# Fact sheet

## Initiating and sponsoring research and evaluation

### About this fact sheet

This fact sheet provides general guidance about issues that staff may wish to consider when initiating, sponsoring or commissioning research and evaluation studies or work.

Staff are encouraged to contact the System Performance Division if specific advice or expertise is required in relation to sponsoring research or evaluation work or entering into partnerships with external agencies or universities on research projects.

### Steps to initiating and sponsoring research and evaluation

Staff considering whether to undertake or sponsor research or evaluation can undertake the steps below.

### Step 1: Describe the context

* Define an issue or key research question and how it aligns with the Department for Education’s responsibilities.
* Describe how many children and young people are affected by the issue and what impact it has.
* Describe any existing programs, services, processes or policies that aim to address the issue. What would be expected or understood to happen if these activities were not in place?

### Step 2: Determine whether research or evaluation is required

Common definitions of research are very broad. Typically, the aim of a research study is to develop or create new knowledge about the scale or nature of something (including how or why it occurs). To determine the value of a research project, consider whether the proposed research methodology is likely to successfully resolve or clarify the research question and how stakeholders may respond to this new information.

An evaluation of a program, service, process or policy may be required or necessary:

1. to meet accountability / transparency requirements (e.g., funding conditions);
2. if routine measures of activity or performance indicators alone will not be sufficient to determine effectiveness and/or efficiency; and/or
3. if there is significant uncertainty about how a program or policy works and what impact it has.

In most cases, an evaluation will aim to determine whether or to what extent a program, service, process or policy is:

* appropriate (e.g., reasonable to do and is viewed as legitimate)
* effective (e.g., maintains or improves certain outcomes)
* efficient and equitable (e.g., targeted well, received well and delivered at a reasonable cost)
* sustainable (e.g., replicable or scalable)
* well-governed (e.g., manages risks, is transparent, ensures quality, ensures that aims and coverage do not drift)

Evaluation studies should be undertaken to provide stakeholders with information to inform a specific decision. The decision(s) that an evaluation are to inform, including when decisions will be made and by who, should be defined before commissioning or undertaking evaluation. For example, the type of information and when it is required may be different for a school looking to improve how staff deliver a learning program compared to a decision about whether to extend a pilot program across all schools.

### Step 3: Proceeding with a research or evaluation project

Please note that research projects that involve Department for Education students, staff or data may only proceed subject to the department approving a formal application. Contact the Research Unit if required ([education.researchunit@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.researchunit@sa.gov.au)).

For evaluation projects, it is recommended that staff produce or approve a formal evaluation plan before proceeding. An evaluation plan formally documents the terms on which a program, policy or service will be evaluated, the process for doing this and the responsibilities of different stakeholders.

Staff may contact the System Performance Division if specific advice on an evaluation plan is required. Before finalising or approving an evaluation plan staff should ensure that the resulting product or report will meet their requirements, for example:

* Are the evaluation questions clearly stated and is it clear that direct answers to each question must be provided?
* Is the audience for the report and the general structure specified?
* Does the evaluation plan state whether a statement of recommendations or next steps is required?
* How long will the evaluation take to deliver? Will the timing align with the decisions that will be informed by the evaluation?
* Are any additional approval or consultation requirements listed?