



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Finance**



Gateway

Strategic Assessment of a Program Workbook



About this workbook

This workbook supports the Gateway review Strategic Assessment of a Program. This particular review investigates the direction and planned outcomes of a program, together with the progress of the individual projects within the program. This review can be applied to any type of program, including policy and organisational change.

The checklists in this workbook provide review teams with key areas to explore, and suggest evidence to look for. At the same time, they provide the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) with information on the areas the review team will be exploring, the types of documents it will be reviewing and the evidence it will be expecting.

As each program is unique and circumstances vary, this workbook should be used as a guide for appropriate questions and evidence, not a full checklist of mandatory items.

Strategic Assessment of a Program

Programs are designed and delivered to carry forward policy and strategic objectives. In other words, they exist to improve organisational performance. They are reviewed under the Gateway review Strategic Assessment of a Program. This review assesses a program's potential to succeed.

A program is about managing change. It has a strategic vision and an established map of how to get there. At the same time, it should be able to deal with uncertainty and be capable of accommodating changing circumstances such as opportunities or risks materialising along the way.

By its nature, a program doesn't exist in isolation. It may have contextual ties on a number of levels.

For example:

- The program may have interdependencies with programs in other agencies.
- The program may have interdependencies with other programs within the agency's portfolio. It may be competing for resources and as such have changing priorities.
- The program itself may coordinate the delivery of a range of work that is needed to achieve program outcomes and benefits. This may include multiple projects or sub-programs, which are delivered in a coordinated sequence that will achieve program outcomes with the optimum balance of cost, benefit and risk.

A strategic assessment review helps to confirm that the way forward is achievable before any plans have been finalised.

A program's sub-projects can also be reviewed. This can occur at key decision points from start-up, through to the point where they have achieved the benefits set out in their business case. Feedback from these project reviews contributes to the ongoing program.

Key areas of review

This review aims to answer the question: *“Does the program make the required contribution to the overall strategy of the organisation?”*

It investigates the following areas:

Outcomes and objectives	Are the objectives and outcomes of the program making the necessary contribution to the overall strategic direction of the agency?
Stakeholders	Is the program supported by the key stakeholders?
Context	Have the program's objectives and outcomes been considered as part of the wider context of Government policy and procurement objectives? Have they been considered in the wider context of other programs within the agency or other relevant agencies?
Project management	Are management controls in place to manage the program, sub-programs and individual projects? Is there a clear understanding of responsibilities between all parties?
Risk	Are there adequate controls in place to manage risks to the main program, sub program and individual projects, including external risks? Have these controls been made available to all relevant stakeholders?
Resourcing	Have there been adequate provisions made for the financial and other resource needs of the life of the program?

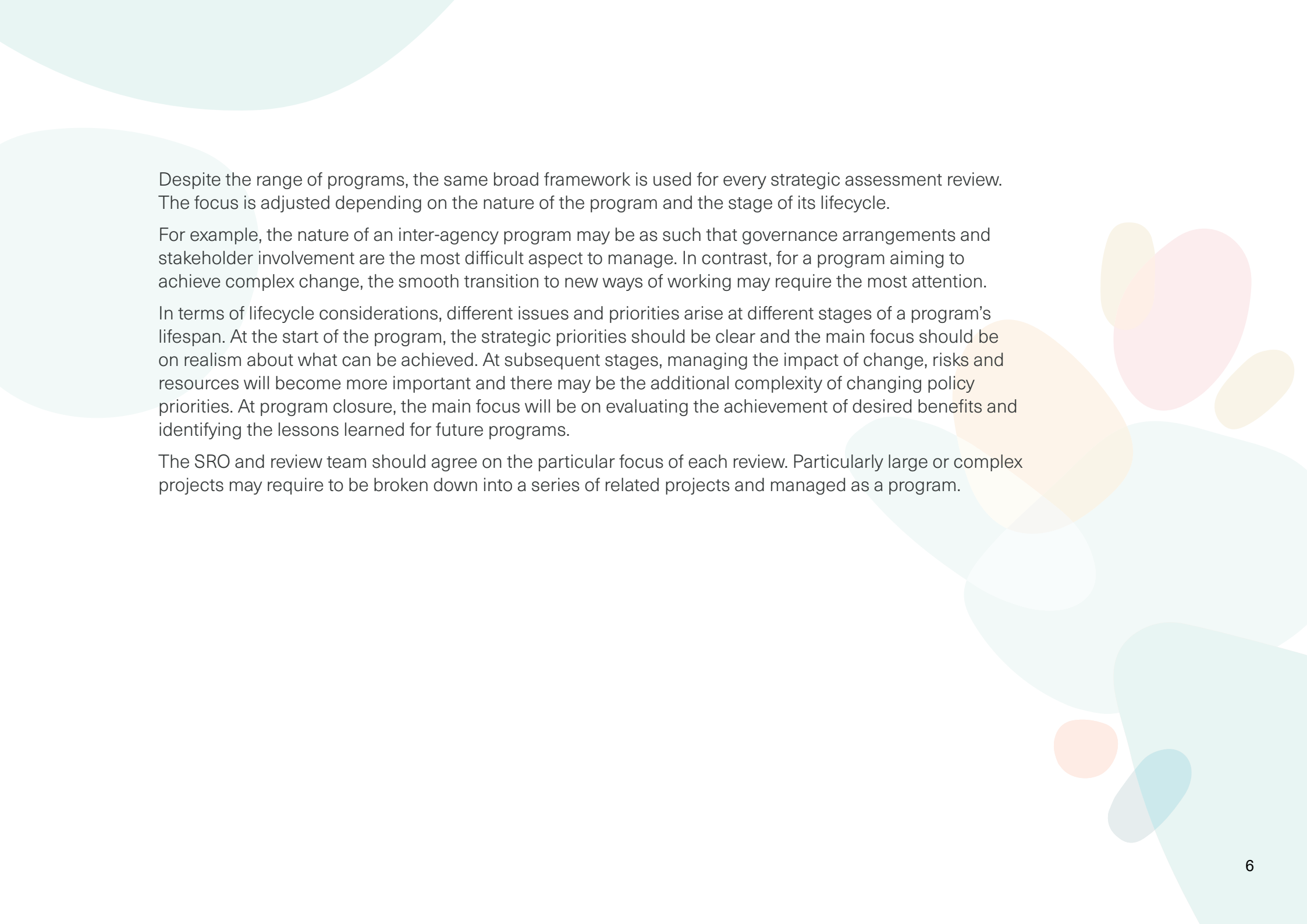
Once the evidence for each of these areas has been considered by the review team, the program is evaluated on its readiness for the next phase and recommendations to this effect are made.

If repeated throughout the lifecycle of a program, the focus of a Strategic Assessment of a Program review changes between the above areas of review. For example, the proposed program outcomes and objectives are reviewed in-depth at a first Gateway review but may no longer require in-depth investigating towards the end of the program. Gateway recommends that strategic reviews are repeated at key decision points throughout the life of the program to capture this shift in focus and ensure the program is on track.

Tailoring a review to a program

Programs come in all shapes and sizes, each of them aiming to deliver different types of change with varying degrees of uncertainty. For example:

Making and delivering new facilities	Typically led by specification of the outputs required, with a clear view of what is required, and a well defined scope.
Changing the way an agency works	Led by a vision of the outcomes and benefits. There may be some uncertainty about the change, but there are clear delivery approaches on how to achieve the vision.
Policy change focused on changes and improvements in society	Driven by desired outcomes but likely to be very ambiguous and complex to define. The scope may need to be revisited as uncertainty is resolved along the way.



Despite the range of programs, the same broad framework is used for every strategic assessment review. The focus is adjusted depending on the nature of the program and the stage of its lifecycle.

For example, the nature of an inter-agency program may be as such that governance arrangements and stakeholder involvement are the most difficult aspect to manage. In contrast, for a program aiming to achieve complex change, the smooth transition to new ways of working may require the most attention.

In terms of lifecycle considerations, different issues and priorities arise at different stages of a program's lifespan. At the start of the program, the strategic priorities should be clear and the main focus should be on realism about what can be achieved. At subsequent stages, managing the impact of change, risks and resources will become more important and there may be the additional complexity of changing policy priorities. At program closure, the main focus will be on evaluating the achievement of desired benefits and identifying the lessons learned for future programs.

The SRO and review team should agree on the particular focus of each review. Particularly large or complex projects may require to be broken down into a series of related projects and managed as a program.

When to repeat a strategic assessment review of a program


It is recommended that a strategic assessment review is undertaken at the start-up of a program, is repeated at appropriate key decision points throughout the program and at the end of the program.

First Gateway review

The first strategic assessment review comes after the broad strategy for change has been set, but before a public commitment is made, and before a development proposal is put before the executive authority.

It focuses on:

- The justification for the program based on the policy or agency objectives to be delivered.
- An analysis of the stakeholders whose cooperation is needed to achieve the objectives.
- An initial assessment of the program's likely costs and potential for success.



Typically, a strategic assessment review will take place following the production of the program brief, which contains an outline of the program's objectives, desired benefits, risks, costs and timeframe. This program brief may be the outcome of a workshop held by the agency to consider delivery of policy.

The first review provides assurance to the program's steering committee that the scope and purpose of the program have been adequately researched; that there is a shared understanding of what is to be achieved by the key stakeholders; and that it fits within the agency's overall policy or management strategy. It examines whether there is a realistic possibility of securing the resources needed and that any procurement takes account of government policies.

The review also examines how the work streams will be organised (in sub-programs, projects, etc.) to best deliver the overall objectives, and that the program management structure, monitoring and resourcing are appropriate.

In short, the first review aims to test whether stakeholders' expectations of the program are realistic in terms of costs, risks, outcomes, resource needs, timetable and general achievability.

Mid-stage strategic assessment review

Subsequent reviews revisit the same broad framework to confirm that the key stakeholders have a common understanding of desired outcomes and that the program is likely to achieve them. The review can be repeated at appropriate key decision points during the program.

For example:

- At scheduled milestones, such as the completion of a set of projects within the program portfolio.
- When there is a significant change to the desired outcomes.
- When the way outcomes are to be delivered must change (perhaps as a result of government changes) or when it becomes apparent that the program will not provide the necessary outcomes and needs to be reshaped.
- When the program's sponsors have concerns about its effectiveness.
- When there is a change in SRO for the program.
- To learn lessons to transfer to other programs when a substantial amount of successful delivery has taken place.

Repeated strategic assessment reviews will be particularly focused on establishing the continued validity of the business case for the program and on ensuring that the outcomes and desired benefits of the program are on track.

Final stage strategic assessment review

Finally, it is recommended that a review take place at the conclusion of a program, to assess overall success and achievement of desired outcomes and benefits, and to ensure that the lessons learned have been analysed and circulated.

Structure of review

The Gateway review Strategic Assessment of a Program is broken up into these sections:

- Policy and business context
- Business case and stakeholders
- Management of intended outcomes
- Risk management
- Review of current outcomes
- Readiness for next phase

The following checklists provide review teams with a range of appropriate questions and evidence to look for in each of the above sections. It also provides the SRO and project teams with a guide as to what the review team will be exploring.

As each program is unique and circumstances change, these questions should be used as a guide rather than a full checklist of mandatory items. Use of the checklists depends on the stage of the lifecycle the program is in.

1. Review area: Policy and business context

When used at a first strategic assessment review

If this is very early in the program lifecycle, information may be uncertain because options for the way forward are being explored. There must be a demonstrable linkage to the business strategy – why is this program needed?

The governance framework will still be in outline, but there should already be a clear program owner. Capability to deliver will be considered at a high level, ideally supported by estimates from similar initiatives. There should be mechanisms in place to learn lessons regardless of the stage in the program lifecycle. High-level risks should have been identified even at a very early stage.

Gateway review teams will evaluate actions taken to implement recommendations made in any earlier assessments of deliverability. At program initiation all areas in this section will need thorough investigation, as they provide the foundation for successful delivery.

When used at a mid-stage strategic assessment review

The focus on each area in this section is whether assumptions or circumstances have changed – for example a change in policy direction or continued availability of skilled resources.

When used at a final stage strategic assessment review

The critical area at this final stage is to confirm that the linkage to business strategy is still robust and supported by the most senior levels of management.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

1.1 Is the business strategy to which this program contributes agreed with the program's sponsoring group (e.g. Ministers or the senior executive group) and robust?	A clear direction set out in the business strategy, which is owned by key stakeholders and informs all investment in public service reform or organisational change.
1.2 Does the program reflect the current policy and agency environment and does the scope of the program fit with the strategy?	<p>Documented evidence that the sponsoring group has agreed the scope of the program and its alignment with policy objectives, strategy and/or change priorities.</p> <p>Where there are significant changes in policy priorities, stakeholders' views or the key objectives; evidence that there has been a re-appraisal of the program.</p>
1.3 Is the governance framework fit for purpose and in particular is there commitment to key roles and responsibilities for this program within current corporate priorities?	<p>Commitment from the sponsoring group (e.g. senior management, key partners and ministers), its willingness to take ownership and a clear understanding of its role in achieving outcomes.</p> <p>Key roles have been identified and assigned (e.g. SRO, Program Director, Program Manager, etc.).</p> <p>For inter-agency programs, evidence that all parties involved know how they are part of the program and are committed to its delivery; and of clear governance arrangements ensuring sustainable alignment with the business objectives of all agencies involved.</p>

Areas to review

Evidence expected

1.4 Are the required skills and capabilities for this program available, taking account of the agency's current commitments and capacity to deliver?	<p>The agency is bringing together the skills and capabilities it needs to plan and achieve the desired outcomes and has access to external sources of expertise where necessary.</p> <p>The agency is realistic about the complexity of the changes and how they can be managed (learning from previous/other programs where appropriate).</p> <p>Key roles are identified with named individuals.</p> <p>Key individuals have an appropriate track record of successful delivery.</p> <p>Appropriate allocation of key roles between internal staff and consultants or contractors.</p>
1.5 Is the agency able to learn from experience with this program and other programs?	<p>Processes are in place to incorporate lessons learned from this program into wider best practice.</p> <p>The agency learns from the experiences of others.</p>
1.6 Is there a framework for managing issues and risk to this program?	<p>Defined roles, responsibilities and processes for managing issues and risk across the program, with clearly defined routes for bringing issues and risks to the attention of senior management.</p>

2. Review area: Business case and stakeholders

When used at a first strategic assessment review

Even at the very early stages of the program there must be a clear understanding of the outcomes needed from the program but the overall scope and way forward may not yet be clear. Measures of success will be in outline. Key stakeholders should already have been identified, especially for cross-cutting programs. The components of the program (sub-programs and projects) and its resource requirements will not be certain at this stage. There should be early indicators of any additional factors that could affect success, which will vary significantly depending on the program. The program controls will not have been established in detail. At program initiation all areas in this section will require thorough investigation.

When used at a mid-stage strategic assessment review

Assumptions will need to be revisited, in particular:

- Are stakeholders remaining supportive?
- Is the program still affordable?
- Are there any other factors that could affect success?
- Are program controls effective?

When used at a final stage strategic assessment review

The main areas to investigate are continued clarity of understanding about the required program outcomes and continued support of stakeholders as the program closes.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

2.1 Is there a clear understanding of the outcomes to be delivered by the program and are they soundly based?

A description of the program's business/policy drivers/objectives and how they contribute to the overall objectives of senior management for a particular public service or the agency's change agenda.

An outline of the required outputs/outcomes and their relationship to each other.

Definition of the benefit profiles for the program, for each of the benefits expected.

For policy implementation, a rationale and objectives statement, appraisal of options and evaluation plan for the option being pursued.

Where applicable, description of linkage to government performance and delivery targets and/or commitments of senior management.

2.2 Does the program demonstrate a clear link with wider government objectives?

Analysis to show the program's relationship to relevant inter-agency government policies and programs (internal and external).

Options identified that reflect the requirements of the government's public service reform initiatives.

Account has been taken of relevant impact assessment and appraisal issues.

Linkage between strategic objectives and outcomes and the program's deliverables.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

2.3 Is there an understanding of the scope of the program?	<p>A description of the program scope as far as it is known – what is in and out of scope?</p> <p>Details of any overlap or linkage with existing internal or external programs or policies.</p>
2.4 What will constitute success?	<p>Definition of key critical success factors and how the required quality of performance will be measured.</p> <p>Description of main outcomes and analysis of the leading and lagging indicators of them.</p> <p>Relationship between program outcomes and government targets or major policy initiatives, where applicable.</p> <p>Projected performance over the life of the program, with key performance targets and measures agreed with stakeholders.</p>
2.5 Who are the stakeholders and are they supportive?	<p>A list of key stakeholders and statements of their needs and support for the program.</p> <p>Plan for communicating with and involving stakeholders in appropriate ways and securing common understanding and agreement.</p> <p>For inter-agency programs, clear lines of accountability for resolving any conflicting stakeholder requirements.</p> <p>Recognition of the need to involve external delivery partners and industry, plus the supply side where appropriate.</p>

Areas to review

Evidence expected

2.6 What are the component projects and sub-programs of the program and why is it structured in this way?

Description of program streams and/or sub-programs with explanation of how each will contribute to the required outcomes; key deliverables and identification of key interdependencies.

Implementation is broken up into manageable steps with phased delivery and avoiding 'big bang' approaches.

2.7 Is the proposed program affordable?

An estimate of the program cost based on previous experience/ comparison with other similar programs, broken down as appropriate by program streams and/or sub-programs and main projects.

Available funds identified and methods of securing additional necessary funding determined.

Provision in current spending review allocation including an allowance for risk.

Market soundings and assessment of likely cost profiles.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

2.8 What are the additional factors that could affect success?

Main risks and risk owners identified at the outset; options for mitigating these risks considered; need recognised for contingency plans and where appropriate, business continuity plans.

Description of dependencies/other factors/programs already under way that could affect the outcomes of the program.

Engagement with delivery chains and/or the market to determine capability to meet the need and where appropriate, to identify suitable options for delivery.

Where suppliers/partners are already in place, evidence that their ability to deliver has been considered.

The legal framework for the program exists, is comprehensive and sound.

2.9 Have program controls been determined, especially where constituent projects will be 'joined up' with other agencies?

Overall program controls defined (progress tracking, risk management, issue identification and resolution and impact assessment).

Interdependencies between other programs defined with high-level plans for managing them.

For collaborative programs accountabilities and governance arrangements for all parties defined and agreed.

Parties in the delivery chain identified and an approach to them working together established.

Processes to manage and record key program information and decision-making.

3. Review area: Management of intended outcomes

When used at a first strategic assessment review

If the first review is very early, key aspects to investigate are the identified outcomes and their inter-relationships. Plans for achieving these outcomes may still be unclear, but there should be evidence of a way forward (or a set of options, with a preferred option identified). There should be a reasonably clear indication of how success will be measured. At program initiation, all areas must be investigated in depth to confirm that expectations for delivery are realistic and that performance can be measured.

When used at a mid-stage strategic assessment review

The main focus of this review at mid-stage is to check that plans for delivery of outcomes remain achievable.

When used at a final stage strategic assessment review

The topics in this section may not need to be covered at program closure.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

3.1 Have the main outcomes been identified?	List of main outcomes and desired benefits, linked to strategic outcomes and to deliverables from projects.
3.2 Are the planned outcomes still achievable, or have any changes in scope, relationship or value been properly agreed, and has the business case been reviewed?	Outcomes identified and their relationships to each other. Credible plans for the achievement of outcomes. Ongoing commitment from stakeholders to the outcomes and their achievement.
3.3 Are key stakeholders confident that outcomes will be achieved when expected?	Confirm planned outcomes have been achieved to date. Mechanisms for collecting performance data in place and a plan for evaluating impact of program in operation. Steering committee confident that planned milestones will result in good quality deliverables that will in turn deliver the necessary outcomes. Commitment from key stakeholders that program deliverables will achieve the desired outcomes.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

3.4 Is there a plan for achieving the required outcomes?

A benefits management strategy and key performance indicators.

Plans to identify appropriate baseline measures against which future performance will be assessed.

Plans to carry out performance measurement against the defined measures and indicators.

Where planned outcomes have not been achieved, evidence that the problems have been identified and plans are in place to resolve them.

Clarity on how the objectives from the sub-projects/ programs link to the outcomes of the program.

4. Review area: Risk management

When used at a first strategic assessment review

If the first review is very early, the major risks must be identified at a high level, with an indication of how they will be managed and initial consideration of the requirements for contingency plans. At program initiation all aspects of risk management must be explored in depth.

When used at a mid-stage strategic assessment review

The main focus is on checking that risk management is effective.

When used at a final stage strategic assessment review

The status of the risk register at program closure will be the principal area to investigate – which risks have now been removed and which risks (if any) will be transferred to the risk register for a new initiative, or corporate risk log?

Areas to review

Evidence expected

4.1 Have the major risks been identified?

Up to date list of major risks to the overall program (strategic, political/ reputational and legislative) analysed by likelihood and impact.

The risks of success (e.g. take-up or usage greater than expected) have been considered and contingencies/early warning indicators identified.

Regular review of risks, mitigation options and contingency plans are documented.

4.2 How will risks be managed?

Identification of a governance framework, procedures for risk management in the program and allocation of responsibilities.

Details of the risk allocation (to whom allocated and why) with high level plans for managing them.

Action to manage the risks identified and where appropriate, taken.

Escalation procedures are documented.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

4.3 Have assurance measures for the program been put in place?

‘Critical friends’ to the program (e.g. internal audit, procurement, specialists and/or peer reviewers co-opted onto the Steering Committee) appointed with evidence that they challenge assumptions, decisions and risks.

Gateway reviews, health-checks and/or policy reviews incorporated into plans.

Review recommendations are turned into action plans.

Advice from ‘critical friends’ is acted upon.

Where appropriate, evidence of audit arranging for complementary assurance (about control and processes) from audit functions through the delivery chain.

Program is subject to the agency’s assurance framework for its portfolio of programs and projects.

Market/supply considerations are understood and acted upon.

4.4 Is there a contingency plan and where appropriate, business continuity plans?

Decisions about contingency and if necessary business continuity arrangements made with appropriate plans.

Program’s effect on public services analysed and decisions taken about those for which contingency arrangements will be needed.

Milestones relating to contingency measures in plans and the milestones being achieved as expected.

5. Review area: Review of current outcomes

When used at a first strategic assessment review

This section would not normally apply, but some of the topics may need to be considered.

When used at a mid-stage strategic assessment review

All areas will need to be investigated in depth to confirm that the program remains on track and that issues are being managed effectively.

When used at a final stage strategic assessment review

This section confirms that the expected outcomes have been achieved and no outstanding issues remain.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

5.1 Is the project on track?

Program report and plan updated.

Milestones achieved as planned and plan for benefits measurement and achievement on track.

Risk register is up to date and issues are being resolved.

Highlight reports for constituent work streams.

Resources and funding used to date.

Confidence from delivery partners that future milestones and plans are realistic.

Interdependencies with other programs are being managed.

5.2 Have problems occurred and if so, how have they been resolved?

Issues documented, with details of action taken.

Governance framework with escalation routes to senior management.

Program plan updated to reflect changing issues and risks.

Recommendations from any earlier assessment of deliverability actioned.

Recommendations from last Gateway review actioned.

6. Review area: Readiness for next phase

When used at a first strategic assessment review

If the first review is very early, plans may be in too early a stage of development to provide reliable evidence. At program initiation all areas would apply to this review, with the main focus on ensuring that everything is in place to start delivering the required outcomes.

When used at a mid-stage strategic assessment review

All areas should be explored in depth.

When used at a final stage strategic assessment review

This section would not normally apply at program closure, but some of the topics may need to be considered.

Areas to review

Evidence expected

6.1 Is there a continuing need for the program?	<p>The desired outcomes of the program are still aligned to the agency's strategy.</p> <p>Continuing commitment from stakeholders.</p> <p>Confidence that the program is on track to deliver the outcomes when needed.</p> <p>The program brief or business case has been updated as necessary and is still valid.</p>
6.2 What assumptions have been made about the program?	<p>A listing of major assumptions made in preparing the program brief, updated to reflect any changes that could affect success, together with current assessments of the validity of all assumptions.</p>
6.3 How will change be managed?	<p>Plans for managing the transition to new ways of working/structures/policies with any key barriers identified (such as cultural resistance to change) and the approach to overcoming them agreed.</p>
6.4 Affordability: are the funds to reach the next phase available?	<p>Budget provision for the program.</p> <p>Adequate approaches for estimating, monitoring and controlling the expenditure on the program.</p>

Areas to review

Evidence expected

6.5 Are the required internal/external individuals suitably skilled, available and committed to carrying out the work?	<p>Information showing who needs to be involved, when and what they must deliver.</p> <p>Identification of the key skills (specialist and management) required for the next phase of the program.</p> <p>Key roles in place with skills matched to the nature of the work.</p> <p>Availability of resources when needed throughout the next phase.</p>
6.6 Achievability: Are the plans for the next phase realistic?	<p>Plan developed showing streams of work, deliverables/milestones and the route map to achieve them, timescales, costs and resourcing, stakeholder involvement, risk management and benefits management.</p> <p>Evidence that the robustness of the plans has been tested and found to be adequate.</p>
6.7 Are appropriate management controls in place?	<p>Accountabilities allocated to SRO.</p> <p>Program management controls and reporting mechanisms defined and operational.</p> <p>Plans for ongoing management of the delivery chain are in place.</p>

Areas to review

Evidence expected

6.8 Where procurement is a part of the program: how is capability and capacity for acquisition to be managed?

Procurement innovation and sustainability issues have been considered.

Market management plan in place and evidence that a good understanding exists of supply side capability and capacity.

Procurement innovation and sustainability issues have been considered.

6.9 Is a benefit management plan active and are benefits being reported?

Confirm the benefits management strategy is complete with a method of reporting planned benefits.

Program documents

Examples of evidence expected for each area should be available before the review starts. The following is a range of information that would typically be required by the review team:

Program objectives	Description of the purposes, outcomes sought, key deliverables and timescales, plus the main success criteria against which the program will be measured.
Background	Outline of the key drivers for the program, showing how it will contribute to policy outcomes or the business strategy.
Outcomes	A model of the intended outcome(s) as a vision of the future and how the vision will be delivered through the agency(s) involved, delivery agents, new services, etc.
Scope	Parametres of the program.
Required benefits	To be elaborated on in a profile for each defined benefit, covering a description, a timeframe and the measures and performance indicators that will be used to assess achievement levels and their costs.
Assumptions/ constraints	On which the program will be founded and dependencies with other programs or strategies.
Stakeholders	List of the key stakeholders and their role in the program, with a strategy and plan for communicating and engaging with them.
Finance	The financial provision made for the program and its components.

Structure	The way in which the program is to be organised, led and linked into other related programs.
Risks	The main risks so far identified, a strategy for managing them and need for any contingency arrangements.
Issues	Strategy for capturing and resolving issues.
Outcomes	Strategy for measuring results and achieving outcomes.
Components	List of the projects in the program's portfolio and interdependencies that have to be delivered successfully if the program is to achieve its objectives and their current status.
Workplan	Covering the work to be done over the short/medium term including the identification of the streams of work and sub-programs; the main deliverables and milestones for each of these and the contribution each is to make to the program outcomes.
Resource estimates	Funding, people, systems, etc.

This information is likely to be found in the documents suggested below, but may be located elsewhere in the agency's documentation system:

- Relevant government policy, report or strategy.
- The business strategy and business plan where applicable: this should set out the agency's strategy and policy objectives in relation to a set of public services or explain the objectives of the agency's change agenda.
- A program brief or business case: this document will be loosely formed at the outset and developed over the life of the program.



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Finance**



Djoekanup, 16 Parkland Road, Osborne Park WA 6017

Postal Address: Locked Bag 11, Cloisters Square, Perth WA 6850

T: (08) 6551 1555

E: gatewayunit@finance.wa.gov.au

W: WA.gov.au

