Agency Guidance: Developing ICT Strategic Plans
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1. **Introduction**

ICT strategic plans are the ‘master plan’ documents that set out an agency’s:

- Current ICT operating environment
- Business drivers for change
- Policy and strategic context, including relationship to NSW Government and agency/cluster strategic objectives and priorities
- Goals and objectives
- Roadmap for achieving the goals and objectives.

ICT strategic plans should provide a consolidated and prioritised view of the agency’s planned ICT investments to enable it to meet its business and service delivery objectives. When viewed together, the ICT strategic plans should provide the ICT Board and Leadership Group with visibility of planned ICT investment across the sector, enabling a more coordinated, strategic approach to whole of government investment and sourcing.

1.1 **Purpose**

This guidance is designed to assist agencies in developing ICT strategic plans, to support consistency in the area of ICT strategy development, and ensure that strategic plans reflect broader NSW Government strategic priorities.

1.2 **Context**

Under the NSW Government ICT Investment Policy and Guidelines, the ICT Leadership Group provides advice to the ICT Board on the application of the ICT Investment Principles in ICT strategic plans, investment proposals and business cases. This guidance outlines key areas for agencies to consider when developing ICT strategic plans.

The guidance applies to all NSW Government Departments, Statutory Bodies and Shared Service Providers with an annual ICT spend of over $20 million. State Owned Corporations are also encouraged to consider the guidance when developing ICT strategic plans.

2. **Review Process**

DFSI will maintain a repository of current ICT strategic plans and engage with agencies to understand when new plans will be developed. Agencies are requested to submit drafted ICT strategic plans to the ICT Leadership Group for review against the NSW Government ICT Investment Principles and alignment with the NSW ICT Strategy, prior to final endorsement within the relevant agency.

3. **ICT Strategic Planning Guidance**

3.1 **Overview**

The purpose of an ICT strategic plan is to ensure that ICT activities and investments are aligned with strategic and corporate objectives, and to define the ICT standards and policies that agencies have put in place. It defines the way an agency proposes to manage and enhance its information assets to support its current and future business needs. It is also a useful tool to communicate an ICT strategy both internally and externally.

ICT strategic plans also guide decision-making about technologies and solutions. New proposals to change or enhance business processes should be tested to ensure that they align with the current ICT strategic plan.

An ICT strategic plan facilitates the consistent management and future direction for ICT investment and assets so that they support an agency’s service priorities.
3.2 Key considerations when developing an ICT strategic plan

The following sets out a list of suggested elements to consider when developing an ICT strategic plan.

**Outlining the Current Position and Business Environment**

The strategic plan should provide an overview of the agency and its business and ICT environment. This sets the strategic context to understand the scale and scope of the business, service delivery priorities and technology used. Information provided may include:

- The organisation: vision and mission, core business, functional capabilities, staff numbers and geographic spread
- The business environment: key stakeholders and customers, range of products and services provided
- The technology environment: information systems and applications, telecommunications environment and information technology architectures and technical infrastructures being used currently.

In addition, agencies should analyse the success and lessons learned from preceding ICT strategic plans so that these experiences can inform the current ICT strategic planning process. This may include an evaluation of the previous ICT strategy.

**NSW Government Priorities, Strategies and Policies**

Agency ICT Strategies should clearly address agency/cluster corporate plan objectives, and demonstrate a clear link to broader NSW government strategic priorities. These include Premier and State Priorities, the NSW Government ICT Strategy, and strategies for relevant policy portfolios.

ICT strategic plans should also demonstrate alignment with the NSW Government ICT Strategy and ICT Investment Policy and Principles.
The NSW Government ICT Strategy is supported by the NSW Government Enterprise Architecture Framework which encompasses all aspects of enterprise architecture activity at the business, information, application and technology infrastructure layers across the NSW Government. This framework should form an integral part of the strategic planning process by which an agency strategic plan is developed. The framework incorporates a toolkit, policies and standards, and an online forum to assist agencies in this process.

**Timeframe**

The fast pace of technological advances means that it is difficult to accurately predict which kinds of technology will be needed in the business beyond a two or three year planning horizon. It is suggested that ICT strategic plans generally cover a three-year planning horizon. Strategic plans should provide clear guidance to allow the prioritisation of ICT projects within an accompanying forward work program. The work program provides more detailed information on the projects and timeframes that underpin the execution of the strategic plan.

**Audience**

A strategic plan will be used by a range of audiences within the organisation. It should identify the audiences and target the content accordingly. A summary for an executive level, non-technical audience would consist of broad statements emphasising high-level goals and the importance of ICT for the success of the organisation and its role in meeting service expectations. ICT and business managers involved in the delivery of ICT programs would require greater tactical detail relating to technologies, funding and timeframes.

**Business Focus**

Clearly define how the agency ICT strategic plan will meet the needs and expectations of both citizens and internal clients. The plan should focus on the end goals and outcomes for clients, not specific technologies.

Case studies that identify successful business or service outcomes enabled by ICT strategies are an effective way of demonstrating the value of ICT as a key business enabler within the organisation.

**Execution Roadmap**

A strategic plan should provide a clear explanation of how strategic goals are to be achieved. It typically outlines long-term goals and details a roadmap that defines the path to the future. A roadmap identifies the steps necessary to execute the strategy in terms of timelines, milestones and benchmarks.

**Governance and Management**

ICT governance and accountability generally refers to the processes by which the ICT functions within organisations are directed, controlled and held to account. It encompasses authority, accountability, leadership, direction, and control exercised within the organisation. Key elements of ICT governance and accountability includes: the transparency of operations, establishing effective risk management, continuity, resilience and internal control systems, and the accountability of ICT Management to its agency through, for example, clear and timely disclosure.

ICT management generally refers to how the ICT functions utilise resources to achieve strategic and operational goals. Key elements of ICT management include strategic and operational planning; implementing and monitoring risk management and internal control systems; and providing accurate and timely communication of progress and results to senior business leaders within the cluster/agency.

The ICT strategic plan should outline the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities assigned to the ICT governance body, Chief Information Officer (or equivalent) and responsible business unit managers in relation to the planned initiatives and work. It should also describe how the relevant people will be given adequate support, advice and training to undertake their responsibilities and manage their accountabilities effectively.

In addition to the specific roles and responsibilities outlined above, the ICT strategic plan should provide a framework within which all ICT activities are undertaken. This involves establishing governance and
management protocols and standards that will be used across the agency for any ICT initiative or ICT project. The governance and management frameworks that agencies should establish and describe in the ICT strategic plan include:

1. Project/Program management methodology
2. Risk management framework
3. Change management framework
4. Benefits management process
5. Information security program
6. Capability development and management

The ICT strategic plan should identify and describe the methodologies and frameworks that have been adopted for use in the agency for each of the six areas noted above. As each individual project progresses into the detailed planning phase, the methodologies and frameworks will have to be customised to suit the requirements of the project. Therefore, this section of the ICT strategic plan should also outline a standard process that is to be used by all project/program managers to customise the methodologies and frameworks for each individual project.

**Performance Measurement**

ICT strategic plans should clearly articulate and demonstrate the evaluation framework that will be used to measure and report on achievements. Key components include:

- **Measurable objectives**: Objectives are specific, with measurable results to be achieved. Objectives and their timelines are guidelines, not rules set in stone. Objectives should be expressed as quantities, or at least as verifiable statements, and ideally would include timeframes.
- **Performance measures**: Performance measures provide an important link between the goals, strategies, actions and objectives stated in the strategic plan and the projects/programs and activities funded in the budget. Performance measures provide information on whether goals and objectives are being met.

**References**

NSW Government ICT Investment Policy and Guidelines, NSW Department of Finance and Services (2014)

“Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Strategic Planning Guidance”, NSW Department of Finance and Services, Version 5.3 (2011)


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