



**Victorian
Public Sector
Commission**



Developing a strategic plan scenario

Learn what steps you can take to ensure a department has appropriate involvement in a public entity's strategic planning process.

How to use this scenario

This scenario is for department and public entity employees to explore what to do when a public entity is developing a strategic plan.

Either as a group or on your own:

1. Read the scenario and result
2. Use the discussion questions to analyse what could be done differently in the scenario
3. After discussing, check the advice under each question to see the preferred course of action.

People involved in this scenario

- Public entity corporate manager
- Department executive
- Minister

The scenario

A public entity is developing its strategic plan. The relevant legislation says it must give the plan to the minister to approve.

The minister has made it clear to the department that before they see the plan, they expect the department to be fully across it.

The public entity's corporate manager sends a draft to the department a fortnight before it is due to be tabled in Parliament. The department has only 2 days to provide any comments before it needs to finalise the briefing for the minister.

The department's responsible executive asks the public entity to make significant changes to the plan so it better aligns with the government's strategic objectives.

The public entity revises the plan but can't make all the changes in the available time. The public entity sends the plan to the minister.

The department's covering brief to the minister criticises the quality of the plan, but recommends the minister approve it.

After it's approved, the department executive emails the public entity to ask that in the future it engages the department earlier on strategic plans.

The public entity reluctantly agrees to provide any future plans a month in advance. But it questions if the department's role is to comment or brief on the draft plan.

The department executive replies via email, stating that:

- the public entity didn't genuinely consult with the department
- the plan doesn't have all the relevant information
- the public entity didn't give them enough time to brief the minister.

The result

The department thinks the strategic plan only barely adequately reflects good governance and support of the government's objectives.

The public entity thinks the department is overstepping its role and attempting to direct or influence the entity's work and strategic direction.

The department didn't have enough time to:

- review the plan
- clarify information
- resolve any issues with the public entity before briefing the minister.

The relationship between the department and public entity becomes more adversarial.

Discussion questions

Use these questions to self-reflect or guide discussions in your team:

- What steps can public sector leaders put in place to prevent this scenario from occurring?
- How much input from the department in corporate and strategic planning is appropriate in your portfolio governance arrangement?
- Has the level of input from the department been agreed and documented between the relevant decision-makers and communicated to relevant staff?

Preferred course of action

Open allClose all

What could the department and public entity have done instead?

At the beginning of the strategic planning process, the department could have clarified its expectations with the public entity.

During the planning process, the public entity could have met more regularly with the department to:

- understand the department's perspective
- ask for their input on the plan.

The public entity could have fostered a more positive working relationship if it had:

- included the department in any stakeholder workshops that informed the plan
- constructively worked through the department's feedback in a face-to-face

meeting or by phone, rather than by email only

The department could have:

- kept the feedback constructive, such as explaining the benefits of the department having more time
- ensured it shared information early and transparently so the public entity had all the relevant context to inform the plan.

What are some other things to consider?

Look at the legislation that established the public entity

Public entities should look at their establishing legislation to work out how they need to involve the department in their strategic planning and annual reporting.

For example, a public entity may or may not need the minister to approve its strategic and annual plans.

Strategic and annual plans approved by the minister need more oversight from the department.

Remember a secretary's obligations

Department secretaries are a minister's primary source of policy advice.

Under section 13A of the [Public Administration Act 2004](#), they must advise the minister on how a public entity is functioning.

Understand the role of departments

Departments can provide valuable strategic input due to their responsibility for:

- portfolio-wide oversight
- knowledge of broader government priorities.

Departments should keep in mind that public entities have their own level of independence and legal responsibilities.

In most circumstances, departments can't control how public entities perform their functions.

The purpose of a strategic plan

The goal of a public entity strategic plan is to provide a roadmap of how they'll achieve good outcomes for the Victorian community.

A department and public entity must prioritise this common goal when they work together.

A public entity should check if their department has any guidance about the process of developing entity strategic plans.