

States of Change pilot learning programme - Evaluation summary



The States of Change learning programme is a practice-led experience that embeds innovation capability and helps public servants become better problem solvers.

The programme was piloted by Nesta in 2018 in partnership with the Victorian Government, Australia. It was evaluated by The Policy Lab at the University of Melbourne*.

Over 40 Victorian public servants in 10 project teams participated in the nine-month programme, spanning 12 different Victorian government departments and agencies. One of the teams also included participants from the not-for-profit Crime Stoppers Victoria.

Throughout the programme, the teams worked on real-life projects nominated by their departments and agencies.

The Policy Lab used a mix of pre-programme surveys of participants, learning reflection essays and mid-and-post programme interviews with participants and their executives (the project sponsors). They sought to understand:

- Which aspect of the programme had the greatest impact on innovation learning and capability development.
- The contextual factors shaping the effectiveness and enduring impact of the programme.

The key evaluation questions posed were:

- » To what extent has the programme increased participants' **core skills and key attitudes** in public sector innovation?
- » To what extent have participants' professional **networks** increased in quantity, diversity and reach?
- » How has the programme contributed to **broader organisational change** in the participants' sponsoring departments and agencies?
- » What is helping or hindering the initiative to achieve these outcomes? What are the specific organisational **barriers** to momentum, outcomes and cultivation of an innovative mindset within and outside the programme?

Participants' core skills and key attitudes in public sector innovation

Participants observed changes in themselves and their team as a direct result of the programme. The majority found that being provided with innovative tools and methods, and a collaborative space in which to practice them, cultivated:

- A greater sense of confidence in their own innovation capabilities and in spreading change outwards.
- A greater sense that they can employ creative approaches and utilise different designs and methods to their future projects.
- An increased recognition of the importance of engaging with and integrating stakeholders.

These findings build on the mid-programme evaluation report where participants were asked about the attitudes they were developing most. The top three reported were: 'courage', 'imagination' and 'empathy'.

Participants were asked to rate how well the programme taught them the competencies from Nesta's [Competency Framework for Public Problem Solving](#). All had seen a positive change as a result of the programme, the highest ranked were:

- Questioning the status quo, being insurgent and using acumen to create opportunities for change.
- Articulating the value of new approaches and solutions for decision-making.
- Creatively processing different perspectives and deliberating on multiple options.

The executive sponsors of the programme recognised the development of new skills and approaches in teams. These were consistently themed around increased confidence and different approaches to problems, specifically around asking more and better questions.

They noted that teams had more confidence in sharing and spreading what they had learnt, and this had inspired not just the participating teams but also broader staff.

Participants' professional networks

- » All but one participant agreed that the programme had increased the reach and diversity of their networks.
- » Coming together as a cohort regularly and for sustained periods of time was attributed to an increased and more diverse network for individuals and teams.
- » The cross-departmental make-up of the cohort in the programme, alongside Nesta and States of Change's networks, were considered the most valuable.

Broader organisational change

In this area, participants were cautious about the level of change in their organisation as a result of their participation in the programme.

The evaluation states that:

"States of Change was credited with creating impactful change within and across individuals most directly involved with the programme, but less so when extended upward to the managerial or organisational level, where suspicion remained about the programme's effect in overcoming longstanding cultural barriers."

Individuals who had moved roles internally reported that they were effectively transferring the skills across to new projects.

When asked about enduring impacts of the programme, participants focused on their shifting mindset and new approaches, and their ability to "do things differently in projects going forward". Their networks and the use of tools were recognised as an impact beyond the programme.

Participants were cautious about the enduring impact beyond personal development, as they recognise there are still organisational, culture and leadership barriers in government. They were hopeful about the ripple effects of these:

"Embedding the tools and mindsets within programme participants and extending this across networks in various departments and branches was the main way participants foresaw a sustained impact from the programme."

Barriers to momentum, outcomes and cultivation of an innovative mindset

The barriers identified to project progress and success were both the authorising environment and a culture of risk aversion. The interviews found that while there was optimism about the spread of an innovation mindset horizontally, there was less optimism around it spreading vertically.

Participants also reported barriers around time pressures and workload, which made their commitment to the programme and learning journey difficult to maintain.

Challenges to enduring impact included organisational culture, leadership and risk-aversion.

The executive sponsors identified a loss of momentum when the programme ended. They highlighted that the leadership level had not adopted an innovation mindset. This illustrates the ongoing challenge of normalising these new approaches into business as usual.

The executive sponsors also shared their suggestions for how to improve the programme to better support their role in ensuring longer-term impact. This included:

- Better engagement between teams and their sponsors.
- Greater understanding of the innovation process.
- Further clarity around what different types of executive support are needed at different times.

Endnote

- * It should be noted that the generalisability of the data is limited due to the;
- » The small sample size of the cohort (43 participants across 10 teams).
 - » The need to preserve anonymity meant department and project specific details had to be omitted.
 - » The natural attrition and movement in the public sector meant that individuals evaluated were not always consistent throughout the length of the programme.