

Department of TREASURY AND FINANCE

# Looking into the mirror: Evaluating a whole of government program evaluation framework

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# Acknowledgement

*We acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of the Jagera and Turrbal people and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge that we come from Larrakia country.*



# Evaluating a whole of government evaluation framework

1. Looking into the mirror
2. Building an evaluation system
3. Methods
4. Findings
5. Recommendations and conclusions



Looking into the  
mirror

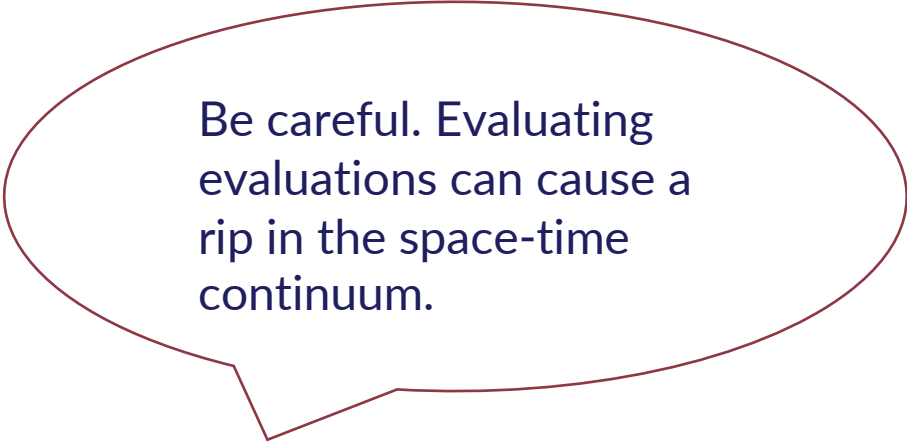
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# Are we making a difference?

- Government program evaluation units support public servants to undertake, commission and use evaluations
- But how do program evaluation units evaluate their own work?
  - How do we measure success when there is a staged approach to building evaluation maturity?
  - How do we know if evaluations are used to inform policy advice and program design?

# Evaluating evaluation reforms?

- We couldn't find many publicly available evaluations on this topic
- We were grateful for the published reports we could find
- Some counterparts also shared their reports in confidence
- We are hoping for conversation and constructive criticism



Be careful. Evaluating evaluations can cause a rip in the space-time continuum.

Survey respondent: NTG Program Evaluation Framework Survey



# Building an evaluation system

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# Building an evaluation system

- The Territory Government has implemented two separate whole of government evaluation approaches in the past 30 years:
  - the Treasurer's Direction Evaluation and Review 1993–2001.
  - the Program Evaluation Framework (2020).



# The Treasurer's Direction Evaluation and Review 1993-2001

- Required agencies to review **all their functions** at least once **every three years**.
  - A brief summary of the results of any evaluation needed to be published in the agency's annual report.
- A Performance Management System audit in 2000 found:
  - there was inconsistency in how agencies recognised and used program evaluation
  - no central agency was providing clear leadership on how and why to carry out program evaluation
  - it appeared unlikely that program evaluation would be conducted in a structured and formal way if the government requirement did not exist.
- The audit concluded that a **program evaluation culture** would be evident if:
  - program evaluation was recognised in training programs and management practices
  - Cabinet submissions on major policy issues included an evaluation strategy
  - evaluation summaries in annual reports demonstrated an understanding of **how evaluation was used**.
- The Treasurer's Direction Evaluation and Review was withdrawn in 2001 (the year following the audit).

# Developing the Program Evaluation Framework

- DTF identified that there was existing evaluation expertise within agencies and established the Program Evaluation Community of Practice in October 2019 to provide relevant officers the opportunity to give feedback on the proposed program evaluation reforms.
  - Over 40 members provided officer-level feedback.
- DTF consulted with program evaluation units in Western Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory as well as the then Department of Industry, Innovation and Science within the Commonwealth Government to draw on lessons learnt
  - It takes sustained effort over a number of years (10 years or more) to embed an effective whole of government monitoring and evaluation system.
  - Need to embed evidence-based policy and evaluative thinking and shift perceptions of evaluation as a compliance exercise to being an integral part of program design and policy development.

# Overview of the Program Evaluation Framework

- The PEF was released in 2020. It integrates evaluation into Territory Government policy and budget development processes.
- The PEF sets out the evaluation roles and responsibilities as part of the Territory Government's centralised approach to program evaluation.
  - Under this approach, evaluation is primarily undertaken by individual agencies (this may include using external experts commissioned by the agency) to maintain a close link between the evaluation and the program area with relevant subject matter knowledge and experience.
- Evaluation activity is overseen, coordinated and supported by DTF
  - 'close the loop' - reviewing evaluation work plans and reports and providing an annual summary of evaluations to a subcommittee of Cabinet (including highlighting concerns with evaluations).

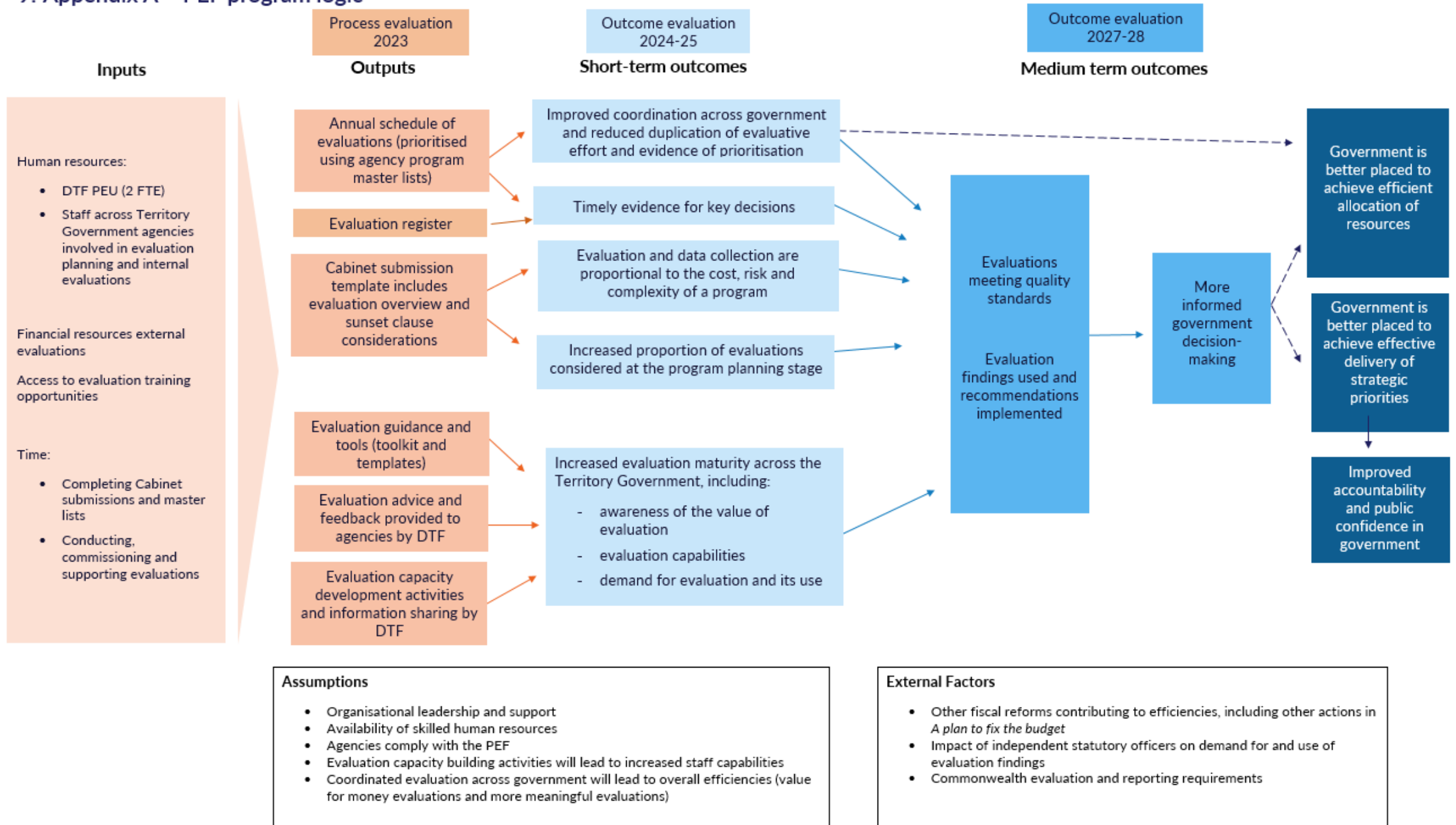


Image Credit: Dreamstime

# Methods

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## 9. Appendix A – PEF program logic



# Key evaluation questions

- To what extent has the PEF been implemented?
- Are the guidance tools and templates being used by agencies?
- How user-friendly and appropriate have the guidance tools been for agencies?
- How ready is the PEF for an outcome evaluation?
- Are there any adjustments to the implementation approach that need to be made?

# Data collection methods

- Desktop review
  - Cabinet submissions, master lists and evaluation schedules, evaluation register, website analytics, internal records
- Employee survey distributed to the Program Evaluation Community of Practice (PECoP):
  - awareness of the PECoP
  - awareness and use of the PEF and toolkit
  - evaluation engagement with DTF
  - evaluation perceptions
  - evaluation maturity
  - individual evaluation capability
  - open feedback.



Image credit: Freepik

# Findings

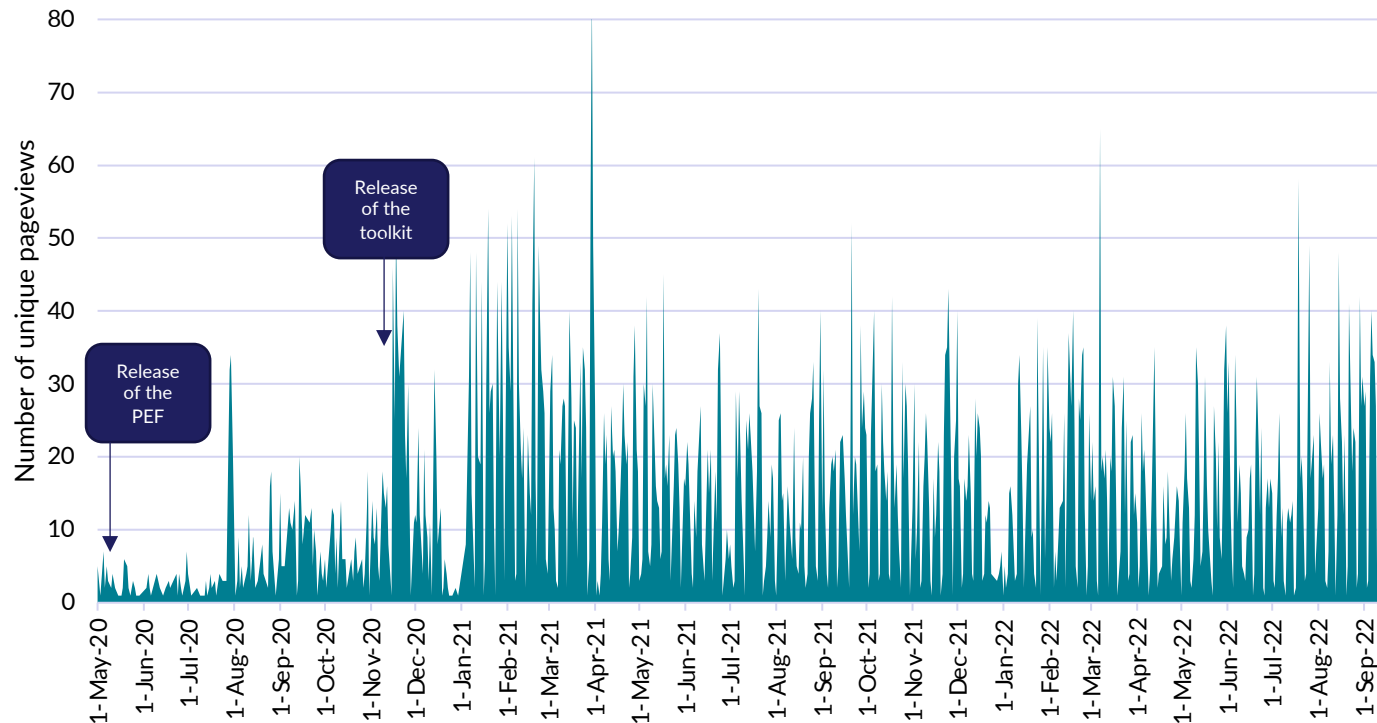
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# To what extent has the PEF been implemented?

1	Annual schedule of evaluations	First annual evaluation schedule approved by the Budget Review Subcommittee of Cabinet in 2021. Subsequently embedded into business as usual processes.
2	Evaluation register	Established in January 2020. As at April 2023, there were 115 Territory Government monitoring and evaluation reports and 122 other relevant resources. PEU regularly updates the register as part of business as usual processes.
3	Evaluation overview and sunset clause requirements in Cabinet submissions	Cabinet submission template updated to include evaluation requirements in August 2020.
4	Evaluation guidance tools	Toolkit published online in November 2020. PEU implements updates as required, including responding to user feedback.
5	Evaluation advice and feedback to agencies	Since 2020, DTF has been requested to provide evaluation advice and feedback on 54 programs across a range of government agencies. Also embedded into business as usual Cabinet submission review processes.
6	Evaluation capacity development	Since 2019, DTF has delivered a total of 40 evaluation-related presentations to 1211 attendees. The PECoP membership has steadily increased - as at April 2023, the PECoP consisted of 179 members.

# Are the guidance tools and templates being used by agencies?



11,700 unique page views since May 2020 (the release of the PEF)

The PEF has been downloaded from the website 1,329 times, with 1,238 unique downloads.

# How user-friendly and appropriate have the guidance tools been for agencies?

*"The resources are easy to access, easy to use"*

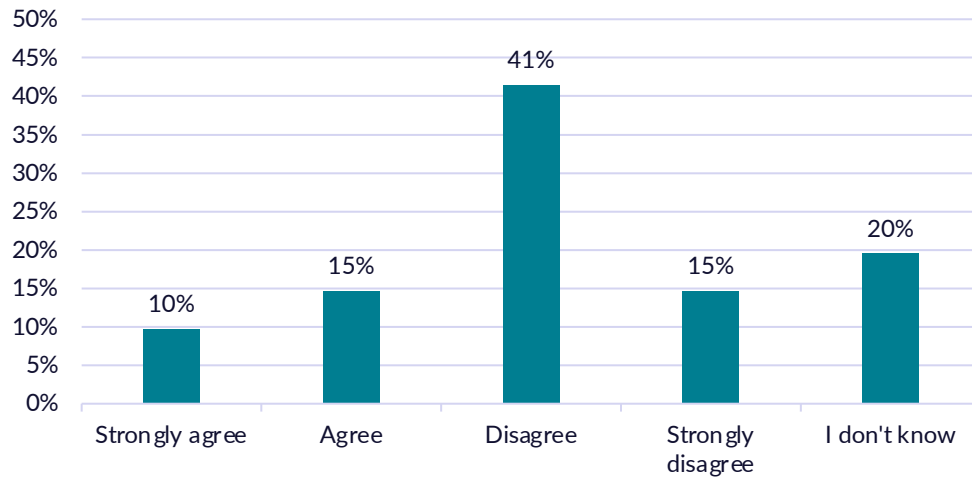
*"[the PEF and toolkit] is very wide-ranging which is great. I think it walks the line well between too much information and sufficient information without going off on tangents"*

Of the survey respondents who were aware of the PEF and toolkit, the majority:

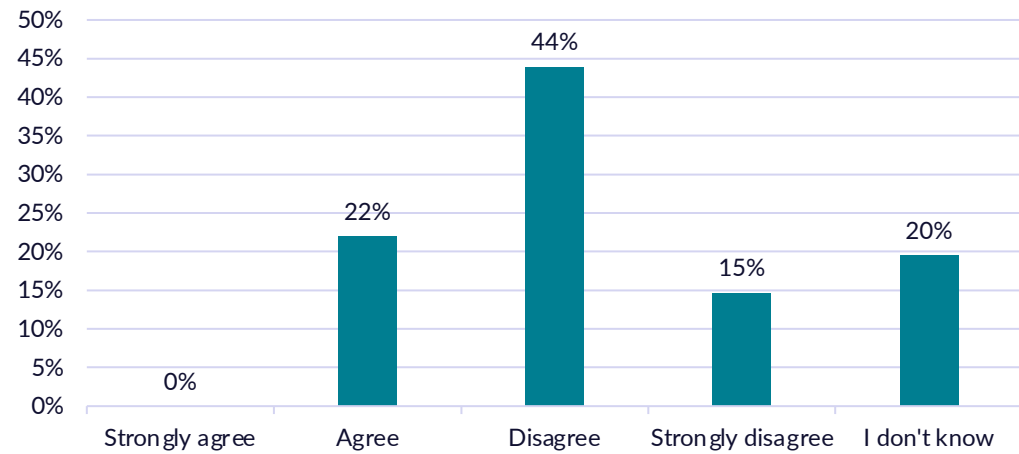
- had referred to it in the last year (82.5%),
- agreed it is relevant to their work (97.5%)
- agreed the guidance is user-friendly (97.5%).
- 40 (97.5%) survey respondents were aware of the PEF and toolkit.

# Baseline outcome data

Graph 4: Staff perceptions - "Evaluation is coordinated across the Territory Government"



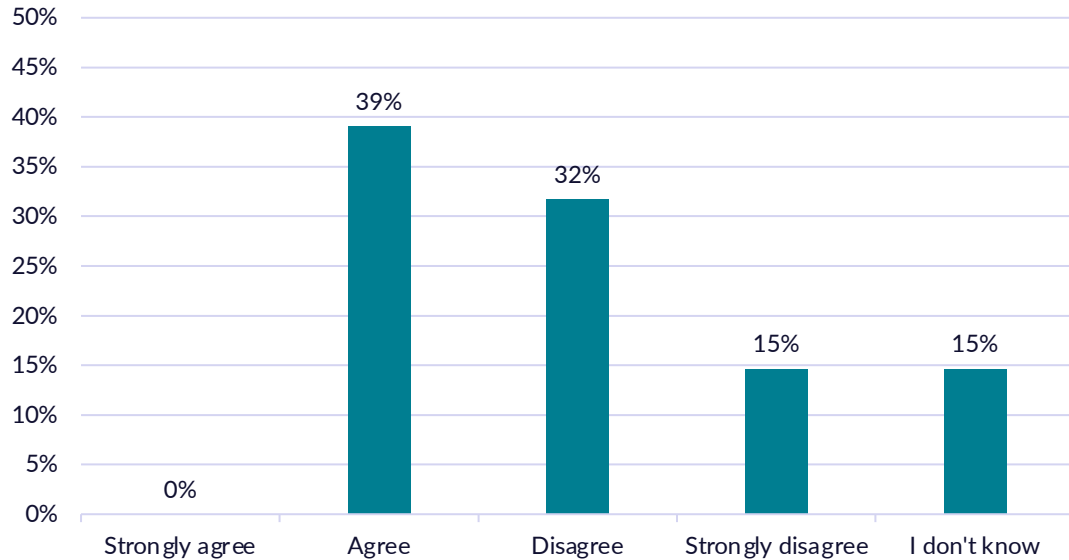
Graph 5: Staff perceptions – "Evaluations are conducted in a timely manner to inform decision-making"



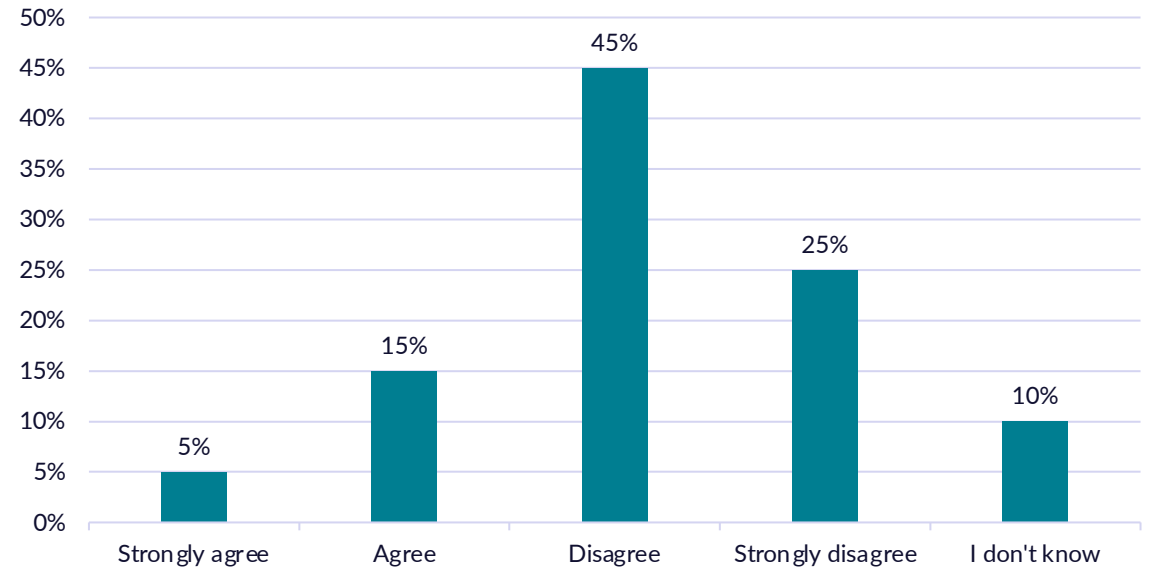
13 of 56 (23%) evaluations were completed as per the evaluation schedule

# Baseline outcome data

Graph 10: Staff perceptions – "Current evaluation activity in my agency is proportional to the priority and risk profiles of policies and programs"

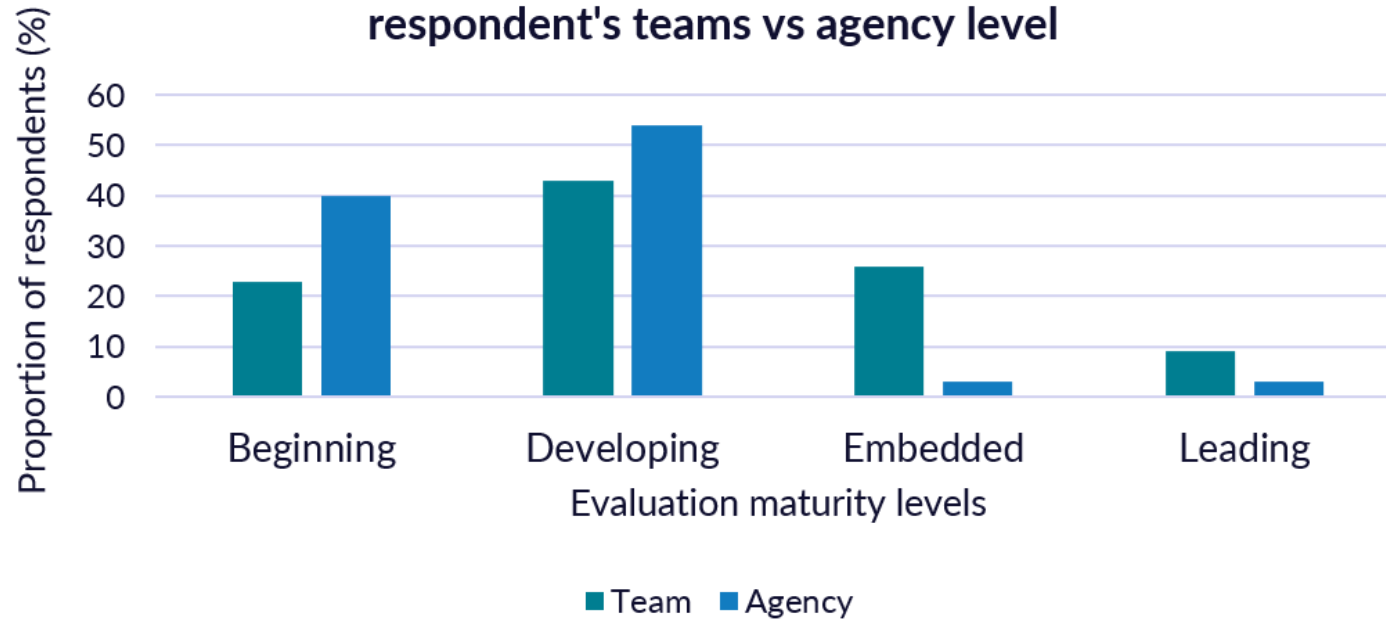


Graph 12: Staff perceptions - "Management in my agency supports and promotes the conduct of evaluation"



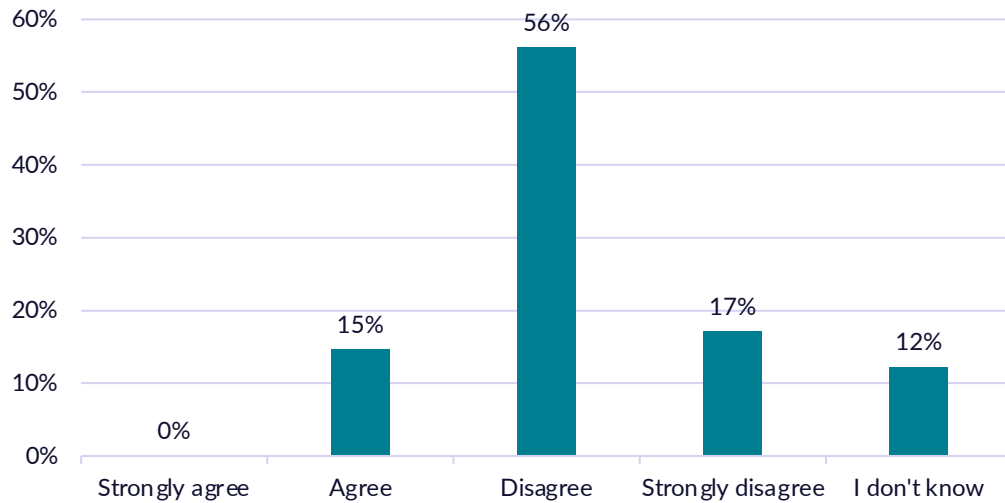
# Baseline outcome data

Graph 11: Staff perceptions of evaluation maturity within respondent's teams vs agency level

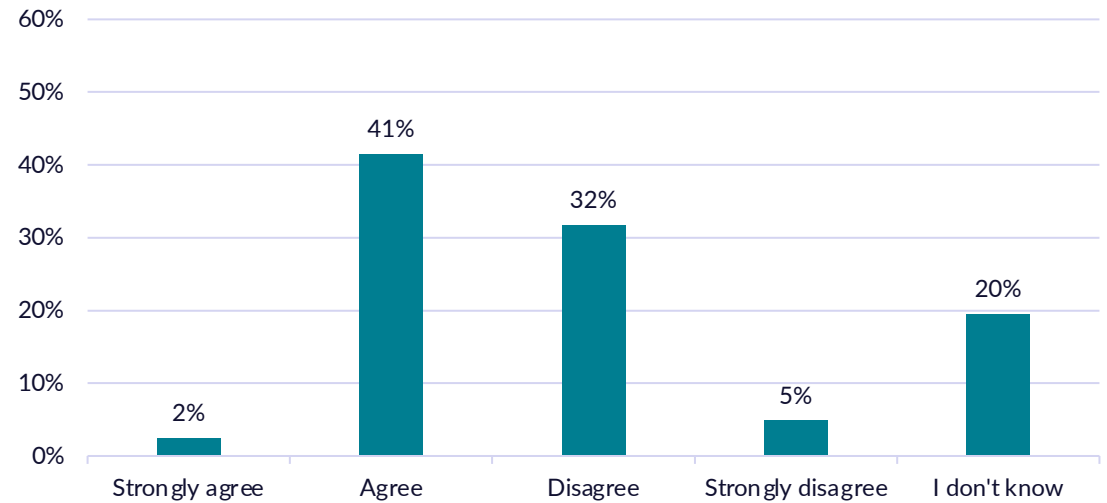


# Baseline outcome data

Graph 2: Staff perceptions – "evaluation findings and recommendations are communicated widely within the agency"



Graph 3: Staff perceptions – "evaluation findings and recommendations are being used to improve service delivery"





# Recommendations and conclusions

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# Recommendations – improving implementation

## 1. Strengthen the toolkit:

- Templates and standards for 3 types of evaluation
- Examples of good quality work plans

## 2. Improve awareness of the PEF and the role of DTF

- Record presentation for new staff
- Offer additional face-to-face or online presentations
- Linking the PEF to the Territory Government intranet

## 3. Actively follow up

- Remind agencies of work plan and report due dates
- Proactively contact relevant teams when Government has publicly committed to evaluating strategies and programs

## 4. Training and professional development opportunities

- Promote training on program logics, data analysis, system theory, implementation science, commissioning evaluations

# Recommendations –strengthening outcome measures

## 5. Measuring evaluation quality standards

- DTF to finalise the evaluation standards in collaboration with the PECO and publish the standards on the PEU webpage
- DTF to measure evaluation reports against standards to provide feedback to agencies and to inform DTF Cabinet submission comments.

## 6. Measuring improved coordination

- DTF to develop a simple monitoring spreadsheet to capture instances where the program master list and evaluation schedule have been used to identify duplication and facilitated coordination across agencies.

# Conclusions

- There is now a central agency providing guidance on how and why to carry out evaluations, evaluation training is available and promoted, and Cabinet submissions on major policy issues include evaluation overviews.
- However, the **low baseline for the key outcomes** measurable at this stage (such as coordinated evaluations across government, evaluations meeting quality standards and evaluation findings being used and recommendations implemented) indicate there is still much work to be done.
- It is **not yet clear** whether the PEF will be able to achieve the intended outcomes even if it is well implemented.
- Given the lack of evidence in this area, it will be important to ensure the planned outcome evaluations for the PEF are completed as scheduled (2024-25 and 2027-28).

# Thank you

Our report is publicly available:  
<https://treasury.nt.gov.au/dtf/financial-management-group/program-evaluation-unit>

We would value your feedback:  
[DTF.ProgramEvaluation@nt.gov.au](mailto:DTF.ProgramEvaluation@nt.gov.au)

