary should publish an accompanying implementation statement setting out how these objectives will be delivered. The current Outcome Delivery Plans (ODPs) can be adapted to serve both purposes. It is essential that the minister has their name attached to the objectives and that the Permanent Secretary is personally committed to the implementation plan. It is understood that unforeseen events can derail the best laid plans, and of course the effect of these can be explained. However these clear statements will make for much greater clarity of accountability for both ministers and permanent secretaries. The Permanent Secretary's annual objectives – to be agreed with the minister, HoCS and First Civil Service Commissioner – naturally will be expected to reflect the agreed plans (Recommendation 31).

⁶ See relevant local guidance – [Western Australia](#), [Queensland](#) and [Tasmania](#)

⁷ <https://www.iema.net/resources/news/2006/07/12/miliband-outlines-defras-priorities-dear-tony>



In the United States, the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010⁸ requires Federal Agencies to publish a strategic plan over a four year cycle that sets out mission, goals and linking those goals to whole of government priorities.

Distinct roles

Ministers are typically at their most effective when they have the strong and consistent support of their department, while their ministerial advisers work in partnership with public servants.

Ministerial staff are employed under distinct legislation (eg the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*) and it formalises the right of Ministers to employ personal staff to provide political advice. This legislation does not provide any formal powers to direct public servants.

These political appointments are different, but complementary, to public servants.

Shergold (2015) puts a positive but nuanced description of the role that they play in the Australian system of Government:

I think (Ministerial Advisers) perform a valuable role in contemporary governance. They ensure that ministers (and shadow ministers) can be advised by people who share their political ideology. Their presence makes it easier for public servants to focus on apolitical advice. The advisers help their ministers to question and challenge the views of their departments. Monopoly is never a good thing, and in the provision of policy advice it can be particularly dangerous. On occasion public servants and ministerial advisers may vie for the ear of the minister. More often they will work together, respecting each other's particular roles... Staffers play a valuable role in helping overburdened ministers cope with the increasing complexity of modern government..

Public Servants are employed under different legal frameworks and usually under separate legislation. These laws formalise an apolitical public service that is serving the public interest and delivering for the Government of the day, chosen by the people, and has constitutional obligations to serve future governments.

An important part of that legal framework is that the Secretary of a Department is the principal official policy adviser to the Minister (to paraphrase the Public Service Act 1999) and they also have specific responsibilities for stewardship.

Stewardship is specifically defined, in the Australian context, as building the public service's "capability and institutional knowledge, and supports the public interest now and into the future, by understanding the long-term impacts of what it does."⁹

As Shergold (2015) recognises, the Secretary and senior public servants have a distinct role that is different but complimentary to ministerial advisers – and that the Minister and policy development benefit when the roles are understood and respected:

Senior public servants and ministerial advisers each have a duty to inform, and an opportunity to influence, government decision-making. At the end of the day, though, it is up to ministers to make decisions, and they are best able to do so when their advisers and officials work well together. By standing in each other's shoes, by openly recognising the nature of their different roles, mutual respect can be built. Good policy will be the reward.

⁸ <https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ352/PLAW-111publ352.pdf>

⁹ Public Service Amendment Act 2024 – <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2024A00044/asmade/text>



As set out in the APSC's Strengthening Partnerships Report (2022), trust and confidence are the essential elements of a productive partnership. This can only be built by proactive and responsive engagement, achieved through regular informed discussions and interactions. The report also noted that strong relationships require effort and communication.



The role of the Government's “centre”

In the Australian context, the Centre of Government has traditionally had three broad functional units (Kelly et al 2009) – the Treasury, managing the jurisdictions finances; the Premier or Prime Minister’s support as chair of cabinet; and the management of public sector employment.

Daniel et al (2024) identify five key contemporary roles of the centre of government – Resource Allocation, Strategy Setting, Problem-Solving Support, Functional Leadership and End to End Delivery. They set out the potential activities related to each of those contemporary roles, noting that many are “optional”.



Sources: Interviews with public sector leaders and government officials around the world; BCG.

Figure 3 – Roles of the Centre – Source – Daniel et al (2024)

Some centres do not perform many or even any of the optional roles (as described as “activity seen in some centers”), and in particular they do not set overall or specific strategies or policy directions.

Mulgan (2014) provides a contrasting observation of the Centre’s various roles and functions. He notes that “...many of these tasks are divided in organisational terms – with functions passed out to ministries of finance, foreign affairs or internal security. A centre which did them all would become unmanageable.”

In undertaking those remaining functions, Mulgan identifies the shortcomings of centres in being

- ineffective at delivering legitimization and building trust,
- poor at making use of knowledge needed for good decision making,
- poor at coordination and alignment of the often sprawling government machine, and
- they get the timing wrong – both being too slow and too fast.

He suggests a set of clusters to create a more effective and “intelligent” centre; a number have relevance to creating a priority setting framework for Ministers.



The first is to make the strategic direction explicit – “transparent, explained and maintained” – and that the key task of the centre is to “own and articulate its purpose”.

The next cluster of relevance is the setting of priorities, and ensuring they are delivered –

“Ensure that the important things happen – and create capacities to keep a sharp focus on the ones that matter most....That requires careful aligning of high level strategy and day-to-day implementation and delivery. ...It requires economy; clarity; and consistency.”

Mulgan’s proposition goes beyond Ministerial portfolios however. It is promoting Governments – and particularly first ministers – articulating and pursuing a set of whole Government priorities.

As such, the priorities framework needs to consider such a dynamic in building a framework for circumstances where the centre is actively setting such priorities, and particularly when whole of government priorities relate to a specific Minister’s own role.

A contemporary example is the setting of five Missions by the newly elected Starmer Government. The newly elected Prime Minister committed in opposition to five national missions – kickstarting economic growth, making Britain a clean energy superpower, taking back (safety) on our streets, breaking down barriers to opportunity by reforming our childcare and education systems, and building a National Health Service fit for the future.¹⁰

The Missions approach, as described by Gould and Mazzucato (2024) is

“...about turning big challenges into concrete goals that catalyse engagement, innovation and investment from across ministries and across sectors. Missions can play a critical coordinating function – ensuring that the government is able to deliver on an ambitious agenda, rather than dissipating its energy across fragmented strategies and “sticking plaster” politics.”

By their nature, Government Missions will relate to a wide range of ministerial portfolios.

Mazzucato and Dibb (2019) define a key criteria of a Mission being cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and cross-actor “to spark activity across and among, multiple ...disciplines”.

The Commission on the Centre of Government (2024) made a similar set of observations:

The prime minister should, soon after their first comments outside No.10, develop a more detailed articulation of their priorities for government.

This framework – the Priorities for Government – should be a small set of top domestic and international priorities. Most of these would be long-term objectives that stretch over more than one parliament, with short and medium-term milestones linked to the parliamentary cycle. They would not be a list of specific policies as in the manifesto but should include a sense of prioritisation, to support the centre to make trade-offs between competing plans when allocating resources.

Each priority should be reflected in measurable outcomes. Priorities would often be cross-cutting and would have a lead secretary of state responsible for overseeing progress, as well as other secretaries of state responsible for contributing in different ways.

The Commission also recommends the combination of the Priorities process with the Budget process, overseen by an Executive Committee of the Cabinet.

¹⁰ <https://labour.org.uk/change/mission-driven-government/>



As noted earlier, similar but different recommendations are made in Francis Maude's Review – the *Independent Review of Governance and Accountability in the Civil Service* (2023) recommending that “Ministers in charge of departments should publish an annual short statement of their objectives for the year ahead”.

Practice / lived experience

In the development of the framework, discussions were held with current and former Secretaries, former Ministers across a party spectrum, former Chiefs of Staff and academics with an interest in the topic. They were a mix of Australian (both Federal and State) and international (UK, Denmark, Netherlands). Seven key themes emerged from those discussions.

- i. It is uncommon for a Minister to have a formalised set of priorities that were the basis of regular discussion and reporting. They are more likely to have an informal hierarchy of priorities which may or may not be revisited, or their professional focus is driven by media, stakeholder and political demands.
- ii. Operating horizons for Ministers are typically short term, and when they are long term it is in alignment with the remainder of the electoral term. The daily demands, and weekly planning and operating cycles often take precedence.
- iii. Where priorities are set and understood, external events negatively impact on both the focus and the ability to deliver. The Covid-19 pandemic was one example, but natural disasters, portfolio based scandals, ministerial reshuffles and demands in related portfolios can all impact upon pursuance. Any framework needs to consider these interruptions and shocks.
- iv. There are significant variations in ministerial roles – senior to junior; significant national portfolios to lesser, state based portfolios; some ministers have multiple portfolios in unrelated Departments; some governments have an active centre setting direction while others are benign. Any framework needs to be useful for all variations.
- v. Charter letters can play an important role in setting and articulating priorities, and creating a framework across Government.
- vi. For a range of reasons and motivations, not all Ministers will embrace a detailed and demanding approach to setting priorities. Specific elements of the approach could be adapted for their use.
- vii. Engagement and collaboration between the political actors (Ministers, ministerial advisers) and the public service leaders is critical for effectively identifying and confirming the priorities, and securing the approach to achieve them. Political actors attempting to secure them without a proper partnership with public service leaders undermines the exercise.

In relation to the final theme, there was considerable friction between the views of senior public servants and Ministers as to the appropriate level of co-development between public service officials and the political actors. There will inevitably be differing preferences amongst Ministers as to the balance of time that officials are taking part in the two workshops.

There were also deep-seated views in the consultation process that officials should take part in all processes in any priority setting framework. In direct contrast, the view was also put that officials' roles in the process should be minimised.



Ultimately, there will be views that cannot be reconciled with the model. The critical insight is that the balance of time spent with officials will be a tension that requires ongoing management.



PART FOUR – THE FRAMEWORK

Design principles

Critical characteristics

Given the problem definition and considering the guidance and insights set out above, there are a number of characteristics that the framework must possess.

- Firstly, it does no harm. The mere existence of the Plan does not create a public liability (ie negative publicity) nor inadvertently create a public benchmark for performance – unless a decision is made to do so.
- It is respectful. It protects the respective roles and responsibilities, and promotes trust and confidence.
- It is robust, so any plan can survive major events, be amended and updated in a methodical approach, and be built upon with a change of Minister or Department leader.
- It is universally applicable. Frontline and significant portfolios can use it, as can smaller and more narrow portfolio mixes. It can be used by jurisdictions of any scale. Processes do not necessarily require external facilitation.
- It is adaptable to the needs of the centre. Governments with a proactive leadership from the centre and/or high profile Government priorities (including Missions) can use the framework.
- It is beneficial. There is a clear benefit to the Minister and their Office in using it; Departments and particularly their leadership also welcome the use of the framework.
- Finally, it has clarity. The issues to be addressed are clear, the responses are equally clear in the form of a Priority, and there is effective monitoring and benchmarks to perform against.

Basic components

Given the critical characteristics, the proposed solution is based on the following components:

- Two parallel tracks of strategic activity are acknowledged, with interaction appropriate with the circumstances. One track is the development of the Minister's priorities; the other, where it occurs, is the setting of the Departments strategic direction. Departmental leaders may choose to mirror the Minister's process but the timing and other elements may vary due to factors outside of their control.
- A balanced suite of inputs is developed by the Department in collaboration with the Office; a largely identical pack of inputs can be used by the Department for their own process.
- The Minister will develop a set of potential priorities based on that input and a structured discussion.
- A small number of Priorities are subsequently confirmed based on a medium-term horizon. Ultimately the horizon needs to be broadly reflective of the context – eg 3 years for a Minister in a newly elected Government with 4 year terms. A set of Priorities could include a mix of horizons or one shorter cycle for a specific Priority.
- Each Priority includes an initial set of actions with key dates and key considerations. These actions may include a decision to stop doing things.



- The Priorities and particularly the Actions are regularly monitored and discussed, and the specific content is routinely revisited and updated.

Issues in pursuing priorities

Whole of Government requirements – such as Charter Letters or a set of Missions – will ultimately impact on any such priority setting; those requirements also need to be considered as a critical input into any priority setting.

Budget processes will likely underpin actions contingent on funding, particularly in relation to both milestones (such as making a submission) and consequent actions should the funding be granted.

As set out earlier, Ministers are ultimately a member of a collective with responsibilities and resources assigned by others. As a consequence, they have limited discretion and agency in making decisions and setting a course. These limitations and risks also need to be considered when developing priorities.



The four key steps – DIPR

The proposed D-I-P-R model is based on four key steps –

- i. **Decide** – The decision to use the framework and securing a mandate to do so.
- ii. **Input** – Commission the Input pack with the Department using the “Compass” structure.
- iii. **Prioritise** – Consider the inputs, key issues and potential priorities, including their viability. Then settle Priorities and the related actions.
- iv. **Review & Renew** – Regular reporting and discussion is used to track progress. Priorities and actions are updated over time.

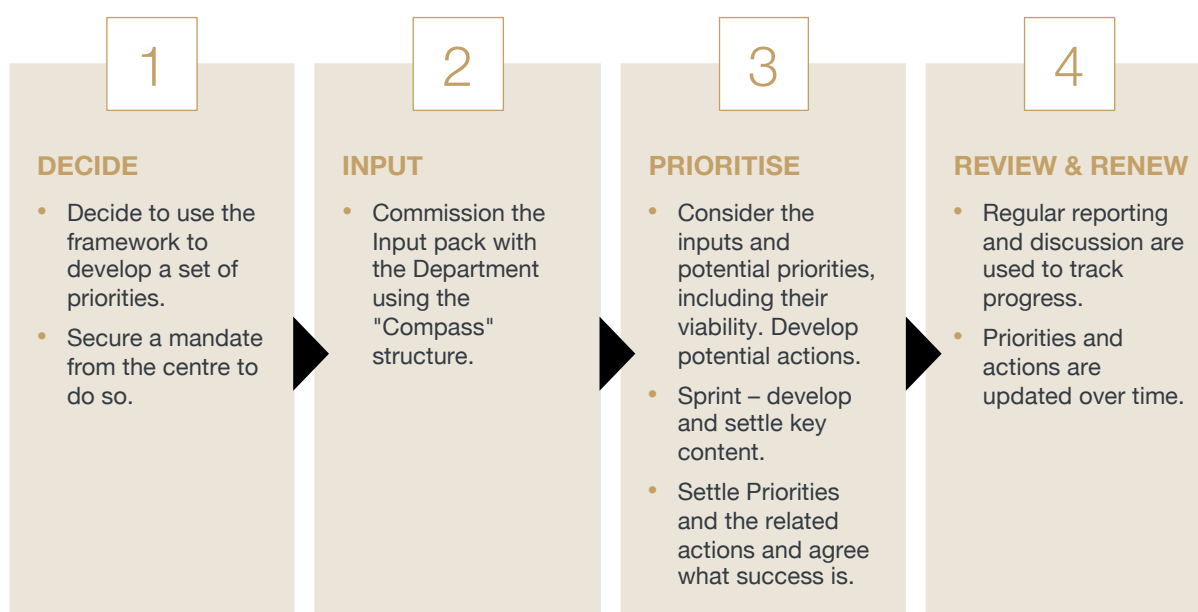


Figure 4 – the DIPR Framework and the four key steps

Each of the four key steps, with sub steps, are set out overleaf.



Step 1 – Decide

The initial step is the deliberate decision of the Minister to undertake a Priority setting process and the related actions of seeking a mandate from the political centre and early strategic engagement with the Department.

Actions for the Minister and their Office	• The Minister and senior staff agree to develop a Priorities Plan using the Framework. • A specific staffer is given responsibility for coordination for the initial steps. • A decision is made relating to the group/process to be used including whether an internal or external facilitator is to be used. • Diary time is allocated for the two workshops (if that is the model), and notice is given to the Secretary and their senior staff. • The appropriate authorising environment is identified. A mandate is sought from the political centre to undertake the process, and where appropriate, seek permission to submit the plan to the appropriate Cabinet Committee. Where relevant, senior portfolio Ministers are also engaged. • Identify and confirm linkages to the relevant WoG process and other critical guidance, for example current Charter Letters and election policy commitments.
Actions for the Secretary and Departmental leadership	• Minister to hold a strategic discussion with the Secretary (or lead Deputy Secretary) on potential priorities, key constraints and key inputs to be incorporated into the briefing pack (overleaf). For Ministers working across multiple Departments, this could require a second meeting with the other senior Official. • The discussion would also discuss key logistical matters – the potential contents of the Input Pack and attendees at the Workshops from the Department.
Other guidance	• Allow time for the political centre to consider the request and respond. • Manage the complexities of multiple Department Ministers, forming a judgement whether Departments are equally involved or to focus on the primary Department. • Identify an appropriate facilitator who is not the Minister. This could be the Chief of Staff, an experienced Senior Adviser or



	an external facilitator. It is critical for the Minister to be a fully engaged participant in the process. • The timing of such a process will never be perfect. A new Minister needs some time to understand the breadth and depth of the portfolio, and have a sense of the Department and key stakeholders. • Three months in a new role is a good time for a Minister to start pursuing a set of priorities. The process can be commenced after two months, with the initial workshop being held around the 100 day mark; the overall process should take 10-12 weeks.
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Step 2 – Input

This second step involves the formal commissioning of the key input, the “Compass Pack”, with the Department.

Actions for the Minister and their Office	• The specific workshop agenda is agreed upon with the Minister, including the line-by-line process for developing and confirming the priorities. • The Compass Pack and specific inclusions are then discussed across the four elements: - Obligations - Performance to date - Context, and - Prospective view
Actions for the Secretary and Departmental leadership	• The Compass Pack is commissioned with the Department; it is informed by the Office discussion (above) complemented by the initial strategic discussion held between the Minister and the Secretary.
Other guidance	• Liaison with the Department on any logistical requirements may be required at this stage. • The Input Pack should be received by the Minister and other workshop attendees in a timely manner – at least one week prior to the first workshop. • A checklist for the Compass Pack is provided in the attachments.



Guidance – The Input pack for the first workshop – The “Compass Pack”

The pack should be balanced across four elements: obligations, performance assessment to date, the current operating context, and a view about the prospective circumstances.

They differ from the strict Internal-External dichotomy of a SWOT Test (Evans 2020), but focus more on “building up” based on obligations and knowledge of internal performance, and then “building out” by considering the wider context and what is known about the future. The four elements are:

1. Obligations

Options for inclusion include:

- Election policy delivery
- Delivery of other major initiatives
- Directions and frameworks from the Centre, including Charter Letters or specific correspondence on guidance relating to strategic policy directions
- Specific internal and external reporting obligations
- Budget process requirements including critical paths
- Central political guidance*

2. Performance assessment

Options for inclusion include:

- Departmental stocktake – key projects underway, critical and emerging issues, strategic risks for Department
- Reflections on previous strategic planning activities.
- Key indicators on program delivery – supply and demand sides
- Key datasets external to the portfolio
- Emerging issues and related community attitudes
- Strategic and Operational Risks including fiscal and other constraints

3. Operating context

Options for inclusion include:

- Departmental observations on like jurisdictions
- Key readings and articles relevant to the portfolio
- What works resources
- Views and priorities of key stakeholders
- Public opinion
- What others are doing – comparative – and Intergovernmental and related portfolio considerations



- PESTLE Analysis
- Electoral overlay*

4. Prospective view

Options for inclusion include:

- Department priority suggestions (1 page each)
- Known dates and events in future
- Megatrends, as prepared by trusted source
- Content from key references, in particular the Incoming Government Brief (or Incoming Minister Brief) along with other relevant Government reports
- Scenarios / Futures
- Foresight projects – eg UK and UK2 and NZ LTIs
- Other stewardship considerations
- Election cycle insights*

** denotes political content for Office and Minister provision only. This content would be developed in the Office rather than by the Department.*



Step 3 – Prioritise

The overall intent of step 3 is to consider the content of the inputs, the wider operating context, key issues and the potential priorities, including the viability of each.

Priorities are then settled and the related Actions are developed and there is an agreement on what success is.

The overall step is broken down to three sub-steps to maximise Departmental engagement and effective development of the detail of Priorities:

- a) The initial workshop session is to consider inputs and potential priorities. Between three and six initial Priorities and potential actions and projects are developed. The format delineates between substantive discussion and political discussion.
- b) An offline sprint involving Office and key Departmental Officers is undertaken to develop detailed actions for the Priorities.
- c) A second shorter workshop is held to review and confirm priorities, actions, responsibilities, milestones and metrics.



Step P-1 Prioritise – Hold the initial workshop

Short description of the step.	Hold an initial workshop (6-8 hours). Consider the inputs, other context and discuss potential priorities, including their viability. Develop draft Priorities and related content.
Actions for the Minister and their Office	Depending on the agreed form of the process, a workshop will include • The Compass Pack is provided at least one week in advance and considered by attendees in advance. • The attendance of the Secretary plus 1-2 other senior officers for the initial part of the workshop. • Discussion of the Compass Pack and distil takeaways – the interesting, and the important. • Discuss other related considerations and identify key issues. • Identify potential priorities for a medium term horizon (eg 3 years), including the viability, risk and return of each. • Agree 3-4 draft priorities including potential actions for each that are cumulative and sequenced. • The actions are developed as a small group activity. • The second part of the workshop will focus on the general political and electoral issues and consider further potential priorities/actions. • Draft priorities and actions are revised further based on the political discussion.
Actions for the Secretary and Departmental leadership	The first part of the workshop will include the Secretary plus 1-2 other senior Officers. The Secretary needs to be updated following the workshop conclusion on the final output and progress in developing the Priorities. The work program for the Sprint is then agreed between the Chief of Staff and the Secretary.
Other guidance	A draft workshop agenda is provided as an attachment – it is a default option. Experienced Ministers may wish to vary the format and content.



Guidance – Choices for the Workshop format

The workshop format can be varied depending on the style and experience of the Minister. Newer Ministers should always use a formal process.

Options include:

- i. “Experienced” – the Minister develops the priorities and presents them to senior staff.
- ii. “Discussion” – the Minister works with a small group of senior staff with an informal process.
- iii. “Small meeting” – the Minister and senior staff meet for one or two formal sessions to develop and settle priorities.
- iv. “Office meeting” – the Minister and all private office staff meet for two sessions session to develop and settle priorities.
- v. “Office facilitated meeting” – the Minister and all private office staff meet for two sessions to develop and settle priorities with the support and assistance of an external facilitator.



Guidance – Mixed portfolio of priorities

In settling the initial draft of the Priorities, a mixed portfolio is recommended to ensure there is a balance of associated risk and resource demands – with an understanding that there will also be variability in the impact across the Priorities.

An example scenario of a mixed portfolio is provided below.

	Risk	Intensity of Resource Requirements	Potential Impact
	Includes stakeholder risk, internal political risk, implementation risk, reputation risk	Includes where there is a <u>significant</u> demand on financial resources, the Minister's time, staff time, and/or Departmental focus	Includes narrow portfolio metrics and wider societal and economic metrics
Priority 1 – ...	High	Medium (Minister's time, staff time)	High
Priority 2 – ...	Medium	High (Minister's time, financial)	High
Priority 3 – ...	Medium	High (Departmental focus)	High
Priority 4 – ...	Low	Medium (Staff time)	Medium
Priority 5 – ...	Low	Medium (financial)	Medium



Step P-2 – Offline sprint

Short description of the step.	Offline sprint involving Office and key Departmental Officers to develop detailed priorities
Actions for the Minister and their Office	Over a two week period, the Minister's Office works in collaboration with key personnel in the Department to fully develop the Priorities and related actions. This includes: • The issue that is being responded to by a potential Priority is well defined, and what success looks like is understood. • Key assumptions are tested, including stakeholder positions and challenges within government. • Confirming specific action responsibilities across the Office and the Department. • Confirming milestones and key metrics. • Reviewing the draft content and discussing it directly with the Minister. • The required resourcing is identified, and (where relevant) the Department providing a resourcing plan that may include reprioritisation within the Department. This requires a specific discussion – and formal agreement – with the Minister to <u>stop</u> Government doing or funding certain things. • Engaging with the Political and Public Service Centres, where appropriate given the feedback received during the initial stage of the Framework. • Engaging with Ministers and Departments with a shared interest in the proposed Priorities.
Actions for the Secretary and Departmental leadership	• Working in collaboration with senior staff in the Minister's Office. • Liaison with the Public Service Centre (DPC/DPMC/Treasury etc)
Other guidance	An iterative process can be used in engaging directly with the Minister during this period, particularly if there are key assumptions that need to be revised or the resourcing requirements are significantly greater than what was anticipated.



Guidance – What makes a good priority?

A good priority is similar to an effective objective, using the SMART structure. Just as an objective should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time Limited (Evans 2020), a Priority needs to be ambitious, measurable and strike a balance between scale and focus.

Three questions to be asked of the draft Priorities are:

- i. *Ask if it creates a sense of ambition* – Pursuing an easily achieved priority defeats the purpose of setting priorities. It needs to be ambitious for the Minister, staff and internal stakeholders. It should be of high impact in an output, outcome and societal impact sense.
- ii. *Ask whether or not you'll know whether you have achieved it or not.* – Like a train arriving at a station, the priority can be measured so that everyone involved understands what success will look like – or not.
- iii. *Ask whether it is understandable and achievable* – The priority should be appropriately general but not banal. Conversely, it shouldn't be so narrow that it can be completed in one project in a short amount of time.

Guidance – What a Priority could look like – potential scenarios

Examples of a priority could include over a multi-year horizon:

- Reform of an area of program delivery, where the first year is based on discovery, engagement and building a consensus; the second year is detailed design and introduction; and the third year is implementation. The process may require intersection with Budget processes to secure funding to introduce change.
- Overhaul of a major legislative regime, where significant technical work is required. The process requires a green paper / white paper process to develop and finalise new legislation over a 3 year horizon.
- Management and neutralisation of a challenging sector, where the current circumstances are hostile. The first period may focus purely on engagement and seeking common ground. The subsequent stages may be unclear until that initial process of engagement is completed.



Step P-3 – Workshop 2 to finalise and confirm

Short description of the step.	Settle Priorities and the related actions in a second, shorter workshop (2-4 hours).
Actions for the Minister and their Office	Key steps in the workshop include: • Review and finalise the Plan, consistent with any Cabinet Committee requirements. Participants will have had at least three working days to consider the revised Plan prior to the workshop. • Test the assumptions – developments since the initial workshop; potential opponents within and outside of Government; what would the critic say? • Delineating between shared interests with the Department (hallmarks, policy priorities, stewardship) and the political content. The latter requires actions and reporting all from within the Office. • Confirm the responsibilities, implementation steps, reporting and review routines. • Agree the forward routine for reporting, including meeting cadence and subsequent reviews. • Confirm Minister's approval. • A second part of the workshop will focus on the political and electoral aspects of the Priorities. • Specific party political content should be managed and discussed separately to the core material.
Actions for the Secretary and Departmental leadership	The first part of the workshop will include the Secretary plus 1-2 other senior Officers. Consideration should be given to including specific experts from the Public Service for discrete Priority discussions. There is a subsequent debrief between the Minister and the Secretary. Internal reporting within the Office (for political content) and reporting from the Department commences.
Other guidance	A draft workshop 2 agenda is provided as an attachment; it is a default option. Experienced Ministers may wish to vary the format and content.



Step 4 – Review and Renew

The fourth step is the longest, potentially lasting a number of years. It is the routine of regular reporting and discussion to track progress, quarterly deep dives on the progress, and an annual revisiting of the Actions and potential amendment of the Priorities.

Actions for the Minister and their Office	• The Priorities and related Actions are communicated to all staff in the Minister’s Office, the political Centre and the senior leadership of the Department. • Settle the final form and timing of written reports. The written reports should include: ○ a visual prompt of progress (eg traffic lights), ○ progress since the previous report, ○ enough text to explain actions/circumstances, and ○ key Department and Office contacts., • New Priority Plan related meetings need to be established within a wider, structured set of routines within the Office, with the Department, and with the Minister. Those Diary entries are made for solely discussing the Priority Plan reporting – and meetings are kept. • Confirm the meeting arrangements and the intersection with existing meetings with the Minister, Secretary and/or within the Office. Confirm the mixed cadence of updates, selective deep dives, and a full revisit. That could be, for instance: ○ The internal Office meeting (weekly or fortnightly) for operations is complemented by a new, second internal Office meeting to review progress in pursuing the Priorities. ○ A new monthly update meeting with the Minister on Priorities. ○ A stand alone monthly meeting between the Minister and the Secretary on Priorities. ○ A quarterly longer meeting (2-3 hours) with selected deep dives on Priorities. • Update the political centre (and senior portfolio minister) on the process, including detailing the final form of the Priorities. • Brief, as appropriate, relevant backbench policy committee members. • Schedule an annual full revisit of the Priority Plan.
Actions for the Secretary and Departmental leadership	• Production of reports to meet timelines aligned with Minister and Office meetings.



	• Secretary to meet monthly with the Minister on the Priority Plan.
Other guidance	Ministers may wish to take the opportunity to allocate routine time in their weekly diary specifically for their own activity in pursuing priorities. This goes beyond the update discussions. This time could be used for policy workshops, stakeholder engagement and/or background reading. A set of draft templates for meetings are provided as attachments.



PART FIVE – OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Application to other jurisdictions and settings

Some Westminster jurisdictions and other systems of Government have demands and complexities where the Framework will not necessarily be effective in the proposed form.

The reason could include the fact that the split between public servants and political staff is not relevant due to the nature of appointments, or due to a lack of political advisers.

There may also be Ministers with a reluctance to pursue a process with detailed steps and such specific requirements. The same Minister may however concur with the fact that a small number of priorities is an effective method to articulate and pursue an agenda.

The key tasks within the Framework that can be adapted to a bespoke version of the process are:

1	The deliberate choice is made to undertake a process, a mandate is sought from the centre, and an initial strategic conversation is held with the Departmental Secretary. 
2	A balanced suite of inputs is developed and then considered by the Minister that balances obligations, current performance, operating context and a prospective view of the future. 
3	Once the inputs have been considered, key issues are identified and potential priorities are then developed in response. This may be done in writing, in an informal setting or in a formal setting. Those priorities are narrowed and then agreed based on considerations of feasibility. 
4	For each of the agreed priorities, specific actions are developed that set out milestones, metrics, responsibilities and required resourcing. The Departmental leadership is heavily involved in this development. 
5	Once the final set of Priorities and related actions are confirmed, they are communicated to the Office and the Department. 



6

A routine of reporting and revisiting the content is strictly kept. The option of fundamentally revising one or more Priorities due to external events and developments is reserved.

The process can also be used with multiple Minsters, such as Teams of senior and junior Ministers across a single Department.



Managing the distinct roles in implementation

Much of the content of a Minister's Priority Plan will be described as shared interests. They are appropriately considerations of and between the Minister, their Office, and the Department.

A small number of items will not be shared.

The content can be categorised across four broad categories – Government hallmarks, policy priorities, political priorities and stewardship priorities.

The first two are the shared interest of both the Minister and the public servants, with the former (hallmarks) being defined by the Centre and the latter being confirmed by this process.

By contrast the third (political) is for the Office while the fourth (stewardship) is principally for the Public Service.

Ministers will have an interest in the capability, culture and structural arrangements, particularly where it relates to policy or public outcomes. But ultimately the Secretary is the principal steward, consistent with the APS definition of building “its capability and institutional knowledge and supports the public interest now and into the future, by understanding the long-term impacts of what it does”.¹¹

Once the Priorities are confirmed and understood across the Office and amongst Departmental Executives and staff, care needs to be taken to manage those responsible for other areas, and to emphasise the importance of the “Business as Usual” activities.

Finally, Budget timelines will rarely neatly align with any such process. The “least worst” alignment of this process to Budget timelines is the best option where there is capacity to develop a major proposal for timely submission to the annual budget cycle.

Events and emergencies

There are circumstances that routinely occur that fundamentally shift the Minister's attention and activity. It is an extension of the Dwight Eisenhower maxim of “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything”.¹²

As mentioned earlier, pandemics, natural disasters, portfolio based scandals, ministerial reshuffles and demands in related portfolios can all impact upon a focus on an agreed set of Priorities. These unseen and sometimes unknowable events will have an unavoidable impact on the setting of Priorities.

A new Government “hallmark” policy can also change the focus. From time to time, First Ministers or the Cabinet as a whole will decide to pursue a major initiative or a wider agenda within a particular portfolio. Events will fundamentally change that Minister's focus.

¹¹ See APS Reforms of the Public Service Act 1999 – <https://www.apsreform.gov.au/about-aps-reform/public-service-amendment-act-2024>

¹² <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/eisenhowers/quotes>



As such, Ministers – and their Office, and their Department – may be required to change the small number of Priorities to add something that has arisen, which is significant and will take a number of years to deliver or resolve. To be resilient, the Framework needs to be adaptable.

That amendment should ideally be undertaken as part of a quarterly or biannual process, but an ad-hoc process can take place to amend the existing Priorities Plan.

The opportunity for public servants

As referenced in the introduction, Departments can and do set organisational priorities in isolation from their Ministers.

Quadrennial and annual plans, as often required in legislation or formal directives, are routinely approved with little or no ministerial ownership.

Departments also choose to develop a strategy and focus on a particular priority, particularly as a stewardship or a capability building exercise.

Just as Ministers benefit significantly from the collaboration with the public service in developing a Priority Plan, Departments will potentially gain by Ministerial engagement in developing their own strategic documents.

Elements of this Framework can also be adapted for a Departmental process, and in particular the key principles of the process will serve the Department well – collaboration, engagement with the Centre, iterative process between the Minister and the Department, and a focus on implementation.

The time cycle for a Department plan will typically not align with the Minister's own priority setting process. This will invariably create added complexity, as it would be ideal to engage in a timely manner on key policy and stewardship matters and using the same Compass Pack.

What makes this Framework different?

While the detail and demands of the Framework are detailed, the benefits to Ministers, their Office and the Department can be distilled to a short list. Those benefits also need to be compared against a business as usual approach to governing.

The key differences of this framework are:

- It is fundamentally about Ministers choosing on what to prioritise, with as much alignment with the Department as is appropriate. It aligns with the political centre as circumstances require.
- By recognising the distinct different but complementary roles, it is collaborative and iterative between the Department and the Office by design.
- Inputs are balanced, prospective and provide wider context.
- Transparency of priorities – to a large extent – assists in maximising impact.
- It is the basis for regular strategic conversations between Minister and Department.



The specific benefits for Ministers and their staff are that

- Securing change is a refreshing narrative in a cynical age.
- The ability to demonstrate impact and getting big things done – and done well. Such impact can lead to promotion, profile, and enhanced reputation.
- The scheduling of key milestones is the basis for effective communication and campaigning activity.
- It focuses limited resources in the Office.
- It focuses Department resources and effort.
- The early and structured engagement with the Centre can often assist in progressing major projects.
- It is a structure for engagement with the public service, and for holding them accountable.

The specific benefits for senior public servants include:

- It provides transparency and clarity on priorities.
- In the context of limited resources, it assists in managing short term or frivolous demands.
- It is a basis for routine strategic conversations with the Minister and their staff.
- It is an opportunity to elevate stewardship and have conversations with the Minister relating to capability, as well as emerging issues and risks.
- It is an opportunity for policy impact and getting big things done, and done well as public servants.

A higher order dilemma – how does the Centre lead and support a strategic agenda

How Governments develop an overarching set of priorities (or agenda) and organise in their pursuance is a higher order dilemma, sitting well above choices made by most Ministers and Departments.

From time to time, whole of government frameworks are adopted to pursue one or a number of overarching priorities. The adoption of Missions by the Starmer Government is one such example; the rush of “Whole of State” plans in Australian States in the 2000s is another (Kelly et al 2009).

To be successful, such approaches require a well articulated direction, related content and guidance for Ministers and Departments and capability and capacity to deliver. This includes advisers and public servants understanding the process, central capability as well as proportionate capability in line Departments, and significant levels of collaboration at both a Public Service and Ministerial Office level.

Central government can also play a role in supporting Ministers developing and pursuing their own priorities – and this is not necessarily at the expense of a central framework. For instance, the First Minister and their department can...

- Develop and mandate key data sets across Government to monitor performance.



- (With the Treasury/Finance ministry) set out a budget and economic outlook for the forward period to assist with priority setting.
- Utilise Charter (or Mandate) Letters to articulate hallmark priorities and encourage specific portfolio priorities – eg [Canada](#)
- Invest in a Futures methodology and/or megatrends approach that can be utilised across Government or articulate specific scenarios- eg Singapore [Centre for Strategic Futures](#)
- Highlight leading approaches to contemporary policy questions – eg the UK [What Works network](#).
- Commission panels of experts to interrogate large, complex issues – eg the [IPCC](#)

Templates

A range of templates have been developed for use; they can be amended as is appropriate for the circumstances.

The templates, all provided as attachments to this report, include:

1. Input pack checklist
2. Workshop 1 draft agenda
3. Workshop 2 draft agenda
4. Priority Plan template
5. Delivery report template
6. Draft agenda for internal Office meetings
7. Draft agenda for meeting with the Secretary
8. Forward meeting planner draft

The placemat version of the Framework is provided at attachment 9.



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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1. Input pack checklist

Obligations	Performance assessment
Options for inclusion include: ☐ Election policy delivery ☐ Delivery of other major initiatives ☐ Directions and frameworks from the Centre, including Charter Letters or specific correspondence on guidance relating to strategic policy directions ☐ Specific internal and external reporting obligations ☐ Budget process requirements including critical paths ☐ Central political guidance* ☐ ☐	Options for inclusion include: ☐ Departmental stocktake – key projects underway, critical and emerging issues, strategic risks for Department ☐ Reflections on previous strategic planning activities ☐ Key indicators on program delivery – supply and demand sides ☐ Key datasets external to the portfolio ☐ Emerging issues and related community attitudes ☐ Strategic and Operational Risks including fiscal and other constraints ☐ ☐



Operating context	Prospective view
Options for inclusion include: ☐ Departmental observations on like jurisdictions ☐ Key readings and articles relevant to the portfolio ☐ What works resources ☐ Views and priorities of key stakeholders ☐ Public opinion ☐ What others are doing – comparative – and Intergovernmental and related portfolio considerations ☐ PESTLE Analysis ☐ Electoral overlay* ☐ ☐	Options for inclusion include: ☐ Department priority suggestions (1 page each) ☐ Known dates and events in future ☐ Megatrends, as prepared by trusted source ☐ Content from key references, in particular the Incoming Government Brief (or Incoming Minister Brief) along with other relevant Government reports ☐ Scenarios / Futures ☐ Foresight projects – eg UK and UK2 and NZ LTIs ☐ Other stewardship considerations ☐ Election cycle insights* ☐ ☐

** denotes political content for Office and Minister provision only. This content would be developed in the Office rather than by the Department.*



Attachment 2. Workshop 1 draft agenda

The below draft workshop agenda and runsheet is provided as guidance.

It is intended as a starting point, particularly for workshops that are facilitated by a senior member of the Minister's staff. It is also the starting point of a conversation to settle a program with an external facilitator.

Minutes Time allocation / running total	Agenda item	Description / process
5/5	Opening	Review agenda for the day.
45/50	Review of Compass Pack	Discuss the content of the Input Compass pack, with the participants requested to identify the issues they found either "interesting" and the "important", with a running list of both being recorded. The discussion is based on discussing the four elements in order: • Obligations (eg election commitments), then • Performance to date (eg key performance indicators from the portfolio), then • Operating Context (eg what others are doing), and finally • Prospective view (eg relevant foresight or futures studies).
10/60	Capacity and capability restraints.	Discuss any capacity and capability restraints in the Office and the Department. Note the key restraints.
10/70	Administrivia	Discuss, list and then put aside the lesser administrative issues participants wish to raise for off-line resolution. Chief of Staff to take carriage.
15/85	Minister's positioning	Discuss the Minister's own role, their policy ambition and overall positioning. Have the Minister initially speak to this.
15/100	Narrow the key issues	Narrow the issues on the "interesting" and "important" lists based on the discussion above; narrow to a key set of issues (4-8 in total).
30/130	Long list of potential priorities.	Discuss potential priorities based on direct responses to each of the issues on the narrowed



Minutes Time allocation / running total	Agenda item	Description / process
		list, and bring together a working list of options. Focus on a multi year horizon of 2 to 4 years. Identify any positioning or overarching positioning or approach of the Minister/Office that should be pursued as an overarching aspect of the Priorities Plan.
45/175	Narrow the field of potential priorities.	Discuss the viability of each long-listed priority on the basis of • The bandwidth of Office staff and of the Department and the subsequent capacity to pursue it, • Alignment with other efforts and activities, including Budget process, • The overall risk/difficulty associated with the proposed priority, • Potential enemies and opponents to each, • The effort, time and resources required, including the required political capital, and • The potential impact for the community.
15/200	Break	Department staff leave at this time.
30/230	Political context discussion	Consider the wider political context for the period ahead, including the electoral cycle. Is there an overarching sense of “where do we want to go” to bring clarity and consistency to the priorities. Discuss the Ministers own political positioning.
20/250	Agree initial draft set of Priorities.	Agree an initial three to six priorities and the time horizon(s) for each. Ensure there is a mixed portfolio of risk, likely resource and effort requirements, and potential impact. (see below)
120/370	Build out each draft Priority – <u>small group</u> activity	For each of the shortlisted priorities, undertake the initial development of potential actions and/or projects for the initial period (12-18 months). Articulate the sequencing and resource requirement of the actions. Confirm staff and Departmental potential responsibilities so they are clear, and related milestones are also identified. This initial



Minutes Time allocation / running total	Agenda item	Description / process
		activity is best done over 2 hours in small groups of 2-4 people for each priority. A refreshment break is built into this activity.
40/410	Report back and next steps	A report back of the draft actions is undertaken with the larger group. Minister provides feedback and confirms their comfort with the overall priorities. A draft document is produced to record the content for the next stage.
10/420	Close	



Attachment 3. Workshop 2 draft agenda

Minutes Time allocation / running total	Agenda item	Description / process
5/5	Opening	Review agenda for the day.
80/85	Review of Priorities and related Actions	Discuss each Priority, with a line by line review of the related Actions. Confirm key tension points including • Responsibilities • Milestones • Resourcing requirements. • Critical paths and key risks. Key experts from the Department potentially attend for the relevant priority.
15/100	“What else” discussion	Revisit key issues discussion and the lists of “interesting” and “important”. Revisit and discuss any key issues not responded to directly by the Plan. Confirm the Priorities in that context – or agree to a specific amendment.
15/115	Departmental view	Secretary to discuss the Department’s view and any key issues relating to resourcing, milestone and other risks. The view of the Centre and the relationships to other Departments is discussed. The Department’s approach to reporting will be confirmed. Departmental staff depart following this item.
20/135	Political discussion	A political discussion is held, discussing the Priorities in the context of - Electoral considerations - Political guidance from the Centre - The Minister’s own positioning.
5/140	Minister’s confirmation	Minister confirms the final Priorities with any changes as discussed during the Workshop.
10/150	Implementation, reporting, routines	The implementation, review and renew arrangements are discussed and confirmed.
	Close	



Attachment 4. Priority Plan template



Office of the <Minister's Name>

Minister for <Portfolio>

Priorities for <Years>

Draft, internal working document

As at <DATE>

How we do it:

<Narrative of approach or overarching considerations for Minister and/or Office>

Our priorities for 202X are:

1. Short, sharp description explaining the first priority.
2. Short, sharp description explaining the second priority.
3. Short, sharp description explaining the third priority.
4. Short, sharp description explaining the fourth priority.



PRIORITY 1 – TITLE IN SHORT FORM

Short sharp description explaining the priority	
What we will do	Further explanation
Why we will do it	Explain the impact and value alignment.
Responsible staff and/or Department branches	Names / actions below
Action 1.1 – Project or activity explained in detail Includes key dates for delivery overall and key risks/critical paths. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved.	
Action 1.2 – Project or activity explained in detail Includes key dates for delivery overall and key risks/critical paths. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved.	



Action 1.3– Project or activity explained in detail Includes key dates for delivery overall and key risks/critical paths. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved. - Milestone/date – and what will be achieved.	
Other key dates:	Key stakeholders:
Key dates relating to the above actions	Key stakeholders listed internal then external



Attachment 5. Delivery report template

	Priority 1 - Title in Short Form							
	Short sharp description of priority							
	Priority Action	Deliverable	Responsibility	Start Date	Due Date	Measure of progress to date	Progress	
	Action 1.1 –Project or activity explained in detail	<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress Behind schedule		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress Task completed		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress Task underway		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress Not yet commenced		
	Action 1.2 –Project or activity explained in detail	<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
	Action 1.3 –Project or activity explained in detail	<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
	Action 1.4 –Project or activity explained in detail	<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress ...		
		<What will be done>	initials of staff, branch of Department	<date>	<date>	Description of progress Not yet commenced		



Attachment 6. Draft agenda for internal Office meetings



Office of the <Minister's name>, Minister for <Portfolio>

Weekly Meeting

<Meeting date>

1. Week ahead

- 1.1 Key diary events – speeches, statewide media events, events with the PM
- 1.2 Parliament
 - 1.2.1 Program
 - 1.2.2 Legislation
 - 1.2.3 Question Time
 - 1.2.4 Other
- 1.3 Urgent policy issues

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 <Priority 1>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues
- 2.2 <Priority 2>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues
- 2.3 <Priority 3>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues
- 2.4 <Priority 4>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues

3. Other matters

- 3.1 Other portfolio matters
- 3.2 Parliamentary Party matters
- 3.3 Office administration
- 3.4 Miscellaneous



Attachment 7. Draft agenda for meeting with the Secretary



Office of the <Minister's name>, Minister for <Portfolio>

Monthly Priorities Meeting

<Meeting date>

Minister, Secretary, TBC...

Strategic Priorities

1. <Priority 1>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues
2. <Priority 2>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues
3. <Priority 3>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues
4. <Priority 4>
 - Review of key actions, as per plan
 - Key immediate issues



Attachment 8. Forward meeting planner

This example meeting planner is provided for illustrative purposes and as a starting model for internal meetings and routines that best leverages the Priorities process

Meeting name	Who	Minister	CoS	Secretary	When	What	Organiser
Secretary's Update	Minister, Secretary, CoS, key senior staff	✓	✓	✓	Weekly / 30m	Current and emerging high priority meetings	Minister's EA
Secretary's Priorities Update	Minister, Secretary, CoS, key senior staff	✓	✓	✓	Monthly / 60m	Discuss progress of Strategic Priorities	Minister's EA
Priorities – Quarterly Deep Dive	Minister, Secretary, CoS, all senior staff, Departmental Execs as required.	✓	✓	✓	Quarterly / 3 hr (March; June; Sept; Dec)	In depth discussion of Strategic Priorities; extended session on one Priority.	Minister's EA
Daily staff update	All staff		✓		Daily / 10m	Update on the day/following day	Staff Admin
Minister -Senior staff	Minister, CoS, All senior staff	✓	✓		Weekly / 30m	Week ahead, key issues	Minister's EA
Minister – Senior staff on Priorities	Minister, CoS, All senior staff	✓	✓		Monthly / 60m	Week prior to Secretary's Priorities update	Minister's EA
Staff meeting	All staff		✓		Weekly / 60m Monday	Week ahead and Priorities update	Staff Admin



Meeting name	Who	Minister	CoS	Secretary	When	What	Organiser
Speeches Meeting	Key staff		✓		Weekly / 60m Tuesday	Forward speech program	Staff Admin
Senior staff	All senior staff		✓		Weekly / 60m Friday	Week ahead; key internal milestones; Discussion by agenda.	Staff Admin
All staff	All staff		✓		Monthly / 60m	Update, forward program, internal issues	Staff Admin
Diary	CoS; senior staff, Minister's EA		✓		Weekly / 60m Wednesday	Consider diary invitations and scheduling.	Minister's EA

Attachment 9. Placemat version of the Framework



McKINNON INSTITUTE
FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The DIPR Framework – Guidance for Ministerial priority setting

The Framework is intended to assist Ministers, their senior staff and departmental leaders set priorities after considering a balanced suite of evidence and information. It is intended as guidance and can form part of a wider set of approaches and management frameworks for a Minister. The Framework is provided for better decisions – more timely, more effective, better aligned with partners, better informed and more transparent.

The timing of such a process will never be perfect. A new Minister needs some time to understand the portfolio, and have a sense of the Department and stakeholders. Three months in a new role is a good time for a Minister to hold the initial workshop (step P-1).

Developed by Ben Hubbard for
McKinnon Institute

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	D STEP 1 Decision	I STEP 2 Input	P STEP 3 Prioritise	R STEP 4 Review & Renew		
Description	This is the deliberate decision of the Minister to undertake the process, seek a mandate from the political centre and engagement with the Department. <i>(Allow 3 weeks)</i>	This second step involves the formal commissioning of the key input, the “Compass Pack”, with the Department. <i>(Allow 2–3 weeks)</i>	P-1 Workshop to develop Hold an initial workshop (6-8 hours). Consider the inputs, other context and discuss potential priorities. Develop draft Priorities and related content. <i>(Allow 1 week of reading for the pack; set aside a whole day for workshop)</i>	P-2 Development Sprint Offline sprint involving Office and key Departmental Officers to develop detailed Priorities. <i>(Allow 3 weeks)</i>	P-3 Workshop to finalise Settle Priorities and the related actions in a second, shorter workshop <i>(2–4 hours). (Set aside half a day)</i>	The routine of regular reporting and discussion to track progress commences, with quarterly deep dives and an annual revisiting and amendment of Priorities. <i>(Allow 2 weeks to start routines)</i>
The Minister and their Office	- The Minister and senior staff agree to develop a Priorities Plan using the Framework. - A specific staffer is given responsibility for coordination for the initial steps. - A decision is made relating to the group/process to be used including whether an internal or external facilitator is to be used. - Diary time is allocated for the two workshops (if that is the model), and notice is given to the Secretary and their senior staff. - The appropriate authorising environment is identified. A mandate is sought from the political centre to undertake the process, and where appropriate, seek permission to submit the plan to the appropriate Cabinet Committee. - Identify and confirm linkages to the relevant WoG process and other critical guidance, eg Charter Letters and election policy commitments.	- The specific workshop agenda is agreed upon with the Minister, including the line-by-line process for developing and confirming the priorities. - The Compass Pack and specific inclusions are then discussed across the four elements: - Obligations - Performance to date - Context, and - Prospective view	Depending on the agreed form of the process, a workshop will include: - The Compass Pack is provided at least one week in advance for consideration. - Secretary plus 1–2 other officers to attend initial part of workshop. - Discuss the Input Pack and note both the interesting and the important content. - Discuss other related considerations and identify key issues. - Identify priorities for medium term (eg 3 years), including viability, risk and return. - Agree 3–4 draft priorities including potential actions for each. Ensure there is a mixed portfolio of risk, likely resource and effort requirements, and impact. <i>(see overleaf)</i> - The actions are developed as a small group activity. - The second part of the workshop will focus on the general political and electoral issues and consider further potential priorities/actions. - Draft priorities and actions are revised further based on the political discussion.	- Over a two-week period, the Minister’s Office works with the Department to fully develop the Priorities and actions. This includes: - The issue that is being responded to by a potential Priority is well defined, and what success looks like is understood. - Key assumptions are tested, including stakeholder positions and challenges. - Confirming action responsibilities across the Office and the Department. - Confirming milestones and key metrics. - Reviewing the draft content and discussing it directly with the Minister. - The required resourcing is identified, and (where relevant) the Department providing a resourcing plan that may include reprioritisation. - Engaging with the Political and Public Service Centres where appropriate. - Engaging with Ministers and Departments with a shared interest in the proposed Priorities.	Key steps in the workshop include: - Review and finalise the draft Policy Plan, consistent with any Cabinet Committee requirements. - Participants will have had at least three working days to consider the revised draft Priority Plan prior to the workshop. - Test the assumptions – developments since initial workshop; potential opponents; what would the critic say? - Delineating between shared interests with the Department (hallmarks, policy priorities, stewardship) and the political content. The latter requires actions and reporting from within the Office. - Confirm the responsibilities, implementation steps, reporting and review routines. - Agree the routine for reporting, including meeting cadence and subsequent reviews. - Confirm Minister’s approval. - A second part of the workshop will focus on the political and electoral aspects. Specific party political content should be managed and discussed separately to core material.	- The Priorities and related Actions are communicated to all staff in the Minister’s Office, the political Centre and the senior leadership of the Department. - Settle the final form and timing of written reports. The reports should include: - a visual prompt of progress (eg traffic lights), - progress since the previous report, - enough text to explain actions/circumstances, and - key Department and Office contacts. - New Priority Plan related meetings need to be established within a wider, structured set of routines. (See overleaf for example schedule). Those specific Diary entries are for only discussing the Priority Plan. These meetings must be kept - Confirm the meeting arrangements and the intersection with existing meetings - Update the Political Centre on the process, including final form of the Priorities. - Schedule an annual full revisit.
Department	Minister to hold a strategic discussion with the Secretary (or lead Deputy Secretary) on potential priorities, key constraints and key inputs.	The Compass Pack is commissioned with Department; it is informed by the Office discussion (above) complemented by the initial discussion held between Minister and Secretary.	- The first part of the workshop will include the Secretary plus 1–2 other senior Officers. - The Secretary needs to be updated following the workshop conclusion on the final output and progress in developing the Priorities.	- Working in collaboration with senior staff in the Minister’s Office. - Liaison with the Public Service Centre (DPC/DPMC/Treasury etc)	- The first part of the workshop will include the Secretary plus 1–2 other senior Officers. - There is a subsequent debrief between the Minister and the Secretary.	- Production of reports to meet timelines aligned with Minister and Office meetings. - Secretary to meet monthly with the Minister on the Priority Plan.
What else?	- Allow time for the political centre to consider the request and respond. - Manage the complexities of multiple Department Ministers. - Identify an appropriate facilitator who is not the Minister.	- The Input Pack should be received by workshop attendees in a timely manner – at least one week prior to the first workshop. - A checklist for the Compass Pack is provided <i>overleaf</i>.	A draft workshop agenda is provided <i>overleaf</i> – it is a default option. Experienced Ministers may wish to vary the format and content.	An iterative process can be used in engaging directly with the Minister during this period, particularly if there are key assumptions that need to be revised or the resourcing requirements are significantly more than anticipated.	Experienced Ministers may wish to vary the format and content.	Ministers may wish to take the opportunity to allocate routine time in their diary for pursuing priorities, for policy workshops, stakeholder engagement and/or background reading.

Choices for the Workshop format

The workshop format can be varied depending on the style and experience of the Minister. Newer Ministers should always use a formal process. Options include:

- "Experienced" – the Minister develops the priorities and presents them to senior staff.
- "Discussion" – the Minister works with a small group of senior staff with an informal process.
- "Small meeting" – the Minister and senior staff meet for one or two formal sessions to develop and settle priorities.
- "Office meeting" – the Minister and all private office staff meet for two sessions session to develop and settle priorities.
- "Office facilitated meeting" – the Minister and all private office

What makes a good priority?

Three questions to be asked of the draft Priorities are:

- Ask if it creates a sense of ambition. Pursuing an easily achieved priority defeats the purpose of setting priorities. It needs to be ambitious for the Minister, staff and internal stakeholders. It should be of high impact in an output, outcome and societal impact sense.
- Ask whether or not you'll know whether you have achieved it or not. Like a train arriving at a station, the priority can be measured so that everyone involved understands what success will look like – or not.
- Ask whether it is understandable and achievable – The priority should be appropriately general but not banal. Conversely, it shouldn't be so narrow that it can be completed in one project in a short amount of time.



Key guidance for the DIPR process

I

The key input – the Compass Pack

Checklist for inputs across the four elements:

Obligations

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Election policy delivery
- ☐ Delivery of other major initiatives
- ☐ Directions and frameworks from the Centre, including Charter Letters or specific correspondence on guidance relating to strategic policy directions
- ☐ Specific internal and external reporting obligations
- ☐ Budget process requirements including critical paths
- ☐ Central political guidance*
- ☐
- ☐

Operating context

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Departmental observations on like jurisdictions
- ☐ Key readings and articles relevant to the portfolio
- ☐ What works resources
- ☐ Views and priorities of key stakeholders
- ☐ Public opinion
- ☐ What others are doing – comparative – and Intergovernmental and related portfolio considerations
- ☐ PESTLE Analysis
- ☐ Electoral overlay*
- ☐
- ☐

Performance assessment

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Departmental stocktake – key projects underway, critical and emerging issues, strategic risks for Department
- ☐ Reflections on previous strategic planning activities
- ☐ Key indicators on program delivery – supply and demand sides
- ☐ Key datasets external to the portfolio
- ☐ Emerging issues and related community attitudes
- ☐ Strategic and operational risks including fiscal and other constraints
- ☐
- ☐

Prospective view

Options for inclusion include:

- ☐ Department priority suggestions (1 page each)
- ☐ Known dates and events in future
- ☐ Megatrends, as prepared by trusted source
- ☐ Content from key references, in particular the Incoming Government Brief (or Incoming Minister Brief) along with other relevant Government reports
- ☐ Scenarios / Futures
- ☐ Foresight projects – eg UK and UK2 and NZ LTIs
- ☐ Other stewardship considerations
- ☐ Election cycle insights*
- ☐
- ☐

* denotes political content for Office and Minister provision only. This content would be developed in the Office rather than by the Department.

P-1

Workshop 1 draft agenda

The below draft workshop agenda and run sheet is provided as guidance.

Minutes Allocation/total	Agenda item	Description / process
5/5	Opening	Review agenda for the day.
45/50	Review of Compass Pack	Discuss the content of the Input Compass pack, with the participants requested to identify the issues they found either “interesting” and the “important”, with a running list of both being recorded. The discussion is based on discussing the four elements in order.
10/60	Capacity and capability restraints	Discuss any capacity and capability restraints in the Office and the Department. Note the key restraints.
10/70	Administrivia	Discuss, list and then put aside the lesser administrative issues participants wish to raise for off-line resolution. Chief of Staff to take carriage.
15/85	Minister's positioning	Discuss the Minister's own role, their policy ambition and overall positioning. Have the Minister initially speak to this.
15/100	Narrow the key issues	Narrow the issues on the “interesting” and “important” lists based on the discussion above; narrow to a key set of issues (4–8 in total).
30/130	Long list of potential priorities.	Discuss potential priorities based on direct responses to each of the issues on the narrowed list, and bring together a working list of options. Focus on a multi year horizon of 2 to 4 years. Identify any positioning or overarching positioning or approach of the Minister/Office that should be pursued as an overarching aspect of the Priorities Plan.
45/175	Narrow the field of potential priorities.	Discuss the viability of each long-listed priority on the basis of: • The bandwidth of Office staff and of the Department and the subsequent capacity to pursue it, • Alignment with other efforts and activities, including Budget process, • The overall risk/difficulty associated with the proposed priority, • Potential enemies and opponents to each, • The effort, time and resources required, including the required political capital, and • The potential impact for the community.
15/200	Break	Department staff leave at this time.
30/230	Political context discussion	Consider the wider political context for the period ahead, including the electoral cycle. Is there an overarching sense of “where do we want to go” to bring clarity and consistency to the priorities. Discuss the Ministers own political positioning.
20/250	Agree initial draft set of Priorities.	Agree to an initial three to six priorities and the time horizon(s) for each. Ensure there is a mixed portfolio of risk, likely resource and effort requirements, and potential impact. (see to the left)
120/370	Build out each draft Priority – small group activity	For each of the shortlisted priorities, undertake the initial development of potential actions and/or projects for the initial period (12–18 months). Articulate the sequencing and resource requirement of the actions. Confirm staff and Departmental potential responsibilities so they are clear, and related milestones are also identified. This initial activity is best done over 2 hours in small groups of 2–4 people for each priority. A refreshment break is built into this activity.
40/410	Report back and next steps	A report back of the draft actions is undertaken with the larger group. Minister provides feedback and confirms their comfort with the overall priorities. A draft document is produced to record the content for the next stage.
10/420	Close	

P-2

Guidance – Mixed portfolio of priorities

In setting the initial draft of the Priorities, a mixed portfolio is recommended to ensure there is a balance of associated risk and resource demands – with an understanding that there will also variability in impact. An example scenario is provided below.

	Risk	Intensity of Resource Requirements	Potential Impact
	Incl stakeholder risk, internal political risk, implementation risk, & reputation risk.	Includes where there is a significant demand on financial resources, the Minister's time, staff time, and/or Departmental focus.	Includes narrow portfolio metrics and wider societal and economic metrics.
Priority 1 – ...	High	Medium (Minister's time, staff time)	High
Priority 2 – ...	Medium	High (Minister's time, financial)	High
Priority 3 – ...	Medium	High (Departmental focus)	High
Priority 4 – ...	Low	Medium (Staff time)	Medium
Priority 5 – ...	Low	Medium (financial)	Medium

R

Potential meeting routines to pursue priorities – and balance with the day to day demands.

Meeting name	Who	When	What
Secretary's Update	Minister, Secretary, CoS, key senior staff	Weekly / 30m	Current and emerging high priority meetings
Secretary's Priorities Update	Minister, Secretary, CoS, key senior staff	Monthly / 60m	Discuss progress of Strategic Priorities
Priorities – Quarterly Deep Dive	Minister, Secretary, CoS, all senior staff, Departmental Execs as required.	Quarterly / 3 hr	In depth discussion of Strategic Priorities; extended session on one Priority.
Daily staff update	All staff	Daily / 10m	Update on the day/following day
Minister – Senior staff	Minister, CoS, All senior staff	Weekly / 30m	Week ahead, key issues
Minister – Senior staff on Priorities	Minister, CoS, All senior staff	Monthly / 60m	Week prior to Secretary's Priorities update
Staff meeting	All staff	Weekly / 60m	Week ahead and Priorities update



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