

Outcome Realisation Case Study:

The Tasmanian Government Web Publishing Framework Project

Department of Premier and Cabinet
Inter Agency Policy and Projects Unit



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The Tasmanian Government Web Publishing Framework Project

Strengthening Accountability and Commitment to Outcome Realisation

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The Tasmanian Government Web Publishing Framework is an example of a better practice project with continually evolving subject matter. This case study explores the Project's innovative approach to realise project outcomes. A significant achievement was the development of a new collaborative governance model that suits projects where the custodian of a better practice framework (the primary output) is not the subject expert. This has served to influence the modelling of project business ownership for other Tasmanian whole of government framework projects.

Key Findings

- Engaging end-users in content development can foster a stronger commitment to utilising project outputs and therefore to realising project outcomes.
- Explicitly defined business ownership sets accountability for outcome realisation
- Outcome realisation planning in an ICT context must anticipate continual and rapid changes in technology

Overview:

The Tasmanian Government Web Publishing Framework Project ran from 2004 to 2007. It was guided by a steering committee comprised of Senior Executives from various government agencies, and managed by a part time team within the Inter Agency Policy and Projects Unit (IAPPU). A Web Publishing Reference Group involving web practitioners from across agencies provided expertise for content development, and arising policy matters were referred to a high level Web Policy Group for resolution.

The Project delivered a whole-of-government framework that defined web publishing better practice, through a collection of standards, guidelines, templates, fact sheets and toolkits. The Framework was, however, not assigned for mandatory whole of government implementation.

The long term and associated target outcomes for the project, as endorsed by the Project Steering Committee in Outcome Realisation Plan, V1.0 18/10/2006, were:

1. Improved standards for Web Publishing across the Tasmanian State Service
Target A: Improved quality of information and resources relating to web publishing tools, techniques and processes.
2. Increased knowledge and skills in web publishing across the Tasmanian State Service, through sharing information, resources, and experience.

- Target B: Improved access to information and resources relating to web publishing tools, techniques and processes
- Target C: Greater recognition of the Web Publishing Framework as a source of high quality information and resources relating to web publishing

Post project closure, these outcomes continue to be monitored and reviewed by the Operational and Substantive Business Owners (see 'Challenge 2' below) in conjunction with the Reference Group, and reporting is provided to the Inter Agency Steering Committee (IASC) as the Corporate Client.

The Challenges

1. Fostering a voluntary commitment to utilise outputs to achieve project outcomes

Government policy that is officially mandated is, by nature, authoritative. The Web Publishing Framework Project did not have this advantage – there was no formal obligation placed on the various agencies within the whole of government to implement the defined practices or advocate for them. Therefore, to achieve greater recognition for The Tasmanian Government Web Publishing Framework as the preferred better practice resource for the Tasmanian State Service, the Project had to foster a commitment from end-user agencies to use the outputs, based entirely on goodwill, peer acceptance, and a credible reputation. For this reason, attention to outcome realisation planning became paramount.

The Solution

The Project team realised that to ensure the end-users would consider the outputs as valuable to them, the content needed to be immediately relevant to the work of web publishers in the Tasmanian State Service and a sense of collective ownership needed to be instilled.

The established Reference Group included the web publishing experts and practitioners that would eventually become the end-users (output utilisers). From within the Reference Group, working groups were formed to contribute expertise on particular outputs, often with one agency taking a lead role, which facilitated the sharing of ideas, knowledge and experience.

The result was twofold in that the outputs had very high relevance and practical utility for end users; and the end user agencies became engaged with outputs to the extent that the Project achieved the recognition required to achieve Target Outcome C. This ensured the outputs would be utilised and advocated, regardless of their not being mandated.

The Success

Establishing the Project Reference Group formalised a relationship for the web publishing community across government. It became greatly valued because it improved inter-agency working relationships and facilitated a regular exchange of ideas and information. The practitioners had developed such a commitment to the welfare of the outputs that it was agreed that the Reference Group have an ongoing formal review role for the Framework after the project closed.

2. Defining roles for managing outputs to realise outcomes

The accepted definition of project business ownership includes the responsibility for managing the project outputs for utilisation by project customers, and accountability for the realisation of target outcomes¹. It is this aspect of governance that proved to be the defining challenge for this project. There was inconsistency in staffing, documentation, and management methodologies through the course of the project, which led to a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. Business Owners were not identified for the project outputs and there was reluctance on all sides to take it on.

Target outcomes for this project centred on improved access to resources, and quality of content. Once the outputs were delivered, the question of who would take responsibility for the continued provision and upkeep of the framework became contentious.

In practical terms, it was envisaged that IAPPU would take custody of the Framework and provide access to the resources. However, they had little influence over the utilisation of outputs by end user agencies, and relied on subject expertise from agencies to ensure content quality. In this situation, making the custodian of the framework solely responsible for realising outcomes was identified as a major risk. This would fail to acknowledge the importance of resource developers in output maintenance and would not effectively engage agencies with substantive responsibility for related policy and legislation, who could advocate for the wider implementation and acceptance of the Framework. For this reason, employing a traditional business ownership model would not lead to outcome realisation.

The Solution

Late in the project, the Project Team came to understand that through this collaborative approach, there was a distinction forming in business owner roles with regard to content maintenance and practical provision of resources. The best way to guarantee that outcome realisation (ie: maintain relevance and currency of content; ensure access by whole of government; achieve recognition and ongoing credibility) would be ongoing was to make the resource developers and the custodian jointly accountable. Thereby, an innovative interdependent business ownership model was born. The role of business owner was separated into two parts:

Operational Business Owner

Responsible for custody of the policy documents, day to day management issues, ongoing maintenance of the related website and supporting processes IAPPU/Inter Agency Steering Committee (IASC)

Substantive Business Owner

Responsible for the maintenance of specific outputs via the provision of expertise and authoritative content, or processes to ensure the output reflects relevant policy and practice

¹ Tasmanian Government Project Management Guidelines V.6 (March 2005), p96

Ownership was assigned separately to each output, according to which agency had the most applicable substantive interests. (eg. the Communications Unit of the Department of Premier and Cabinet took substantive ownership of Web Domain Naming Guidelines.) The roles and responsibilities of every business owner for output maintenance, monitoring, and advocacy, were explicitly defined and agreed upon through the Outcome Realisation Plan. This was the most critical step in the project for outcome realisation.

The Success

Output content is now guaranteed to be subject to regular maintenance, review and redevelopment; and accountability for outcome realisation is spread across those agencies better placed to implement and advocate for the project outputs. This model was accepted by stakeholders and endorsed by the steering committee with commendation. It has now become a preferred model to employ for similar whole of government projects by the Tasmanian Government.

3. Realising outcomes when output life is fleeting

In an ICT environment, change is a constant. The better practice advice produced for the project outputs inherently has an extremely limited life span. Compounded by the absence of a defined project schedule for output delivery and timeline for completion, some content became irrelevant even before the project closed.

The short life span for outputs has a high impact on the realisation of outcomes in regard to relevance, currency, and recognition as a better practice resource. This impact is ongoing and will always require attention.

The Solution

An acknowledgement of this problem as a risk management issue was crucial for outcome realisation. The project team had to become more focused on effective time management. A continuous cycle of review and re-development, facilitated by the operational business owner, IAPPU, had to be initiated in order to ensure outputs continue to be relevant and retain practical value to end users. The timing of this cycle was difficult to establish because of the need for some 'settling in' time, when the framework was left to allow users to develop familiarity and comfort with it.

The review cycle created its own new challenges, because each iteration of an output set the fit-for-purpose quality standards higher, which in turn called for the devotion of resources, both human and financial. These were not factored into project planning.

The Success

Changes in technology continue to present challenges. However, with the responsibilities for outcome realisation so explicitly defined prior to project closure, and a commitment from business owners obtained, a continued drive for output redevelopment is sustainable.

Lessons Learned

- Explicitly defining governance roles for outcome realisation before project closure will clarify expectations, accountabilities and resources required.
- The project management system is flexible- one size will not fit all, but the process is crucial. Without considering outcome realisation before project closure, the welfare of outputs after project closure cannot be guaranteed.
- Consider how an output's life span will impact outcomes.
- Business owners need to consider the resource implications for output maintenance post project closure in order to ensure they are allowed to evolve in line with changing context.

Relevant Documents

Tasmanian Government Web Publishing Framework Resources:

www.egovernment.tas.gov.au/themes/web_publishing

Web Publishing Framework Project - Project Business Plan V2.1, 11/2006

Web Publishing Framework Project - Project Review & Closure Report V.1, 19/2/07

Web Publishing Framework Project - Outcome Realisation Plan V1.0, 18/10/2006

All documents can be found at www.egovernment.tas.gov.au



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