

RAA Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Strategy

1.0 Monitoring Evaluation and Reporting Statement

The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) recognises the value of Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) to promote and demonstrate the impact of our activities, and to ensure we manage our activities in accordance with best practice and in compliance with Outcome Budgeting and NSW Program Evaluation Guidelines https://arp.nsw.gov.au/assets/ars/f506555395/NSW-Government-Program-Evaluation-Guideline-January-2016_1.pdf

2.0 Purpose of this strategy

The overarching purpose of this strategy is to guide the delivery of evaluation in the Rural Assistance Authority (RAA) and thereby, improve the experience for RAA customers.

More specifically, the strategy is intended to support the improvement of program design so that the RAA can learn from issues that arise and design better programs that meet the needs of customers.

This strategy will also enable the RAA to demonstrate the impact of programs against the key evaluation questions established through this program, and also against the outcomes established at a higher level through the overarching Department and the expectations of the NSW Government.

Evaluation also has an important role in contributing to transparency and accountability, enabling the RAA to demonstrate how well it achieves the intentions of the programs for which the RAA receives public funding.

3.0 Description of Strategy

This strategy will describe the overarching approach that the RAA takes to MERI. Individual Evaluation plans will be developed to articulate the methodology and requirements for MERI for individual programs.

RAA's evaluation approach will be driven in-house. Elements that would be better handled at arms-length, like customer and stakeholder interviews will be undertaken externally.

It is also possible that some elements of analysis and synthesis will be undertaken externally.

A rolling design will be used, whereby real time amendments can be made.

4.0 Governance arrangements

Clear governance arrangements are vital to the successful implementation of the RAA Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Strategy.

An Evaluation Working group was established in July 2021 and is chaired by the Manager Risk, Policy & Governance. The working group includes representation from key managers within the RAA, as well as the Manager Evaluation DPI, and the Biometrician for DPI.

Role	Responsibility
Project Sponsor Chief Executive	Responsible for approving the establishment, funding and implementation of the Strategy. Responsibility for strategic decisions about performance, reporting, timing and funding.
Working Group Chair Manager Risk Policy & Governance	Responsible for convening meetings as needed, to progress implementation of the RAA MERI Strategy Responsible for oversight of risks associated with the Strategy
Project Manager Senior Policy Officer, Risk Policy & Governance	Responsible for day-to-day aspects of delivering the Strategy. Responsible for coordinating evaluations under this Strategy.

5.0 Scope

All information and activities that contribute to answering the Key Evaluation Questions as outlined through this strategy. Anything that is not covered by a Key Evaluation Question is out of scope. The Key Evaluation Questions are:

1. How well is the RAA communicating with customers and potential customers? (process evaluation)
2. To what extent are our customers satisfied with the services we provide? (process evaluation)
3. How and to what extent have customers benefitted from the services we provide? (outcome evaluation)

6.0 Evaluation Type

This is an Evaluation Strategy so does not in itself, adopt a 'type' of evaluation, however the Evaluation Plans that will be undertaken under this Strategy will use a combination of outcome and process evaluation. It is possible also, that economic evaluation will be used where it is deemed beneficial.

In the broad, outcome evaluations will be undertaken to enable the RAA to determine if programs are achieving intended outcomes. An outcome evaluation will also determine if intended outcomes can be attributed to the program, and to what degree. An outcome evaluation should also identify any unexpected outcomes.

Process evaluation will enable the RAA to determine whether programs are being implemented as intended or if there are system, policy or administrative issues that impacted delivery.

Economic evaluation will assist in determining whether the costs of a program outweigh the benefits.

7.0 Audience

The primary audience of the MERI Strategy is the Chief Executive and RAA Management team. Evaluation will assist in the delivery, design and improvement of programs.

When the RAA delivers good programs, that has an effect for our customers. They therefore, are the beneficiaries of this Strategy. Consultation with our customers is central to the plans that will arise from this Evaluation Strategy.

The RAA MERI Strategy is also directed to other key stakeholders who are interested in, and have a role in overseeing the performance of, the RAA. These stakeholders include:

- The Minister for Agriculture and Western NSW, the Hon Adam Marshall
- The RAA Board
- The Director General of the Department of Primary Industries
- The Deputy Director General of Infrastructure Investment and Business Development

The products of the RAA MERI Strategy will explain to RAA Staff, how important their roles are to the effective performance and delivery of RAA Programs.

8.0 Risks and controls

Risk	Control
Risk of poor data, or data that lacks meaning	Monitoring and consideration of results with working group, to determine if they are helping answer the KEQs
Risk of insufficient funds for some aspects of evaluation	Budgets to be carefully monitored.
Requirement to deliver programs quickly, potentially leading to poor results in some areas	Context must always be considered at the point of evaluation.
Risk that climate impacts on evaluation load increasing the number of programs rolled out.	The Chief Executive and Management team will direct the areas of greatest priority
Overstretching staff with evaluation requirements	Evaluation 'burden' will be monitored and decisions made on the basis of resources.
Risk that programs may have unexpected outcomes	Evaluation will assist in understanding outcomes achieved, and enable reporting of unexpected or undesirable outcomes, potentially leading to future program refinement.

9.0 Ethical and Quality Standards

The RAA will adhere to the Australian Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations.

<https://www.aes.asn.au/ethical-guidelines>

A working group will oversight this strategy, to monitor and respond to issues of quality.

Members of the public will be surveyed. Ethical clearance for these surveys will be obtained in line with departmental requirements.

10.0 Program Logic*

Given that the RAA has numerous programs and is regularly required to establish new programs, this program logic has been kept purposefully quite simple to enable the broadest consideration of program logics for individual programs.

Strategic objective: to guide the delivery of evaluation and improve the experience for RAA customers				
DPI outcome: Stronger Primary Industries				
Inputs	Outputs	Short term outcomes	Intermediate outcomes	Long term outcomes
Staff time, funding, communication infrastructure (phone lines, website etc) governing documents	Financial assistance programs that include concessional loans, natural disaster grants and rebates	Primary producers undertake activities in line with program requirements	Primary producers experience benefits from activities	Stronger primary industries

* Individual program logics that elaborate on the nature of outcomes will be developed for individual program evaluation plans.

Approved by RAA Chief Executive, 22/9/2021