Australian Public Service-Academia Collaboration Workshop
Discussion Paper

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# Introduction

Thank you for your interest and participation in the workshop exploring ideas for strengthening collaboration between the Australian Public Service (APS) and academia on 28 July. This workshop is part of a broader push towards better partnerships in the APS.

You have been invited to participate thanks to your expertise and experience on collaboration between the APS and academia. As I’m sure you’re aware, this is not the first time public servants and academics have convened to discuss how better to work together to solve complex public policy challenges.

With a view to focusing the workshop’s discussion on solution-oriented outcomes, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has commissioned an academic to help consolidate the excellent thinking that has already been done around collaboration, both in the public and academic sector. This discussion paper, written by Dr Sarah Ball, serves as a foundation for upcoming workshop discussions. It delves into existing ideas about collaboration and proposes new potential innovations based on past experiences.

Although we are eager for progress, the APS has not made a commitment to implementing any of these ideas, nor do they represent a shortlist for such purposes. The range of ideas is intended to facilitate an exploratory discussion which unpacks the advantages and disadvantages of possible mechanisms in a collaborative environment.

We are grateful to Dr Sarah Ball for collating the contents of this paper, and to Professor Ariadne Vromen, who is facilitating the workshop, for providing oversight on its drafting.

## What do you need to do?

Please read through this discussion paper as a basis for the ideas to be worked through on the day. During the workshop, you will be invited to share your reflections on the possible collaboration innovations and you will be welcomed to propose alternative mechanisms worth exploring. Your thinking will help inform the development of an outcomes report and ongoing work on this topic in the APS.

Dr Rachel Bacon, Deputy Secretary

APS Reform

# Context

As it currently stands, the roles of academia and the public service serve different purposes. Academia aims primarily to generate and disseminate knowledge through education and research, while the public service serves the government of the day, assists in developing its policy agenda and delivers services to the public.

These different purposes drive much of the debate around evidence-based policy, with the relationship between the two presented in two key ways. The first sees policy making as inherently political and argues that policy can at best be evidence-informed. Therefore, academics and the public sector need to work collaboratively to produce usable knowledge (Cairney, 2014, 2017; Head, 2010, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016; Western, 2019). The second focuses more on how academia can more effectively increase the uptake and comprehension of evidence by policy makers (Boaz et al., 2008; Haskins & Margolis, 2014; Oliver et al., 2014; Stoker & Evans, 2016).

Research and policy making are distinct, but both sectors can leverage these differences to come together to better address the complex issues that face Australia today. Oliver at al. (2022) notes that most of the support and research to date tends to focus on dissemination of research or facilitating relationship building. While these elements will also be an important part of future partnerships developed between the APS and academia, more is needed to facilitate collaboration between the sectors. Oliver at al. (2022) state that “[m]ost initiatives appear to address the assumption that decision makers do not listen to evidence, which is still widely held despite increasing evidence to the contrary” (p702). This paper will go beyond these assumptions to explore how academia and the public service can work together.

Finding effective ways of articulating the aims of collaboration and developing productive working relationships are key goals for this workshop. A key step in achieving this is breaking down the process into discrete steps and articulating the aims and markers of success for each.

The stages identified are discovery, design, delivery, and review. Each stage outlines some proposed mechanisms for discussion.



A detailed background on these stages is provided at **Appendix A: Further reading and research**.

The focus of this workshop is on collaborative projects, rather than research translation. This work is intended to focus predominantly on how the two groups can work more closely and collaboratively in the design and delivery of evidence-informed policy. Translating research into policy after it has been delivered is also critical work but will not be the focus of this workshop.

This workshop will also build upon a similar process which was undertaken in 2013. Two half-day workshops were hosted by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet with the intention of facilitating better linkages between the Australian Public Service (APS), and the broader research community. This event was held at the Australian National University and attended by more than 70 people from across the APS, universities and think tanks. A number of ideas were designed for further development during these workshops and some of these are highlighted for revisiting under the proposed mechanisms for discussion at this workshop. It will be particularly useful to consider what the limitations were when implementing these ideas in the years following the workshop in 2013. A summary of 2013 workshop is at **Attachment B.**

# Possible collaboration mechanisms and innovations

## Discovery

This stage explores how researchers and policy makers learn about shared interests, get to know each other, and begin to explore potential opportunities for collaboration. This is the stage which has attracted the majority of research interest to date, but is only the first step towards successful collaboration. For more detail see **Appendix A: Further reading and research**.

### Collaborative Portal

This suggestion builds upon a recommendation from the 2013 workshop, which aimed to use the (now decommissioned) ANU Policy Xpress platform. The purpose of the portal would be two-fold. Firstly, to generate a community of academics and policy officers who could be quickly identified when formulating policy ideas, by inviting interested academics to nominate interest and their area/s of policy relevance. Secondly, once the portal is established, policy officers could upload policy challenges where they would like academic and researcher input.

For example, the APS Reform Office recently conducted a survey on what Public Sector Stewardship means. While a generic survey generates a breadth of ideas, this topic could have been posed to a closed forum of academic researchers, seeking their unique contribution on this topic.

This mechanism would need to be managed by a person able to translate policy questions into academic-relevant requests and distil academic contributions into policy-relevant advice. To be useful, the platform would need to be promoted to academics in a way that meets their needs and makes it valuable to participate.

It will be important to explore existing mechanisms as well as proposing new tools. For example, the Mind Hive tool could be used but factors which led to low take up of that platform would need to be understood.

### Communicating the research agenda

Green papers were another tool proposed to communicate the government’s research agenda in 2013. These would involve research institutions partnering with Commonwealth and State departments to develop joint exploratory ‘green papers’ to generate debate on key issues. The use of ‘blue papers’ for earlier stage collaborative blue sky thinking was also considered, although now this would be captured under the process of a Long-Term Insights Briefing.

This builds on an idea that has since gained traction in the UK, known as Areas of Research Interest (ARI). ARIs are lists of policy issues or questions. Government departments use ARIs to scope and inform future work, and to seek expert contributions (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>). Oliver, Boaz and Cuccato (2023) have recently written on the ways ARI’s have been used. They note that it is primarily an internal process for departments, but that some engaged with experts to help shape their ARI’s. They have, to date, been effective at helping departments articulate their research needs but could be even more effective at connecting with relevant, interested parties if they were searchable and if they were given a universal identifier to link them with the broader research agenda.

### Roundtables model

Roundtables are used by international governments, academia and knowledge brokers. For example, the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia has hosted many roundtable events across a wide range of issues. The roundtables can include participants from across the public sector, community and NGO sector, industry and academia, and are intended to advance discussion and thinking on policy. You can find further information on past roundtables at the following link: <https://socialsciences.org.au/roundtables/>.

PM&C has also initiated a series of roundtable discussions, comprising representatives from academia, the private sector and the APS, to workshop a specific policy challenge. The first roundtable was held in April 2023 on a key policy issue. Participants were selected based on their expertise on the topic, and provided with a package of pre-reading material to help contextual the discussion.

### PhD internships

A more short-term opportunity is to explore PhD internships. These internships are being encouraged for PhD students undertaking a Research Training Program funded scholarship. These internships include a minimum 3-month (60 days FTE) engagement with a research end user. This internships can be promoted to departments as an opportunity to build links with research and as a useful tool for early career scholars to understand the policy environment amongst early career scholars. Tuckerman (2022) shares that these programs “can make them think about how their PhD research is or can be made relevant to practice and policy” (139). Many universities are willing and able to facilitate the process, including finding a PhD student well suited to the policy problem at hand.

### Rotating returning SRW scholars through the in-house consulting hub

The Sir Roland Wilson Foundation was established to promote evidence-based policy making by providing scholarships that invest in research opportunities for public servants. After Scholars complete their PhD, they return to their home department, with deeper insight into the policy topic of their research, new skills in research, and new relationships which can be drawn on throughout their public service career. This fosters collaboration and builds networks between the APS and the partner universities (ANU and Charles Darwin University).

A PhD research topic will likely generate a range of insights with relevance and benefits for several APS portfolios. This potential pilot project could rotate returning SRW scholars through the new In-House Consulting Hub (located in PM&C), to provide a platform for wider dissemination of their research and relationships with academia.

## Design

This stage involves the development of the potential collaboration and agreement on the parameters of the collaborative project. This may include defining methods, outcomes and timeframes.

### The Chief Knowledge Officers Network

This is a proposal from the 2013 workshop. Chief knowledge officers were intended to provide a means of clarifying and disseminating research engagement mandates and auditing existing capacity. Chief knowledge officers could be appointed in each department, to be responsible for managing the relationship between that department and the research community. This would involve creating networks, and assisting departmental business units with research brokering, and capability building. This was based on the idea that most departments already have research expertise, but don’t have a clear mandate for engaging with research across the entire organisation. The aim of this possible mechanism is collaboratively shaping shared agendas and mutual cultural understanding.

### Knowledge Broker Hub

A knowledge brokers hub that builds on the learnings from Open Innovation UK and other university initiated public sector translation programmes, could be tested to facilitate stronger relationships between the APS and the academic sector.

A hub could pilot a series of relationship management approaches and knowledge broker functions (some discussed in this paper) to identify researchers with an APS-relevant focus and facilitate pathways to connect researchers and public servants. Knowledge brokers connect researchers and practitioners and help them better understand one another to identify shared objectives and promote knowledge exchange. A hub mechanism could provide a whole-of-service offering for the APS, enabling policy officers to identify research partners in their field. A hub could also provide a location to host researcher fellowships for academics with topics of APS significance, be a platform for APS staff conducting other relevant research, to maintain their links to the APS and establish new links for the service in new academic institutions and fields, and a base for continuing engagement with SRW Scholars throughout the duration of their PhD.

### Project-focused fellowship program

This mechanism would involve a fellowship program for academics to join a department for a short term secondment and work collaboratively with a policy team on a particular policy topic. The hosting department will benefit from the fellows research capability and contribution to policy solutions. This would also benefit academics researching policy or public administration, as they gain an understanding of the practicalities of the policy development process.

### Secondments

A secondment model which can go both ways is worth exploring. Researchers may work within a department or agency for a period of time, such as in the University College of London’s policy secondment scheme (Government Office for Science, 2013), or members of the public sector can be seconded into an academic environment such as in the National Security College at ANU. This could also be aligned with the PhD internships mentioned above. A key part of this mechanism would include establishing formal rules and explicitly outlining expectations – as they are shown to be less likely to be effectively utilised when left to be arranged by individuals (Sasse & Haddon, 2018). It has been shown that secondments with clear outcomes are most effective - even though the actual impact of the secondments may be more relational (O’Donoughue Jenkins & Anstey, 2017).

### Training

This possible model would give APS staff access to training in how to design and manage collaborative projects. This training would align with the strong focus in the *Independent Review of the APS* on partnership, with academic partners, industry, states and territories and beyond. This could be aligned with existing project management training – noting that there are unique characteristics within a public sector and external partner collaborative project that would need to be explored. These include the risks highlighted in the *Independent Review of the APS*, such as the inclination to manage stakeholders rather than collaborate with them, and “on the APS’s own terms —often after decisions have been made” (117). These require new ways of designing partnerships, and training that goes beyond standard project management.

The University sector has invested in providing training and upskilling in how to generate impact or broker knowledge with the public sector, but also has limited training on the specifics of designing and delivering a collaborative project. This is a worthwhile avenue to explore, if only because these skills would also be useful for the design and delivery of existing grants such as the ARC Linkage project program as well as the new Industry Linkage Fellowships scheme.

## Delivery

This stage represents the core of the collaboration, the delivery of the project itself. **Appendix A: Further reading and research** demonstrates the importance of building a strong relationship, and part of this involves both partners understanding the contextual, contingent and negotiated nature of knowledge. Moving away from a transmission model of knowledge requires us to think more about how knowledge sharing and learning can be achieved practically. This may mean sharing information more regularly in ‘bite-sized’ format or it may require building more easily searchable and useable databases. It will also mean a greater focus on building trust and communicating honestly – something which is best established during the design phase above, but will need to be regularly revisited.

### Knowledge management tools

In the UK a number of departments are reported to hold databases of stakeholders and academics and some have a database of reports they have produced. As noted by the Government Office for Science (2013), “the ideal would be to have these databases not only accessible between departments, but also easy to search, although this is probably some way off… social media may have an increasing role to play here” (25). It is a behavioural challenge that more information is rarely the best way to address a lack of knowledge (Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA), 2018; Behavioural Insights Team, 2018). It is beneficial to provide access to reports and information but the biggest challenge is generally accessibility and useability. Any resource developed should be useful for either the public sector or researchers. This will be important to take into consideration with this mechanism.

### Training and mentoring in communication skills

In addition to the project management and partnership training mentioned above under design, there is also value in exploring specific training in how to deliver and communicate research results in a way that allows for more effective policy learning and translation to occur. This could take the form of additional training for academic partners, or it could also be supported by ensuring additional funding is provided in projects for the purposes of producing regular blogs, short policy briefs, podcasts, and other forms of media engagement. These activities are not currently well-supported as an academic output by the University sector and the amount of labour involved is often underestimated. Producing policy-relevant content also requires a specific set of skills not always well aligned with the skills of an academic researcher. Training could be provided either by the University, the relevant government agency or through a knowledge broker.

## Review

This is the stage where collaborators should evaluate or review the processes, practices and outcomes of the collaboration to see what worked, and what lessons were learned. Given the renewed focus on evaluation in the APS, it would be equally important to begin building in reflective, formative evaluation which can help us better understand what works to best support the use of research in policy.

### Sharing lessons learned

Formative, process focused evaluations provide valuable lessons. Ideally, learning can be published broadly, for departments, governments and the public to learn from and to improve transparency and trust.

There are many ways this could be achieved. Some examples are provided in **Appendix A: Further reading and research** and summarised below:

* Critical-incident/near-miss reporting systems
* Adopting ‘whole system in the room’ debriefs
* ‘Learning from our stakeholders’ exercises
* Training evaluators across the APS in the methodology and tools of positive policy evaluation

Many examples of best practice exist but these cases are not generally shared broadly. Case studies and research on the broad processes of collaboration, learning and policy design will be an important way to support the development of better practice in future. An example is provided in the below case study which highlights some key points that we have covered in this discussion paper. Ball (2023) was invited to undertake an ethnographic study of how the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government worked with its partners to develop policy. The book was the result of 6 months of embedded research and helped develop theories about how new ideas are translated into policy practice. This project offered a highly valuable opportunity for an academic to engage with practice.

Another possibility is using PhD internships or research secondments for this purpose.

#### Example Case Study: BETA

An interesting case for consideration is that of the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA), established in 2016. BETA’s primary role is to work in partnership with government departments to design and develop projects which apply behavioural insights (BI) to public policy.

The team has a 4 step process to designing a project – discovery, diagnosis, design, and delivery (similar to the stages explored in this discussion paper). While each stage has a different focus, the process is not expected to be linear. The team acknowledge that it is important to be thinking about how to evaluate from the beginning and be open to reconsidering the problem definition during the design phase.

BETA have also used academic advisory models – both secondments and an external brokerage model. For an example see: <https://behaviouraleconomics.pmc.gov.au/blog/strengthening-links-academia>

BETA provided specialised training in BI for the public sector. This helped to define key terms and to speak the same language when developing projects. They also occasionally partnered with academics, and had seconded PhD students, when developing projects. These two strategies allowed BETA to build stronger engagement between research and the public sector.

In the early stages of BETA’s establishment, some conflict remained between academic and public sector timelines and priorities. BETA was able to educate the public sector about BI by focusing on BI training and expertise but partnership challenges can still create friction (Ball, 2023).

### Rewarding impact

Oliver et al (2022) found over 60 prizes or rewards for impact, knowledge exchange, or ‘best use of evidence’ in the UK. These are often run by journals (Evidence & Policy’s Carol Weiss Prize); Policy Institutes (the King’s Policy Idol Competition); universities (Nottingham Universities’ Keystone Award for non-academic members of staff); research networks (AusPSA’s Marian Simms Award, Life Sciences Research Network Wales’ Research Impact Awards); and societies (for example the UK Political Studies Association’s ‘Best Use of Evidence’ Award); as well as funding bodies (the ESRC’s ‘Impact Prize’). Prizes may be perceived as attempting to incentivise academic-policy engagement, although none have a clearly articulated theory of change, strategy or evaluation in the public domain.

# Appendix A: Further reading and research

## Discovery

The work of bringing together academics and policymakers is the primary focus of most research to date when exploring research-policy engagement (Oliver et al., 2022). This includes the work of disseminating results, making formal requests for evidence by government, and facilitating relationships between the two to build partnerships. This focus was reflected through the much larger number of proposed mechanisms in this paper but does not necessarily reflect a higher degree of importance. Ensuring effective design, delivery and review will also be vital for building better, more effective collaborations.

The work happening at this stage has many names, which can make it difficult to clarify the aims of collaboration. The work could be called research translation, knowledge transfer, diffusion, research impact or evidence uptake. These all refer to practices used by academics to promote completed research or disseminate results, rather than intending to informing policy (Cherney et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2008; Oliver et al., 2022). These uni-directional practices can be distinct to broader concepts of engagement and collaboration which aim to develop policy relevant research outcomes (Western, 2019). The public sector has similarly been accused of seeking research after the fact, with the primary goal of supporting decisions already made (Ferguson et al., 2014). Contract research can be limiting for those working within the University sector, particularly as contracts rarely allow for publication or accommodate theory generation - the backbone of promotion and success in academia (Oliver et al., 2014). The public sector is also claimed to work to different timelines and with the goal of looking for more definitive answers than is workable for their academic collaborators (Ferguson et al., 2014; Head, 2015).

A vast array of institutional and cultural practices have been recommended to address the challenges listed above. From the research (push) side there are arguments about designing and developing usable knowledge in partnership with policy makers (Western, 2019), using PhD internships or secondments to educate academics in how policy is made (Foxen & Bermingham, 2022), and building more extensive engagement platforms (Menon & Rutter, 2022). On the public sector side (pull) the focus appears to be on encouraging an interest in engaging with research in the first place (Ferguson et al., 2014; Uneke et al., 2015), or addressing the barriers that come with limited time or capability to engage with academic research findings (Cairney et al., 2023; Oliver et al., 2014).

Another view is that these differences lead to unspoken cultural barriers between the two. Bogenschneider et al (2019) suggest that academics might be better served if they see their research as forming part of a broader argument and acknowledging the role compromise and negotiation play in policy making. This is similar to the framing of evidence as something policy will be *informed* by, rather than something it is independently *based upon* (Head, 2016). Importantly however, this is likely only to be meaningfully achieved if there is a mutual trust between the two parties (Buick et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2021). Bringing academics and policy makers together will not, alone, lead to better collaboration. The collaboration must be built on authenticity and trustworthiness (Mols et al., 2018).

To address the differences between the two communities, sometimes a third party is also presented as a way of brokering relationships and translation. Commonly known as knowledge brokers, these actors are presented as a possible solution to navigating the barriers between the two worlds. These can take many institutional forms, such as external and independent like the UK’s What Works Centres (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network>) or supported by universities in the form of a Policy Lab or Research Institute. Government funded bodies such as the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare or the Indigenous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse also do important brokerage work. Some internal government teams, such as that of the Behavioural Insights Teams (in their varied forms), can be effective in bringing in expertise and facilitating projects and partnerships. They do many different types of work, brokering relationships, disseminating and translating ideas and facilitating the development of research networks (Auld et al., 2023; Bandola-Gill & Lyall, 2017; Bornbaum et al., 2015; Knight & Lightowler, 2010). However, brokerage is a broad and complex idea in and of itself and not a panacea.

These ideas point to opportunities to develop more effective collaborative partnerships between the APS and academia, but also highlight some of the ongoing challenges. Many of these debates are long-standing, with concerns dating back to the very development of the policy sciences but these issues are surmountable with time.

## Design

The majority of initiatives developed on academic and public sector collaboration have been focused on discovery. How can academics better communicate their research? How can academics find out what problems matter to the public sector? How can the two work together more effectively? Unfortunately, this means very little focus is given to how collaborations could or should be designed, delivered and reviewed. The following sections will explore these ideas in more detail.

Several conditions can help to facilitate better collaboration during design. The first is addressing any asymmetry in power relationships. If there are imbalances in “capacity, organization, status, or resources to participate, or to participate on an equal footing with other stakeholders, the collaborative… process will be prone to manipulation by stronger actors” (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 551). This means groups that are more cohesive and organised will have more power when shaping a collaborative project. Academics, especially individuals who are negotiating independently, will likely be at a disadvantage. Individuals from ATSI, CALD, LGBTQI+ communities and those undertaking research which represent these communities (and other disadvantaged demographic groups) could find this particularly challenging. Some universities and research groups have more structured ways of engaging and these groups may experience an advantage in negotiating partnerships, however, by and large, the public sector will have more power in these collaborative arrangements. Addressing this imbalance is an important component of the design of a collaboration.

Addressing the power imbalance will also need to include a consideration of how these partners will benefit from the collaboration. Do they have the right skills, time and capacity to participate? It is an ethical question to ask whether all parties benefit (Sullivan, 2022, p. 109). Making policy better is a laudable goal, but academic collaborators, particularly from less privileged groups, have a balance of commitments that should not be assumed as less important. Equally, research which does not address a clear public problem (but is perhaps of academic interest), should not be prioritised in this context. For example, Newman (2011) wrote about her experience working at the boundary of research and academia – noting that the challenges included:

struggles to overcome the limits of specification in order to do what we considered to be useful research, and concerns about how we might use the opportunities offered by commissioned research to advance thinking and theory building in the field – [which was] an almost impossible process given the need to focus on writing reports for funders and bidding for the next project. (Newman 2011, 475)

This was in opposition to her experiences working within government where,

the short, sharp, but inevitably simplifying messages tended to be welcomed by policy actors, although their production tended to be strongly resisted by researchers not only on the basis of the incompleteness of the evidence but also since they wanted the complexity and subtlety of the argument, and the qualifications and caveats surrounding the evidence, to be fully recognised. (Newman 2011, 475)

Understanding the existence of these disparities from the outset, will allow for a design which provides opportunities for both.

This highlights that interdependence is another important condition. If groups feel that they can more effectively achieve their goals independently, they are less likely to collaborate successfully (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2015). It is important that both parties see the other as a contributor to success, rather than a gatekeeper to the necessary data or a stamp of legitimacy (Boswell, 2009). A common frustration for academic partners is the feeling that their work ultimately fails to shape the policy decisions made (Boswell 2009). Incentives increase as stakeholders see a direct relationship between their participation and concrete, tangible, effectual policy outcomes (Brown 2002). But they decline if stakeholders perceive their own input to be merely advisory or largely ceremonial (Futrell 2003).

Some countermeasures which have been argued to support collaboration include:

* Transparency of contracts (MOU’s), processes and information
* Willingness to be challenged or, at least open to diverse interpretations (non-antagonistic debate)
* Follow-through and consistent information sharing (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2015)

In addition, the role played by neutral leadership or knowledge brokers is also considered a key component for facilitating collaborative engagement more broadly (Chrislip and Larson 1994; Ozawa 1993; Pine, Warsh, and Maluccio 1998; Reilly 2001; Susskind and Cruikshank 1987). They can provide assistance in setting and maintaining clear ground rules, building trust, facilitating dialogue, and exploring mutual gains (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 554). Leadership should also include direction over the ethical, emotional and experiential elements of a collaboration – although these foundational elements are often not discussed in detail (Sullivan et al., 2012). Navigating the values, meanings and beliefs that exist in a collaborative project will require taking the time to explore conflict and openly discuss how these differences play a role in shaping what ‘matters’ to each party.

In addition to leadership, the question of ownership is also important. Ownership allows for clear lines of accountability. Defining who will do what and when, makes expectations clear and can be the basis for the development of greater trust and cooperation (van der Arend, 2014). Ownership could be supported by a Charter of Partnerships similar to what was recommended in the *Independent Review of the APS*. The Charter of Partnerships could encourage the establishment of

clear expectations — for government, the APS and the community — on how the APS will work with its external partners. Premised on the understanding that current engagement is insufficient, the Charter will be a public commitment to work openly and respectfully, to be willing to learn and listen, to inform and be informed. It will set expectations of being a good partner with the APS, as this relationship cannot just be a one-way street. (p119)

The literature also suggests that clear ground rules and process transparency are important design features (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 556). Process transparency means that stakeholders can feel confident that the public negotiation is ‘‘real’’ and that the collaborative process is not a cover for bargaining done behind closed doors (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2016). Process transparency means having a clear line of sight between input and output. However, this also requires academic collaborators to be well informed about the nature of the policy process, and the circuitous and slow impact that new information and research can have (Weiss, 1986).

Process transparency, the role of leadership and accountability, all highlight the important role played by trust in collaboration –particularly when past relationships have been antagonistic or fractious. If trust doesn’t exist already, it will need to be built(van der Arend, 2014). It is critical that power imbalances, language barriers and different institutional expectations are addressed outright in discussions.

Finally, openly acknowledging and finding ways to work with the institutional and structural expectations of both parties is important. This includes the frameworks, norms and rules that exist and cannot be assumed to be well understood. For the public sector, changes in government direction and interest, resourcing, framing of language and timeframes for clearance and critical dates such as Senate Estimates and Budget are all critical but implicit institutional knowledge. For the research sector, publishing pressure, semester dates, grant applications and the expectation to ‘show your work’ in the form of extensive literature reviews (like this one!) are also key to institutional expectations, but also, not well understood outside of the academic sphere. The politics of both institutions, and the norms and rules that exist, are equally important to the involved parties and ignoring them is an exercise in futility. Communicating these politics explicitly, clearly and transparently, can only improve collaboration. A prehistory of conflict is likely to express itself in low levels of trust, which in turn will produce low levels of commitment, strategies of manipulation, and dishonest communications” (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 553).

These establishing practices all involve a meaningful commitment of time and resources. Ansell and Gash (2008) note that if partners “cannot justify the necessary time and cost, then they should not embark on a collaborative strategy” (p559). Arguably, it is better to consult or use internal research capacity than to undertake a collaboration without taking the time to establish the relationship.

## Delivery

Much has been written about collaborative governance and the ways to achieve more effective outcomes from these partnerships. These elements are sometimes referred to as antecedent conditions for collaborative governance. This section discusses the elements of interest for the actual delivery of the project.

Collaborative governance is defined, at least in part, by principles of consensus-oriented decision making (Ansell & Gash, 2008). This is an important consideration, as consensus is not necessarily a required component of an academic collaboration. However, the ideal of a collaborative relationship is one which goes beyond just consultation. The agency is ultimately held responsible for policy outcomes in normal decision making. Collaborative governance shifts ‘‘ownership’’ of decision making from the agency to the stakeholders acting collectively. This speaks to the interdependence noted above under design.

The need to define the ultimate goal of a collaborative project involves having discussions on the role of decision making. A common frustration for academic partners is the feeling that their work ultimately fails to shape the policy decisions made. Ensuring there is a clear understanding of how the research will and will not be used, and contingencies for when consensus is not able to be reached, are essential discussions during the project design phase.

Two considerations from policy theory are also of interest here - policy learning and policy translation. They both capture a similar idea – that the instrumental, rational assumption of how knowledge travels in policy making is flawed. As Cairney (2020) states, we need to “reject the temptation to describe policy learning simplistically, with reference to a process that we might associate incorrectly with teachers transmitting facts to children. Nor should we assume that adults simply change their beliefs when faced with new evidence” (208). Rather, policy actors are more likely to generate learning through the process of engaging with new ideas, from diverse sources and forms of information. Knowledge is contextual and contingent and developed in negotiation with what is already ‘known’. The ability to see this negotiation, or translation, as a part of the process, rather than as a loss of fidelity of the research, will be important for academic partners in collaborative projects (Mukhtarov & Daniell, 2016; Stark, 2019).

Some more concrete lessons from the literature include the importance of regular meetings, and establishing short-term goals (small wins) where parties can build trust and demonstrate competency (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2015; Weick, 1984). The short-term or intermediate outcomes of these projects may represent tangible outputs in themselves, but they are also essential for building the momentum that can lead to successful collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Despite this, these smaller scale outputs are not often well supported by the University sector and this is a challenge which will need to be addressed explicitly in many collaborative projects. As noted by Sasse & Haddon (2019), “engaging with policy making is typically not a directly funded activity [for academics], which makes it hard for academics to buy themselves out of their other commitments” (16). This is an important consideration when defining the preferred short-term goals. Are there resources available within the Department to provide support with communications? It is also an important goal for the University sector to find ways to incentivise policy impact as an alternative to a more ‘typical’ path to promotion.

Staff turnover in the public sector also impacts effective collaboration. This is perhaps most clearly acknowledged in a report by the Government Office for Science on *Engaging with academics*. The report states that “a successful collaboration may be forgotten when the key contact moves on, leading to duplication of research effort and a lack of awareness as to what is going on in other teams” (2013, p. 25). To address this, they note that several departments have produced things such as “databases of stakeholders and academics and some have database of reports they have produced” (25). However, as is noted above regarding policy learning and translation, knowledge is often generated over time and through personal relationships and experience. Having the information available is not, on its own, enough. Knowledge management is only one step, albeit an important one.

## Review

There is little research done on the actual *practices* of academic-public sector collaboration and knowledge translation activities (Oliver, 2022). To date, the focus is generally on the outcomes of the collaborative project itself, the program, rather than the *process* of collaborating. This is despite the fact that ‘process’ success is an important element in the success framework (Bovens et al., 2002; McConnell, 2010).

It is also generally agreed that evaluative assessments should consider exploring the process for individual participants, member organisations, the collaboration as a whole and the community (Bryson et al., 2015, p. 649) but it is generally only undertaken as a small part of a broader evaluation and is often not published more broadly.

The resistance to undertaking this style of evaluation is highlighted in a report by Bray, Gray and t’Hart (2019) which informed the *Independent Review of the APS*. While this document is focused on evaluation of programs these tools will also be useful for interrogating the collaborative process. Bray, Gray and t’Hart offer a suite of complementary options that could be explored by the APS, which are worthy of consideration during this process as well.

The building up of **critical-incident and near-miss reporting systems**, particularly within delivery and regulatory agencies. These can be modelled on good practices currently extant within, among others, the process industries, the aviation sector and hospitals.

**Adopting ‘whole system in the room’ debriefs**. These are carefully prepared and facilitated Chatham House rule exercises where critical cases (near misses, explicit failures, ongoing or ad hoc instances of high performance) are reconstructed and reflected upon, drawing on the perspectives of designers, (co-)producers, deliverers, and targets/recipients of policies and programs. The focus lies on what may be learned from the experience, by whom and how this learning can be actioned.

**‘Learning from our stakeholders’ exercises**. These can take the shape of focus group or fishbowl sessions. In these sessions, clients, stakeholders (including otherwise ‘soft voices’ in the sector), and independent experts of policies and programs are explicitly encouraged to articulate their experience of tensions, disappointments and frustrations with an agency, as well any highly positive, constructive and impressive performances by the agency. Agency representatives observe but do not speak, let alone defend, during these sessions. The feedback obtained from these sessions can be compiled, analysed and used to craft unit, program and agency level ‘Learning from our Stakeholders’ reports. These reports can be used to feed into strategy, innovation, design and improvement processes within the agency.

Expanding and better using existing routines of **recognising professional achievement**. Awards events and competitions could be organised in a tiered, multilevel fashion (from branch to agency to APS systematic level). They could be designed and leveraged not just to put a positive spotlight on certain high-performing and dedicated individuals and teams, but to generate a series of standardised case narratives describing the nature, operative mechanisms and boundary conditions of successful performance. Such leveraging can take several forms, such as: – staging annual agency-level Learning Festivals open to all staff, where success cases are presented, subjected to ‘critical friend’ scrutiny and form the basis of ‘lesson-drawing’ workshops; – presenting award-winning cases from across the APS at dedicated APSC-run Learning Conferences or IPAA/ANZSOG annual conferences open to the public.

**Widely disseminating conference proceedings** featuring both individual case histories as well as comparative, thematic and lesson-drawing reflections by commissioned observers, across and beyond the APS.

Training evaluators across the APS in the methodology and tools of **positive policy evaluation**, as well as encouraging their use by other review and accountability bodies such as the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman, and (through inculcation in the Ministerial and Parliamentary Services division) the Senate and House. These tools include: Appreciative Inquiry, the Success Case method, the Most Significant Change method, tracking and analysing instances of Positive Deviance, and Developmental Evaluation strategies. (24-25)

Undertaking this reflective work, and ideally making some of the lessons learned publicly available, will assist in the practice of stewardship. Again, turning to Bray, Gray and t’Hart (2019) it is clear that

it needs to become both normal and safe within the APS to forensically – methodically, dispassionately – take stock and ‘look back’ at how and how well policies, programs and projects are performing; to actively seek out voices from clients, stakeholders and critics; to ask hard questions about what is valuable and what is not; and to re-examine beliefs and assumptions on which policy decisions were made and programs were designed in light of the subsequent experiences after they were put into practice. (26)

For this to be most effective, it should also involve a detailed process of evaluating how it undertakes the process of collaboration and what lessons it can learn to improve moving forward.

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