



# NSW Countering Violent Extremism Evaluation Approach

## Overview

This Evaluation Approach outlines the rationale for, and components of, the evaluation of CVE initiatives in NSW and details agency responsibilities in relation to CVE evaluation. This includes a program-wide evaluation, to be led by DPC, CVE project evaluations to be led by the implementing agency, and evaluation of policy appropriateness by all affected agencies.

This document aligns with the National CVE Evaluation Framework, which is being developed through the CVE Taskforce in accordance with the COAG decision of 11 December 2015, and has also been drafted with reference to the NSW Government Evaluation Guidelines.

This is a living document which will be reviewed regularly and evolve over time. It is expected that, as our understanding of violent extremism and the best ways to counter it improves, both what we are evaluating, and the way we are evaluating it, will change.

## Current understanding and evaluation of CVE

The NSW Government is committed to the evaluation of programs it delivers, including the suite of CVE initiatives announced in November 2015, to assess their effectiveness, relevance and value for money. In the sensitive CVE context, evaluation is particularly important in ensuring accountability and enhancing the effectiveness of any future initiatives.

However, there is limited evidence of what works in CVE programming or how to evaluate CVE programs effectively. To date, the majority of evaluation of CVE initiatives in NSW and other Australian jurisdictions has been based on participant feedback on individual projects.

CVE is inherently a complex social problem. It has no clear, single solution, rather interdependencies and multifaceted causal pathways. Our understanding of the issue is constantly evolving. The design and implementation of CVE initiatives must therefore be adaptive, iterative and experimental.

Similarly, rather than focussing solely on testing hypotheses about the contribution of programs to outcomes, CVE evaluation should also examine the learning from activities and incorporate and share the experiences of those involved in and affected by CVE initiatives. In doing so, any emerging patterns and lessons can be identified and incorporated into the next iteration of both the initiatives themselves and their evaluation. This approach is taken to evaluating activities in other areas of complex social policy and programs.

In adopting an experimental approach, it is necessary to be mindful of the lessons of previous CVE efforts around the world while also recognising that CVE is highly context-specific. Central among the lessons learnt from previous CVE efforts are:

- CVE initiatives must avoid stigmatising or marginalising particular communities. Efforts should nonetheless focus on those considered most vulnerable to extremism.
- Broad community engagement and clear messaging are critical in ensuring the effectiveness of CVE initiatives in the local context, by maximising community buy-in and addressing any concerns or misconceptions.

- The potential unintended consequences of CVE initiatives should be properly considered and mitigated, while recognising that it will be necessary to take calculated risks to see real impact.
- CVE takes time; expectations about what can be achieved should be realistic.

### **Purpose of CVE evaluation in NSW**

CVE evaluation is difficult, but will be beneficial in helping NSW Government understand the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of CVE initiatives.

The approach to evaluation set out in this document seeks to:

- establish feedback loops to share information about CVE projects, encouraging learning and adaptation
- develop a more comprehensive CVE evidence base
- determine the contribution of particular activities to outcomes and better tailor CVE initiatives, and
- inform decision making about allocation of funds and resources into the future, including any proposed funding of additional programs out of the CVE Fund for Future Initiatives.

### **Principles of NSW CVE Evaluation Approach**

Noting the context above, this approach is based on the following high-level principles:

- We need to learn more about violent extremism and the best way to tackle it.
- This will require experimentation to figure out what does and doesn't work.
- Experimentation should be based on lessons learnt from previous CVE efforts around the world, as well as any available analogue evidence.
- Information about violent extremism and CVE approaches should be shared as widely as possible.
- Violent extremism should be addressed using existing capabilities and services, including in the community and non-government sectors, wherever possible.

### **Scope of CVE evaluation in NSW**

CVE is part of a broad policy continuum for the NSW Government in actively working to reduce the threat of terrorist activities in Australia. The NSW approach to CVE combines broad social cohesion efforts with focussed intervention activities.

CVE outcomes may be realised through programs which are not CVE-specific. CVE considerations exist in a range of policy domains, as shown in the table below.

<b><i>Policy domain</i></b>	<b><i>Lead agency</i></b>
Social cohesion and community resilience	MNSW
Discrimination/vilification	Justice (Attorney General)
Primary/secondary education - public and independent	Education
Tertiary education	Education
General practice and mental health	Health
Offender management	Corrective Services/Juvenile Justice
Rehabilitation/disengagement	Corrective Services/Juvenile Justice
Diversion	Office for Police/Justice/NSW Police
Child welfare/protection	FACS

The purpose of this Evaluation Approach is not to impose a focus on CVE in these policy domains, but rather to ensure that all NSW Government staff involved in policies and programs which may touch on CVE issues are sensitised to this fact, and that all CVE-relevant learnings are captured as a result.

In addition to existing CVE-related projects and activities, this Evaluation Approach is therefore intended to apply not only to those NSW agencies currently implementing CVE initiatives, or responsible for developing new initiatives in the future, but also those agencies whose activities affect, or are affected by, CVE considerations.

In summary, agency responsibilities are:

DPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and undertake a program-wide evaluation of CVE activities in consultation with NSW CVE Steering Committee member agencies.</li> </ul>
Agencies implementing CVE projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an evaluation plan for each CVE project, including the components below wherever relevant.</li> <li>Contribute information to the program-wide evaluation, with reference to the Theory of Change and evaluation questions outlined below.</li> </ul>
Agencies whose activities involve CVE considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute information to the program-wide evaluation, with reference to the Theory of Change and evaluation questions outlined below.</li> </ul>

While this scope is broad, it is important to note that evaluation efforts should be proportionate to the size, and associated risk and impact, of the program or activity being evaluated. Not all projects will need to be evaluated in the same way or to the same extent.

### Theory of Change

Ultimate NSW CVE outcomes can be articulated based on the agreed National CVE Framework and NSW CVE Strategy:

<b>Ultimate outcome</b>
<p>NSW residents face a lower risk of violent extremism, measurable at two levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced likelihood of violent extremism in NSW, through effective early intervention.</li> <li>Reduced consequences in NSW of violent extremism, through effective preparedness and response.</li> </ul>

Intermediate and enabling outcomes expected to contribute to this ultimate outcome can also be determined:

<b>Intermediate outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At-risk individuals in NSW are diverted away from violent extremism.</li> <li>Violent extremists in NSW are disengaged from violent extremism.</li> <li>Community resilience in NSW, in prevention of and response to violent extremism, is improved.</li> </ul>
<b>Enabling outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drivers of violent extremism in NSW, including both push and pull factors, are mitigated.</li> <li>Protective factors against violent extremism in NSW communities are strengthened.</li> </ul>

- Capacity in NSW Government to respond to violent extremism is improved.
- Capacity in communities and the non-government sector to respond to violent extremism is improved.
- Communications which challenge violent extremism, promote cohesion and support positive narratives are more prominent in communities.
- NSW Government, communities, service providers and experts have a better awareness and understanding of violent extremism, its risks and optimal approaches to tackling it.

In seeking to achieve these outcomes, it is noted that CVE is a nascent field which defies simple cause and effect analysis due to frequent and dynamic change in the nature of the issues being addressed.

Further difficulties in determining a traditional program logic for CVE evaluation arise because:

- In addition to measuring a negative (the absence of violent extremism), the small numbers of individuals and incidents involved may reduce the availability of meaningful quantitative measures.
- Many CVE outcomes described elsewhere are relatively intangible and affected by a range of variables, for example social cohesion, trust and perceived safety.
- Distinct policy initiatives are often rolled out simultaneously, which makes attributing causation problematic.

Noting these methodological issues, an initial theory of change for the program-wide evaluation has been adopted which focuses on enhancing our understanding of CVE. The gaps in our knowledge need to be identified and structures created to close those gaps. Feedback from experimentation and consultation will be used to refine and iterate the theory of change. The focus of the initial theory of change is on establishing common ground, building relationships and developing capacities.

A copy of this initial Theory of Change is at **Attachment A**.

Agencies implementing CVE projects should adopt a distinct theory of change for each which details the hypothesised path from those enabling outcomes to the intermediate and ultimate outcomes. In some cases, multiple theories of change and complicated pathways from inputs/activities to outcomes may need to be articulated. In all cases, the assumptions upon which these pathways are suggested should also be outlined in detail and tested rigorously.

As with the program-wide evaluation, project evaluations should aim to constantly revise not only the activities being implemented but also the theory of change itself to reflect any new learning.

Agencies not implementing CVE projects but whose activities involve CVE considerations will also be required to report on how they are contributing to awareness or understanding of CVE.

### **Key evaluation questions**

For the purpose of a program-wide evaluation, DPC will seek to compile responses to the questions below based on regular input from agencies.

A full set of evaluation questions, building on these high-level questions, is at **Attachment B**.

Evaluation questions, covering process, outcome and economic considerations, will apply as relevant to both agencies implementing CVE projects and other agencies whose activities involve CVE considerations.

Agencies implementing CVE projects should similarly seek to develop a set of questions specific to each individual project test the degree to which the project is appropriate, effective and efficient.

#### *Process evaluation*

- Has an evaluation plan been designed and implemented for each CVE project?
- Has a culture of learning been established in relation to CVE?
- Has a culture of experimentation been established in relation to CVE?

#### *Outcome evaluation*

- How well have CVE activities reduced the likelihood or consequences of violent extremism in NSW?
- What is the extent of the contribution of CVE activities to those changes?

#### *Economic evaluation*

- What resources have been put towards CVE project implementation?
- In the short term, how is data being collected to facilitate a comprehensive economic evaluation in the future by measuring and valuing the direct and indirect effects of projects?
- What resources have been put towards CVE evaluation?
- Is the process of collection and sharing CVE information and data (as described in the Theory of Change) an efficient use of agency resources?

### **Evaluation data sources, measures and indicators**

In order to properly evaluate CVE activities, meaningful measures for both outputs and outcomes must be identified.

The methodological challenges in identifying these measures in CVE policy are well documented. Chief among those difficulties is identifying proxy measures to circumvent the impossible task of measuring the negative: the absence of incidents of violent extremism. There is no 'expected' or 'normal' number of incidents against which to measure a relative decline, nor is it possible to estimate the number of incidents that would have occurred, but for CVE activities. For this reason, as described in the theory of change above, agencies should seek to collaborate to determine targets and measures based on the *risk* of violent extremism rather than the *rate* of violent extremism.

CVE also does not operate in a vacuum – it is a complex problem and interacts with a variety of other policy initiatives, including law enforcement efforts. In addition to these conceptual challenges, practical constraints can limit data collection.

These challenges, however, are not unique. Lessons can be drawn from the experience of evaluators both in the crime prevention space and in other policy areas where quantitative data is scarce. It will be necessary to develop outcome measurement even in the absence of clear causal pathways.

In the shorter term, this measurement will focus on the extent to which experiential learning is being incorporated into the ongoing CVE program, and its adaptivity. The program-wide evaluation will be based on data both from individuals CVE projects and independently collected, as well as qualitative consultations with agencies.

Measurement opportunities should be built into CVE projects, and mixed methods approaches used to triangulate information from different sources and cross-validate the data collected. To the extent possible, indicators used to measure performance against outcomes need to be identified early in order to contribute to the baseline data set.

Agencies should seek to assess the level of data already available relevant to the learning outcomes of the program-wide evaluation and project-specific outcomes.

### **Key stakeholders and governance**

Each CVE project evaluation will have a distinct group of key stakeholders.

In relation to the program-wide evaluation, the key stakeholders are:

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Participation/role</b>
CTEMCS Cabinet Committee	Consider and endorse findings
NSW State Counter Terrorism Committee	Consider findings and oversee their implementation
NSW CVE Steering Committee	Oversee methodology, progress and findings
DPC	Conduct and manage program-wide evaluation
NSW agencies implementing CVE projects	Conduct and manage project-level evaluations
NSW agencies, non-government organisations and peak bodies whose activities involve CVE considerations	Contribute information and data to CVE evaluation as relevant. Consider methodology and findings.
CVE experts/academics	Consider methodology and findings as subject matter experts.
CVE practitioners in community and non-government sectors / General public	Interested in methodology and findings. Beneficiary, to the extent findings contribute to improved CVE programming.

### **Internal/external evaluators**

Noting the complexity of CVE evaluation, external evaluators and subject matter experts should be engaged where required to review evaluation methodologies and assist in the development of evaluation plans, including outcomes sequences and measures.

### **Reporting and communication**

The endorsement of this Evaluation Approach by the CTEMCS Cabinet Committee will be sought in a DPC-led submission, drafted in consultation with the NSW CVE Steering Committee, in early 2017. Noting that the program-wide evaluation will continue indefinitely as CVE projects are completed and others initiated, program-wide evaluation findings and any changes to the Approach will be reported to the Cabinet Committee annually.

These periodic reports to the Cabinet Committee will be informed by:

- Agency reports to each NSW CVE Steering Committee meeting which focus on the program-level evaluation questions above. These reports will likely take the form of a 'dashboard' to be updated in advance of each meeting.
- Any reports on project-level evaluations completed by agencies in the interim and sent to the NSW CVE Steering Committee for consideration.

In developing project evaluation plans, agencies implementing CVE projects will be responsible for setting out reporting milestones during and upon completion of each project.

Agencies are required to proactively and publicly release the findings of evaluations unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure in line with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. In addition to enhancing accountability and transparency, in the CVE context this helps to promote the development of the evidence base and encourage shared knowledge.

Further consideration will be given to an appropriate online location to publish either full reports or executive summaries of CVE evaluations.

## Resources

The resources available for CVE in NSW include:

- \$46.4 million to implement the package of measures announced in November 2015
- Funding opportunities through the ANZCTC CVE Sub Committee
- Funding opportunities through other national forums
- Opportunities to partner with the Australian Government in developing and implementing its CVE initiatives

Agencies should look to leverage this available funding wherever possible and, in implementing projects, identify where any unspent funding can be redistributed. Regardless of the funding source, agencies should apply this Evaluation Approach to all relevant projects.

In addition to the resources put towards CVE initiatives themselves, a genuine commitment to continuing evaluation of the effects of these initiatives over time is required. Accordingly, wherever possible, discrete budget and staffing resources should be set aside for CVE evaluation purposes relative to program size and objectives. Where a number of small policy projects can be taken as part of a larger program, for example, agencies may choose to evaluate the collective as a whole rather than considering its component parts separately.

## Risk management

The key risks, and associated mitigation strategies, in relation to the program wide evaluation are outlined below.

<b>Risk type</b>	<b>Mitigation strategies</b>
The methodology or findings of NSW CVE evaluation are not recognised by the academic community or general public.	Expert review as required.
Timeframes for reporting are not met.	Adequate resources allocated from outset.
NSW agencies disagree on outcomes and/or reporting requirements.	Governance through the CVE Steering Committee structure.

Evaluation plans are not of an appropriate standard (and are therefore not useful).	Collaboration and expert review to ensure quality and consistency across the program of activities.
Lack of Ministerial awareness and buy-in.	Endorsement of Evaluation Approach by CTEMCS Cabinet Committee.

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