Working together:
Evidence on collaboration from the reports of independent watchdogs

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Contents

Executive Summary

Collaboration by government agencies is identified in public administration literature and guidance material as an essential strategy to successfully achieve outcomes in many areas where multiple parties and complex issues are involved. There may be references to working together, and collaboration may relate to service delivery or related areas of government activity.

While much has been written about collaboration, reports by independent watchdogs as a body of work provide an important yet previously untapped source of independent evidence and analysis regarding collaboration and governance practices. The research reported here draws on analysis of 112 reports of Auditors General[1] and Ombudsmen, including detailed examination of nine of these reports, to provide a broader and deeper understanding of issues identified by these watchdogs. It has identified and assessed watchdog reports that involve working together, and in providing numerous quotes from these reports is a rich source of commentary and analysis on collaboration. The reports arise from investigations that are scoped in the context of the specific legislation that applies to each watchdog. In general they address issues of effectiveness, efficiency, compliance and administrative fairness of programs and services, but exclude a direct consideration of the merits of the legislation and policies that underpin these programs and services. The analysis is based around the three domains of governance, capacity and information, and their nine characteristics (as detailed in Table 1):

Governance	Capacity	Information
Collaboration, coordination, cooperation	Capacity, including system capacity	Communication, consultation, engagement
Role clarity and accountability	Leadership, commitment, resources, relationships, trust	Drawing together, sharing and managing information
Plans, processes, policies, formal agreements	Team, training, guidance	
Risk management, monitoring and evaluation		

Governance issues make up a large proportion of all issues identified. The reports mostly treat the governance arrangements in place as a given and do not assess them in the context of other available models. There is extensive coverage of 'lead agency' arrangements, with the term having different meanings in different reports. At a minimum the lead agency is seen as having a broad oversight role. Watchdog reports also give strong emphasis to processes and formalised agreements. These agreements can provide a framework for governance and operations including identification and clear articulation of roles and responsibilities and provisions for transparency and accountability.

Less commonly found in watchdog reports are specific references to capacity as an important contributor to effective collaboration. In particular, issues around leadership, commitment and relationships receive little or no attention in the reports reviewed. Some reports have identified a lack of leadership, relationship management and aspects of resourcing as significant issues. The most common examples of watchdog reports addressing capacity as a broad concept arise from reports looking at the not for profit (NFP) sector and government's relationships with NFPOs.

Collaboration-related approaches to information are identified at a similar rate to capacity issues, with the key information issue relating to drawing together, sharing and managing information. Communication and consultation in the context of collaboration are also identified as significant issues, and there is an emphasis on sound information management practices.

Overall, the watchdog reports reviewed identify a wide range of practices and factors that support and hinder working together. This project has identified pointers additional to those typically highlighted in the literature for public sector managers and researchers:

- considering the merits of assigning a central agency the overarching responsibility for collaboration;
- considering a full range of governance models;
- designing robust accountability arrangements;
- actively monitoring for barriers in legislation;
- enabling and encouraging innovation;
- including strategies that address critical aspects of capacity; and
- participating in information sharing exercises to assist in focussing and targeting agency programs and identifying additional opportunities for collaboration.

There is very limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of collaboration by the public sector that is collected in a consistent manner across multiple programs and initiatives. This project has developed an approach to add to this evidence that mines data from existing sources of evidence: watchdog reports. The source material in the watchdog reports has the advantages of being independent from the agencies involved in the collaboration, and of being developed using rigorous methods. There is potential to advance research on collaboration and other key public administration issues and strategies using methods similar to those used in this project. Research that looks at how watchdogs collaborate could assist in strengthening of the institutional bases and practices involved.

In conclusion, this project has confirmed from an extensive evidence base that collaboration remains very problematic for the public sector. There is a large array of evidence regarding issues that arise where collaboration is required, with lessons that are relevant beyond the specific areas investigated. However, it is not evident that the wider public sector is drawing on this evidence extensively to learn and improve. There are also lessons for watchdogs from this research that may help to increase the contribution of their work to improving public sector collaboration.

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1 It should be noted that where we are discussing Auditors General within the broader narration we have used the Westminster convention of not hyphenating the title. However, where we discuss a particular report or comments made by a particular Auditor General, we either hyphenate or not depending on the usage in that particular jurisdiction.

1. Introduction

Collaboration as good practice

Current approaches to public administration have a strong emphasis on collaboration as an essential feature of good practice. For instance, "collaborate and build common purpose" is one of ten elements of Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) Capability Reviews with the explanation that it "assesses the agency's ability to work across government and beyond to address crosscutting issues" (APSC 2012, 224). Amendments to the Public Service Act in 2013 identify cross-government collaboration as one of the roles and responsibilities of Secretaries, and the agency's collaboration in support of government priorities and community needs is now part of their annual performance evaluation (APSC 2014, 22).

Related reforms in the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA) have a focus on cooperation and partnering, requiring a Commonwealth entity to "encourage officials of the entity to cooperate with others to achieve common objectives, where practicable". In imposing requirements on others, it must among other things take into account "the effects of imposing those requirements" (PGPA 2013, 20). These are recent developments in long-standing public policy agendas of joined-up government (Wilkins 2002) and whole-of-government approaches (Management Advisory Committee 2004).

Despite the recognition of the importance of collaboration, it is identified as a significant challenge to the sector as "[m]any Capability Reviews have found that agencies are 'too siloed' with potential operational and/or strategic synergies lost" (APSC 2014: 23).

Concern has been expressed about the lack of empirical evidence regarding collaboration, and a tendency "to idealise collaboration as the mode of coordination across boundaries " (O'Flynn 2014, 15). In relation to collaborative processes, Head (2014) commented that "[t]he unresolved question is whether they produce different and better outcomes" than conventional organisational processes (p. 146). Similarly, Blackman (2014) noted that there has been little academic research or systematic study into the successes and limitations of approaches to working across boundaries (p. 174).

It is not evident that this literature has made significant use of the work of independent watchdogs to provide insights into the effectiveness of collaboration. Many watchdogs have responsibilities and powers under legislation to investigate and report to Parliament on aspects of public administration, and do so protected from direction by the executive. Some have responsibilities limited to specific areas of government and aspects of public administration such as corruption, whereas Auditors General and Ombudsmen have more broadly specified responsibilities (Wilkins 2015).

This project therefore looks to the work of Australian and New Zealand Auditors General and Ombudsmen as a source of evidence on collaboration practices and factors that support and hinder working together. This work includes performance audits, investigations, and inquiries that address issues of effectiveness, efficiency, compliance and administrative fairness of programs and services. Either by statute or convention, the work excludes direct consideration of the merits of the legislation and policies that underpin these programs and services under scrutiny. Investigations are generally at the instigation of the office holder, and might be prompted by parliamentary interest, complaints, whistleblower disclosures, and child death reviews. The generic term 'investigations' is used in this report for the varied work of the watchdogs involved.

This research project has been supported by a grant provided by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). The project Public sector collaboration and governance: evidence from accountability agencies aims "to provide a broader and deeper understanding of common governance issues uncovered by the accountability agencies, along with their causes and possible remedies", and in particular looks at the practices and factors that support and hinder working together, how these practices and factors align with other research and writings on collaboration, the findings about the effectiveness of collaboration, and the extent to which these findings contribute to learning and accountability.

Collaboration concepts

The term 'collaboration' is used in different ways by different authors. Some give a narrow interpretation and define it as a particular form of working together. However, according to O'Flynn (2008), "there is a current trend to call all forms of working together 'collaboration'" (p. 184). This is consistent with dictionary definitions that assign meanings along the lines of working with others on a joint project.

This report uses the term 'collaboration' in this broad sense for ease of communication. Nevertheless, in examining the reports of watchdogs the underlying factors that distinguish particular forms of working together will be identified so that the nature of the collaboration involved (as broadly defined) can be analysed.

Much has been written about the need for collaboration, as well as its benefits. In 2008, ANZSOG released a monograph of contributed papers on collaborative governance arising from a conference posing the question "A new era of public policy in Australia?" (O'Flynn and Wanna 2008). The Preface questions whether collaboration is rhetoric or reality, commenting that:

It is clear today that governments across the developed world are preaching the gospel of collaboration, cooperation and coordination, and are realising that their objectives cannot be achieved without collaboration with others (Fels 2008, xi).

In exploring the concept of collaboration, Wanna's (2008) chapter observes that "[c]ollaboration means joint working or working in conjunction with others. It implies actors—individuals, groups or organisations—cooperating in some endeavour" (p. 3).

In a concluding chapter, four common strategies of working together are identified, "each representing a unique inter-organisational linkage, requiring different commitments of trust, time and turf" (O'Flynn 2008, 186). Drawing on the work of Himmelman (2002). the four strategies are identified as:

• Networking: an informal relationship in which information is exchanged for mutual benefit.

• Coordination: a more formal linkage in which information is exchanged and activities are altered in pursuit of mutual benefit and achievement of common purpose.

• Cooperation: an exchange of information, altering activities and resource sharing for mutual benefit in pursuit of a common purpose. Formal agreements can be used.

• Collaboration : this is distinctive, as it involves a willingness of the parties to enhance one another's capacity – helping the other to "be the best they can be" for mutual benefit and common purpose. In collaboration, the parties share risks, responsibilities and rewards, they invest substantial time, have high levels of trust, and share common turf (O'Flynn 2008: 185-186).

A recent edited book (O'Flynn et al. 2014) focuses on connecting across boundaries to achieve goals, the concept of boundaries extending to organisational, jurisdictional and sectoral boundaries, and these potentially being real or imagined. Head's chapter focuses on process and outcome factors in successful collaboration. Importantly, he notes that of the four modes or levels of working together – networking, cooperating, coordinating, and collaborating – "[n]one of these is intrinsically superior; the key point is that each may be better suited for specific tasks and challenges" (Head 2014, 143).

This project sees collaboration 'through the eyes' of the watchdogs and is therefore likely to result in areas of focus different to those from other perspectives. For instance, watchdogs tend to focus on areas where performance can be improved and not on successful initiatives. Furthermore, a review of the work of the Dutch audit office in relation to collaboration identified that key audit standards applied were clear and controllable goals, sufficient authority and information, and clear consequences (Bemelens-Videc 2003; Wilkins and Boyle 2011). It is likely that a similar focussing of criteria will underpin the investigations reviewed in this project.

While some may see collaboration as inherently good in all situations where working together is required, this project takes a more situational perspective on the basis that collaboration comes with costs and risks as well as benefits, and therefore the degree and nature of collaboration that is warranted will depend on the specific context.

Importantly, the project focuses on the effectiveness of collaboration as implemented – not whether it is inherently good as a strategy. For public administrators, there are many aspects of government policy that determine the degree and nature of collaboration required – for instance, the scope and functions of government departments are set by the government of the day and can be changed through amalgamations, shifting of functions between agencies, and creation of new agencies, thus changing the requirements for inter-organisational collaboration.

Domains and characteristics of collaboration

Many different characteristics of collaboration have been proposed in guidance documents, reports and public administration literature. For instance, in looking at lessons from examples of collaboration, Wanna (2008) focused on the importance of "commitment, trust, leadership, clarity of objectives and planning stages, developing understanding and mutual working relations" (p. 11).

O'Flynn (2014) identified six categories that enable exploration of specific factors that may be enablers or barriers: "formal structures; commonality/complexity; people, culture and leadership; [p]ower and politics; performance, accountability and budgets; and boundary objects" (p. 26).

Blackman (2014, 175-182), through an investigation involving four case studies of how agencies worked across boundaries, identified the following enablers and barriers:

Enablers:
Clear mandate and central leadership
Pattern-breaking behaviour
Shared understanding of objectives outcomes

Barriers:
Programmatic focus and focus on core business
Staff turnover
Decision making and capabilities
Misalignment of evaluation and accountability

She concluded that "there needs to be a greater clarity as to the differences between enablers and barriers for a given context in order to improve potential collaborative strategies" (p. 187).

This suggests that there is not an agreed analytic framework that is suited to an analysis of watchdog reports for the purposes of this project. Thus, an analytic framework was developed by drawing on characteristics of collaboration identified in the literature and an initial analysis of watchdog reports.

The comparison of the many characteristics of collaboration found in the literature, in conjunction with the initial review of watchdog reports, points to three broad but relevant collaboration domains: governance; capacity; and information. As shown in Table 1, these three broad domains encompass nine specific collaboration characteristics.

A number of areas and concepts are not included as characteristics, as they are matters of broad context and are not typically addressed by watchdogs in their reports. For instance, we omitted characteristics identified by O'Flynn (2014) such as power and politics, formal structures, and budget (p. 26).

Table 1. Nine characteristics of collaboration

Governance	Capacity	Information
Collaboration, coordination, cooperation Formal structures (such as a lead agency approach), the role of legislation, working across levels of government and other sectors.	*Capacity, including system capacity* System capacity	*Communication, consultation, engagement* Community involvement
Role clarity and accountability Outcomes, problem definition, objectives, mission, goals, purpose; responsibility, roles, accountability	*Leadership, commitment, resources, relationships, trust* Trust, allocating resources	*Drawing together, sharing and managing information* Drawing information together; sharing of information; information management; supportive ICT; and common terminology
Plans, processes, policies, formal agreements Multi-party (including joint) planning; processes, policies; and formal agreements (MoUs etc)	*Team, training, guidance* Team structure, team work; training, skilling; guidance	
Risk management, monitoring and evaluation Addressing risks associated with collaboration and coordinating risk management and evaluation across agencies		

Methodology

We adopted a two-phase, broad-based search strategy to identify a pool of potential reports by Australian and New Zealand Auditors General and Ombudsmen. The first phase included scanning the listings of reports for the period of 2009 to 2014, identification of some significant earlier reports, and discussions with the Heads of Performance Audit and Deputy Ombudsman to identify reports that addressed collaboration in some way. In all, 112 reports were found to have content relevant to collaboration in the context of this project (Appendix A).

In the second phase, these 112 reports were subjected to a high-level review of their contents to identify reports that had substantive material regarding collaboration and related governance issues. Nine reports were selected for detailed analysis to gain deeper insights into the detailed approaches involved (see Appendix B). These nine reports were grouped into three subject-area clusters, each containing three reports, and reflect the diversity of topics investigated by watchdogs that raise collaboration as an issue (Table 2).

Table 2. The nine reports grouped in three clusters

Report	Source	Scope
Cluster 1: Child protection		
Review of the NSW Child Protection System	NSW Ombudsman 2014	State agencies, NFPOs
Planning for children in care	WA Ombudsman 2011	State agencies, NFPOs
Care and Protection System	ACT Auditor-General 2013	State agencies
Cluster 2: Environment		
The Asbestos Report: An investigation into the regulation of asbestos in Queensland	QLD Ombudsman 2013a	State agencies, local government, the community
Our Heritage and Our Future: Health of the Swan Canning River System	WA Auditor General 2014	State agencies, local government, businesses, and the community
Managing the Environmental Impacts of Transport	VIC Auditor-General 2014a	State agencies,
Cluster 3: Collaboration arrangements		
Prisoner Transportation	VIC Auditor-General 2014b	State agencies, contractors
Effective Cross-Agency Agreements	CTH Auditor-General* 2010	Commonwealth agencies
Commonwealth and Territory agencies delivering Indigenous Housing programs - Remote Housing Reforms in the NT	CTH Ombudsman 2012	Commonwealth and Territory agencies, local government and service providers

* Also termed the 'Auditor-General for Australia' with reports released in the name of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO).

The nine reports were selected to provide a cross-section of cases and issues; a mix of reports by both Auditors General and Ombudsmen; and coverage across State, Territory and Commonwealth jurisdictions and the private and not-for-profit sectors. Overall this selection sought to provide rich and potentially differing insights into collaboration.

We used a multi-layered approach to identifying issues from the reports because watchdog reports do not have a standardised format, and therefore relevant material may be embedded in different reports in different ways. Issues were identified by reviewing each of the nine reports and analysing their recommendations and key findings to identify subject matter that related to collaboration. The text in the report that supported this subject matter was then reviewed. In addition, reports were scanned in their entirety and word searches were undertaken in each report using root words for the keywords collaboration, coordination and cooperation (collabor-, coordinat- and cooperat-).

This method identified evidence-based observations and recommendations relating to performance matters linked to collaboration. The vast majority are related to areas where performance has not met requirements, but there are some issues that relate to observations of better practice and successful operation.

The nine reports are an illustrative sample and are unlikely to be statistically representative of the larger pool of reports, let alone the full body of watchdog reports scanned. As such, the analysis of the nine reports and the arising comments are illustrative of the reports and work of watchdogs but not definitive.

Following an initial analysis of the larger pool of reports, feedback was sought from the accountability organisations and information was gathered to provide context and information about particular reports. The initial results of the research were presented at meetings of Ombudsmen in February 2015 and heads of Performance Audit in March 2015. They were also shared with senior staff of watchdog organisations, with all the feedback obtained being incorporated into further analysis of the relevant reports.

Structure of the report

The next four chapters of this report provide an analysis of the collaboration-related content of watchdog reports in relation to: the overarching interest in (and in-principle support for) collaboration by watchdog agencies (chapter 2); governance issues (chapter 3); capacity issues (chapter 4); and information issues (chapter 5). Throughout the report, the analysis includes quotes from relevant watchdog reports to provide a rich source of commentary and analysis regarding collaboration. It is also set in the broader context of literature on collaboration. Chapter 6 concludes with a summary of key findings and suggestions for further research.

2. Watchdog agencies' interest in and in-principle support for collaboration

Many reports by Auditors General and Ombudsmen identify services that require the participation of more than one agency, and identify shortcomings in governance arrangements in particular.

In a relatively early contribution, the Auditor-General of New South Wales (NSW) produced a performance audit report titled Agencies Working Together to Improve Services. In the foreword the Auditor-General observed:

> Since the 1990s, the NSW Government has been promoting collaboration between departments. Guidelines have been issued on how to set up collaborative projects; central agencies have provided support and forums have been established to facilitate joint problem solving (2006).

The foreword indicates that the audit reviewed three case studies where collaboration had been used. The report "highlights some of the benefits to be gained from the Government taking a collaborative approach to resolving complex problems. It also highlights the risks that chief executives need to address to make sure these approaches work".

The practical problems arising from a lack of collaboration are illustrated in a report released by the Queensland Ombudsman in 2013 that investigated the approaches of state agencies and local councils to asbestos regulation (Queensland Ombudsman 2013a). Box 1 provides some telling examples of the impact on citizens of the lack of coordination between agencies.

Box 1: Examples of the lack of coordination between agencies in Queensland asbestos regulation

• *Asbestos in a neighbour's yard:* Six weeks after making a complaint to the council, the complainant was advised that the complaint was not within the jurisdiction of the council and she should contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ). WHSQ records appeared to show that the matter fell within the jurisdiction of Queensland Health (QH) and the council.

• *Cleaning up asbestos contamination:* A painter had pressure-cleaned an asbestos roof causing splashing of asbestos particles but had then left the site. WHSQ officers said they did not have a role in arranging the clean-up of the asbestos contamination after a painter had cleaned an asbestos roof as it was no longer a worksite because the contractor had left. Officers from the then environment department (now the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, DEHP) also denied responsibility. It appeared to be possible that QH and the relevant council could also have denied responsibility on the basis that a contractor had caused the damage.

• *Asbestos dumped on Crown land:* The land was gazetted as a road, although it was unused. DEHP stated that the removal of the asbestos was the responsibility of the council. However, the council stated that it was only required to mow the grass and not to remove waste on the side of the road. The asbestos remained where it had been dumped as no agency would take responsibility for removing it.

Source: Queensland Ombudsman 2013a

The report on asbestos management by the Queensland Ombudsman focused on a lack of coordination[2] and made an opening observation that "[t]his lack of coordination lies at the heart of my concerns about asbestos regulation and response in Queensland" (2013a, iii).

Some reports have collaboration as a central theme. Amongst the nine reports we examined more closely, this is most obvious in the report on cross-agency agreements, in which the Commonwealth Auditor-General observed:

On a day to day basis, officials from different agencies work across organizational boundaries to deliver government services, or collaborate in the formulation of national policies. Interdepartmental Committees (IDCs), taskforces, and joint working parties are just a few of the mechanisms used to coordinate substantial cross agency initiatives (ANAO 2010, 13).

Many other reports identify collaboration as a component of a broader analysis of performance. For instance, the Ombudsman of Western Australia commented that he identified the development of a collaborative, inter-agency approach to preventing youth suicide, "as the reasons for suicide by young people are multi-factorial and cross a range of government agencies" (2014, 7).

Most watchdog reports use terms like coordination, collaboration and partnering interchangeably. This is understandable as it is difficult to create tightly defined categories that are mutually exclusive and to then categorise individual collaborations. It is also awkward to use each term in practical situations as a tightly defined label.

The Commonwealth Auditor-General's report on Indigenous programs is unusual in that it discussed a spectrum of engagement strategies, observing that:

[t]here are various models that describe different ways in which organisations might work together, but all point to a spectrum of engagement strategies, which might be helpful to consider in positioning the type of engagement required in the coordination arrangements for Indigenous affairs (ANAO 2012, 59).

It drew explicitly on the spectrum of four common strategies for working together – networking, coordination, cooperation and collaboration – summarised in section 1.2 above (see Figure 1). The report included use of the spectrum concept, commenting:

there would be clear benefits for the coordination arrangements for Indigenous affairs being shifted towards a more collaborative arrangement … [t]his would require strengthened leadership with a clearer role to address more tangibly some of the critical strategic issues in Indigenous affairs, such as: making agencies' mainstream programs more accessible and effective for Indigenous people; strategic oversight of new and existing expenditure; prioritising and sequencing programs across sectors; or integrating program delivery on the ground (ANAO 2012, 60).

Figure 1. Spectrum of engagement strategies (ANAO 2012:59, adapted from Himmelman 2002)

While the report made clear that collaboration involves deeper engagement than coordination, consistent with much of the literature it does not use the terms for the four strategies to describe distinct approaches assessed against relevant criteria of engagement. Instead the terms are used to have similar meanings and potentially interchangeably, for instance, it is stated that "the coordination task should focus on critical cross-cutting areas that require the cooperation of other agencies " (ANAO 2012, 41). Similarly, the report title features the term coordination but its content includes extensive use of cooperation and collaboration as well as coordination (but not networking).

The focus on collaboration by watchdogs is not unique to Australia. For example the Auditor-General of New Zealand (2012) commented in a report on recovery from the Canterbury earthquakes that "[a]n effective recovery requires all involved – public sector agencies, communities, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector – to coordinate and collaborate well" (p. 5). A subsequent report on an aspect of the same topic opened with a quote from the Director, Strategic Issues of the United States national audit office (the Government Accountability Office): "[r]ecovery from major disasters is a complex undertaking that involves the combined efforts of all levels of government in order to succeed" (2013, 5).

It is evident from these examples that issues of collaboration arise reasonably frequently in the work of watchdogs, and their work provides a range of evidence and findings that can be assessed on the basis of individual reports or by grouping their work to identify patterns and trends.

The reports are underpinned by systematic investigation approaches, for instance the performance audit work of Auditors General is guided by auditing standards and quality assurance systems (Bemelens-Videc 2005). In a report on the response of organisations to

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2 The term 'coordination' is used in the report in a broad sense. Identifying it as collaboration is consistent with the approach in this report to use the term 'collaboration' to mean working together, rather than the specific meaning used by Himmelman (2002) and others who have built on his differentiation of four strategies for working together.

domestic and family violence, the Auditor-General of NSW specifically stated:

> Our performance audit methodology is designed to satisfy Australian Audit Standards ASAE 3500 on performance auditing, and to reflect current thinking on performance auditing practices. We produce our audits under a quality management system certified to International Standard ISO 9001. Our processes have also been designed to comply with the auditing requirements specified in the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983 (2011, 39).

The report sets out details about the audit criteria, exclusions, approach and sample to assist readers to understand the nature and strength of the evidence underpinning the report (Auditor-General of NSW 2011, 38-39).

The reports reviewed indicate that watchdogs frequently assert collaboration to be, as a matter of principle, a key requirement for effective service delivery. They primarily make statements focussing on the importance of coordination and working together, on occasions attributing this to the policy context, the government approach, and origins in legislation.

For instance, the three Child Protection reports (listed in Table 2 above) all made a case for the importance of collaboration. These are made in the form of interpreting the policy context, the government approach, making a supporting statement of origins in legislation, and by direct assertion of its importance for effective services. They focus on aspects of collaboration that include cooperation, coordination, shared responsibility and sharing of information. The three Environment reports indicate a lack of coordination and a need to strengthen the capacity to effectively oversee and transparently report. The three Collaboration reports comment on coordination; productive cross-agency relationships; and agencies being required to work closely with each other and with all stakeholders.

The Auditor-General of NSW identified strategies to reduce alcohol-related crime that include preventing intoxication, reducing opportunities for crime, and responding to incidents after they occur. He identified the many factors involved as the reason for agencies to work together:

> Many factors affect crime rates including the weather, the number of premises, access to transport, the age of patrons and time of day. Therefore it is important that government agencies and licensees work together to implement these strategies to reduce crime (2008, 2).

In-principle support of collaboration by watchdogs may have been informed by reading public administration guidance and research literature, or their accumulated experience. For instance, under a heading "everyone needs to work together", the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Auditor-General cites the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 in arguing that:

> at the Government level it is not only child protection and community services portfolios that have a role to play in improved outcomes for children in out-of-home care but also other portfolio areas such as health, education, justice, housing and employment. Families, communities, business and services all have a role. Everyone needs to work together (ACT Auditor-General's Office 2013:146).

This illustrates a reliance on external sources. The Ombudsman of Western Australia (2014) in the youth suicide report has several examples of learning from other reports, for instance observing that:

> [t]he importance of information sharing in preventing the deaths of children and young people was recognised in New South Wales in 2008, through the Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services (p. 165).

The Ombudsman also commented in this report that research literature "recognises that coordination between agencies that have contact with young people is essential to achieve appropriate services and supports for those young people at risk of suicide" (p. 165), citing a report by the Queensland Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. Similarly, the Ombudsman cites a Federal Department of Health document, Models of collaborative care for children and youth (0-25 years), in support of a statement that:

> [a] coordinated approach to suicide prevention for young people can include enhanced communication, joint education, and joint program and system planning, and as an overarching principle, should involve a degree of systemic co-operation (p. 165).

The Victorian Auditor-General (2014c) pointed to research evidence in support of joint planning and coordination in a report on the effectiveness of planning and coordination for mental health across Victoria's criminal justice system:

> Better practice research indicates that joint planning and coordination is required where policy issues span the responsibilities of more than one agency, where agencies' responsibilities are interdependent, or where coordinating services can reduce costs and increase quality for end users (2014c, ix).

In the same report, the Auditor-General also commented that the level of inter-dependence between the two key agencies "necessitates effective collaboration and coordination" (2014d, xi).

Watchdogs have not been uncritical in their support for collaboration. For instance, the Commonwealth Auditor-General in a report on coordination arrangements for Indigenous programs observed that:

> [t]he main purpose for coordination between government agencies is to achieve results that could not have been achieved by any one of the agencies working alone. Coordination across different government agencies is difficult because each agency is accountable to its own ministers and different operating cultures are often difficult to bring together. Accordingly, there are various risks to coordination, as well as benefits (ANAO 2012, 39-40).

These risks, as well as potential benefits, were illustrated in a table sourced from the New Zealand State Services Commission (Figure 2 below).

Similarly, in a recent report on support for local government, the Victorian Auditor-General concluded that while two entities had worked together on numerous support initiatives "collaboration is not always appropriate" (2015a, 59). He cited the advocacy role of one of the entities, a membership association incorporated under a specific statute, in the case of it having a different position to the government (2015a, 60). However, he considered potential duplication as a reason to be more collaborative, observing that the audit's survey of councils:

> found a significant number of councils—23 of 70—believed [the entities] duplicated each other's work, suggesting there is potential for them to be more effective by adopting a more collaborative and coordinated approach (2015a, xvii).

Benefits/advantages	Cost/disadvantages
• a potentially better result for the population or entity of interest; • helping to convey 'big picture' strategic issues (e.g. sustainable development) which are not captured by agency objectives; • helping to realise synergies and maximise the cost effectiveness of policy and/or service delivery; • exploiting economies of scale (e.g. sharing of IT facilities, data and information, property); • bringing together organisations or key staff whose cooperation could prove beneficial in other areas; • improving customer focus and thus the quality and user-friendliness of services; • assisting prioritisation, resolution of potential conflicts and trade-off decision-making; and • developing goodwill with other agencies that are likely to be critical to future successes.	• less clear lines of accountability for policy development and service delivery • longer decision-making processes; • greater difficulty in measuring effectiveness and determining impact, because of the need to develop and maintain more sophisticated performance measurement systems; • direct and indirect costs of management and staff time spent establishing and sustaining joint working arrangements; • organisational and transitional costs of introducing joint approaches and structures; and • can lead towards consensus and the 'lowest common denominator' at the expense of making tougher decisions about trade-offs to get better results for the public.

Figure 2. Advantages and disadvantages of coordination (ANAO 2012, 40, sourced from the New Zealand State Services Commission).

In summary, watchdogs have frequently expressed in-principle support for collaboration drawing on authoritative sources and the cumulative findings of their work. They have also highlighted both the benefits and costs of collaboration and hence the importance of considering a range of governance models.

3. Governance

Through analysis of the issues identified in the nine reports of the three domains (see Appendix B), we determined that governance issues were raised more often than Information or Capacity Issues (54% compared with 25% and 21% respectively). Governance issues were also regularly raised as an issue in the larger sample of reports reviewed.

Collaboration, coordination, cooperation

The terms collaboration, coordination and cooperation were typically used interchangeably in the watchdog reports reviewed. Recommendations relating to collaboration commonly require an agency to 'work with' other agencies. For instance, the report of the Auditor General of Western Australia on the Swan River used this wording in four out of seven recommendations relating to collaboration (2014, 9). Insights into the issues underlying the distinctions between working together governance models are provided in the following sections covering formal structures, the lead agency approach, the role of legislation, and collaboration across levels of government and with the private and NFP sectors.

Formal structures/Lead agency approach

Where new formal structures are put in place with (amongst other things) an objective of providing more integrated services, the arrangements are generally treated by watchdogs as a given and not assessed in the context of other models that were available. In contrast, a 2006 report by the Victorian Ombudsman made some recommendations specifically calling for adoption of particular collaboration approaches. Excerpts include:

> formal arrangements with other agencies
>
> a date at which time the details of the arrangement are to be reviewed
>
> establish the State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault, or similar inter-agency committee, as a permanent standing committee
>
> establish an Indigenous State-wide Sexual Assault Steering Committee
>
> consider utilising cross-government project teams
>
> That government agencies and Centres Against Sexual Assault explore partnership projects with agencies representing or serving people with culturally or linguistically diverse background (2006, 26).

The Auditor-General of NSW 2006 report on agencies working together provided a framework of three common governance models:

> • lead agency model where one agency assumes overall responsibility for the project and controls funds
>
> • committee or partnership model where agencies come together and equally share responsibilities
>
> • board or joint venture model where a separate entity (a Board) is established with responsibility for all aspects of the project (2006, 18)

It supported inter-agency committees as possibly the best way to ensure collaboration. The report also identified an overarching responsibility for promoting collaboration, observing that:

[p]rimary responsibility for promoting collaboration between agencies lies with the NSW Premier's Department. The department published guidelines for agencies in 1999 on how to establish collaborative projects. These guidelines consist of a series of checklists covering key steps in collaboration illustrated by a number of case studies on best practice (2006, 12).

It directed its recommendations to this central agency.

The Auditor-General of NSW 2006 report observed that the lead agency model "preserves agency accountability while working collaboratively. That is, one agency is accountable for expenditure and outcomes and is in control of processes and priorities" (2006, 18). It noted:

All the case studies had adopted a lead agency model. However in all cases, a more appropriate governance model may have been a committee or partner structure because the problems they were addressing went beyond the responsibilities of a single agency (2006, 18).

In a 2007 report on homelessness, the Auditor-General of NSW directed a number of recommendations to the housing agency "as lead agency on behalf of government" with the requirement that the agency "work in cooperation with other agencies" (p. 3).

The term "lead agency" is used in various ways, which don't always include having the control of funds, or the responsibility for the project being formalised in some way (elements of the Auditor-General of NSW's (2006) definition). For instance, the Commonwealth Auditor-General, in the report on coordination arrangements for Indigenous programs, observed that:

[i]n the Australian Government, a lead agency may have various roles, but a broad oversight role to assess whether implementation progress, expenditure and results are meeting the Government's objectives for Indigenous programs is central to informing both policies and delivery models (ANAO 2012, 40-41).

The Auditor-General commented jointly with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) in the Better Practice Guide on policy implementation issues that:

[w]here a number of entities are contributing to the delivery of a program or taking action to achieve program goals, the costs and benefits of different whole-of-government approaches to implementation should be considered. However, as a minimum, identification of a lead entity is usually beneficial. For the arrangement to be effective, the lead entity should have the authority and recognition to act in this capacity. It may be the case that the lead entity has primary policy responsibility (rather than an operational role), effectively becoming an actual or de facto purchaser of services from one or more other entities to facilitate implementation (ANAO and PM&C 2014, 25).

In a further report that addressed the governance arrangements in place to provide flood relief and recovery, the Victorian Auditor-General (2013) found that "[t]he governance model, based on the SFRG [Secretaries' Flood Recovery Group], and using existing departmental structures and arrangements, did not encourage either collaboration or coherence across the suite of programs administered" (2013, vii).

It concluded that:

[e]mergency management in Victoria has been affected by a siloed approach in the past which worked against achieving vital collaboration between stakeholders. Yet the model chosen to lead the state

relief and recovery efforts in 2010–11 perpetuated the model of multiple stakeholders each responsible for their own piece of the recovery task … Without clear authority and with funding controlled by each department, the key governance committee, the SFRG, inevitably had a coordination rather than a leadership role (2013a, viii).

The ACT Auditor-General's report on the child protection system recommended that the child protection agency should lead the improvement of cross-government collaboration for children, young people and their families, but does not detail the specifics of such an arrangement beyond indicating a number of recommended tasks. These include presenting analysis of care reports to a committee of Directors General and supporting this committee, developing a protocol or some other mechanism for "cooperative working, better integrating services internally and documenting and making available information on relevant Government collaborative programs and initiatives" (ACT Auditor-General's Office 2013, 31).

The Ombudsman of Western Australia recommended in the youth suicide report that the Mental Health Commission, in effect as a lead agency, work together with three other departments to consider "the development of a collaborative inter-agency approach, including consideration of a shared screening tool and a joint case management approach for young people with multiple risk factors for suicide" (2014, 171).

The Queensland Ombudsman report on asbestos differs from many other reports where a lead agency is identifiable. It looked at an issue where it was not evident that a single agency had at least lead responsibility. The Ombudsman (2013a, vii) identified that "the framework for regulating asbestos in Queensland is complex and contains a number of gaps and areas of confusion".

The report provided the perspectives of different agencies where there was not an agreed cooperative arrangement in place, and identified perceived obstacles to addressing asbestos issues until this is achieved. It recommended the creation of a lead agency for the coordination of issues relevant to the management and regulation of asbestos, identifying specific roles for a lead agency once created. It should:

be responsible for reporting on asbestos issues to a single Minister and, through the Minister, to Cabinet. While agencies will still be responsible for delivering policy an undertaking their individual functions, the lead agency will effectively act as a coordination body and single decision-maker who could take responsibility for coordination and strategic oversight, as well as ensuring that actions are taken in a timely manner (Queensland Ombudsman 2013a, vii).

However, the Ombudsman recommended that the lead agency work with other relevant bodies to ensure that that there would be adequate facilities in each local government area and that adequate information would be given on council websites (Queensland Ombudsman 2013a, xii). Requiring a lead agency to ensure that actions are taken by others does not sit well with it not having any formal power to ensure that these requirements are met, but it does emphasise the extent to which informal influencing skills were expected to be applied.

Key learnings in this context are that agencies should:

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• Consider the merits of assigning a central agency the overarching responsibility for collaboration by the agencies in the jurisdiction;

• Consider a full range of governance models in terms of benefits, costs, risks and opportunities;

• Be clear about responsibilities, powers and accountabilities if adopting lead agency or other models that are not tightly specified.

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The role of legislation

Legislation can enable collaboration, but there may still need to be a heavy reliance placed on influencing skills. For instance, the WA Auditor General report on the Swan River focused on an agency that had responsibility for the issue and broad legislative provisions that enable collaborative arrangements. The Auditor General observed that the legislation "provides for a more coordinated and collaborative approach to managing the river system" (2014, 5), but that:

> agency responsibilities for river management are complex and often overlap. The [agency] must often negotiate and work with others to achieve results or change practices (Auditor General Western Australia (p. 4).

The legislation contains specific features to address collaboration, including that the agency has powers to enter into collaborative arrangements binding parties or providing for measures to be taken jointly (Western Australia Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006 Section 27 p. 26-27). Notwithstanding these provisions, the agency can only influence other agencies and organisations through negotiation, as it doesn't have the power to direct other parties or take action in areas that are the responsibility of other agencies.

The WA Ombudsman report on care planning focused on legislative provisions for the child protection agency to work in cooperation with other agencies, along with government policy requirements for the preparation of Health and Educational Plans. The legislation provides that "in performing functions under this Act, the CEO must endeavour to work in cooperation with public authorities, non-government agencies and service providers" (2011, 26).

Legislation is sometimes identified as a barrier to collaboration or a cause of inconsistent practices. For instance, a report by the Queensland Ombudsman relating to agencies' responses to the Hendra Virus identified that "[t]here was dated and overlapping legislation that addressed similar issues which lead [sic] to inconsistent quarantine practices across the various responses". Overall, "[i]mproved coordination was required between the agencies responding to Hendra virus incidents" (2011, xix).

The importance of a clear legislative base is also evident in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's (2009) report on the Economic Security Strategy Payment. It noted an innovative legislative provision enabling certain Ministers to establish an administrative scheme to address limitations of the legislation (i.e. where the statutory regime does not necessarily produce an appropriate result). It was found that there should have been much better information sharing between the service delivery agency and the relevant policy agency, which could have informed the development of

advice to Ministers on the administrative scheme option. Consideration should have been given to improved means of gathering, analysing and advising on the issues addressed in complaints, inquiries and feedback that the service delivery agency collects, and sharing that information with the policy agencies (2009a, xx).

The significant role of legislation is emphasised by a consideration of situations where there are no relevant provisions. Looking at issues that involve a single level of government, the Auditor-General of Victoria (2014b) identified an absence of overarching and coordinated oversight of prisoner transportation. This was the most significant issue in an examination of effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the services managed by one agency and used by two others, as well as services by one of these two agencies. The Auditor-General commented:

> Given that prisoner transportation is affected by issues outside the direct control of those responsible for moving prisoners, effectively managing prisoner transport will require collaboration across the criminal justice system (2014b, vii).

A key learning in the legislative context is:

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• Actively monitor for barriers to collaboration in legislation and address them through business case analysis.

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Collaboration across levels of government and with other sectors

The importance of collaboration in the context of inter-governmental relations has often been remarked upon. This is evident from comments by Wanna et al. that homelessness:

> cannot be neatly disentangled to discrete State and Commonwealth roles. Homelessness has a number of contributing factors, including access to welfare payments (Commonwealth responsibility), education and training opportunities (State responsibility), health services (State responsibility) and crisis accommodation (States and community sector responsibility). These problems need genuine and effective inter-jurisdictional cooperation in order to 'join up' systems and ensure people do not fall through the gap between where Commonwealth services end and State services begin – and vice-versa. The role that local government and the community sector also play in these areas means cooperation is an involved and multi-dimensional task (2009, 24).

Similarly, the Commonwealth Ombudsman (2012, 9) argued that the remote housing reforms he investigated "require agencies to work closely with each other and with all stakeholders involved in their delivery", citing their significance and complexity as reasons. In the cases studied in his report, it is notable that the observations apply to all three levels of government and service providers, with the stated objectives of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing requiring "collaboration and integration of all three levels of government and other service providers" (2012, 9).

Contractual relationships can also raise collaboration issues. The Commonwealth Ombudsman identified in a 2013 report on immigration detention that:

> [t]he contract arrangements recognise that the department will implement a strategy to manage the coordinated delivery of services from all service providers working in the immigration detention

network and that an integrated service relationship requires the service provider to cooperate with the department in meeting its obligations (p. 28).

Under the heading "Commitment to joint service delivery" the report noted that their respective contracts required the two contractors "to work cooperatively with the department and with each other to provide coordinated services to people in immigration detention, in line with the immigration detention values" (p. 74).

Relations between the public sector and private sector are commonly established through contracts let by the public sector. The terms of the contract bind both parties and the contractual relationships create a highly structured form of collaboration. There are many watchdog reports examining individual contracts, nine being listed in Appendix A. Those reports included in the scope of this study have had a specific focus on collaboration, this being the case for alliance contracting and some types of partnerships.

Alliance contracting is an approach that seeks enhanced collaboration between the parties. It is the subject of comment by the Auditor-General of the Northern Territory in relation to the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) that operated under the Council of Australian Governments' National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. Excerpts include:

> The alliance model was selected as the preferred contracting methodology following a detailed assessment process
>
> …
>
> The alliance model has not been used by the Northern Territory Government previously and that would suggest particular care was required to ensure that alliancing was the approach most likely to achieve the desired program outcomes while also ensuring that value for money was achieved
>
> …
>
> it is clear that effective governance is a critical factor in ensuring successful project outcomes and while alliancing is regarded as a mature approach, there appears to be no agreement on the most effective approach to the governance of projects that use the alliance approach (2010, 11, 14 and 15).

The Auditor-General concluded that:

> [t]he initial timetable that was set for the project resulted in key management control and governance issues being neglected in the early stages of the program as emphasis was placed on putting the operational elements into place. The absence of a proper management control system left the Joint Steering Committee, and others, in a position where they were unable to exert full control over the program, and lacking the information that would have permitted timely, corrective action to be taken. While management control systems are still incomplete, work is well advanced towards rectifying this matter (2010, 47).

In a recent report the New Zealand Auditor-General examined the Primary Growth Partnership (PGP), which seeks to bring together the public and private sectors in partnerships to increase innovation, economic growth and sustainability of primary industries. It was found that:

> PGP contracts include provisions that reflect how the Ministry and industry intend to work in

partnership. When needed, the Ministry works with industry towards mutually agreeable solutions. The Ministry is prepared to hold its industry partners to account for meeting their obligations under PGP contracts (2015, 28).

The Auditor-General commented that "[i]nnovation by its nature cannot be a "paint by numbers" exercise" (2015, 3). She supported the flexible approach taken by the Ministry to setting up and managing partnerships with industry, examples including good-faith clauses, agreeing to program activities starting before the contract is confirmed, and sharing intellectual property with the industry partner to save time and money. She argued that when forming new partnerships it is important to foster trust and appropriately manage risk rather than rigidly keep to a set formula.

A review recommendation in 2012 that the Ministry define what partnership meant was not accepted by the Ministry as it "did not want to risk dictating the terms of partnership to industry applicants. It did not want to lose the "spirit of partnership" before the partnership had begun. However, Ministry staff said that industry partners often ended up defining partnership anyway" (2015, 29).

In the report on the coordination of public transport, the Victorian Auditor-General identified that the absence of contractual incentives for operators to work together to improve the coordination of their services was a shortcoming along with the absence of state-wide coordination objectives and governance arrangements. The Department's ability to effectively oversee and coordinate related initiatives across the portfolio was therefore limited (2014d).

Three reports by the Auditor General WA specifically had a focus on contractual relationships between government and NFPOs (2000, 2003 and 2013). A finding made in the most recent report in relation to ambulance services includes that:

> [the agency's] contract management has been effective but the Contract has limitations and does not assist [the agency] to demonstrate whether the State is receiving value for money. The Contract is largely input rather than output based and does not include incentives or penalties. It lacks mechanisms for [the agency] to monitor the quality of the service provided, such as standards of patient care, staff training or conduct, and equipment (2013, 10).

In the 2007 report on homelessness, the Auditor-General of NSW observed that Government and community agencies were working together but that more needed to be done to network with some agencies and that until recently there was no accountability or reporting framework" (2007, 22).

While there has been a general shift by governments to contract NFPOs for services, tensions can arise with their wider roles including in relation to advocacy. In a 2009 report into child protection, the Victorian Ombudsman recommended that the department review current arrangements to ensure community service organisations are able to appropriately advocate for the best interests of children and present their professional opinions on matters under consideration.

A key learning in this context is:

> • Enable and encourage innovation in the design and implementation of collaboration arrangements, and engage watchdogs as active supporters of flexibilities that enhance innovation.

Role clarity and accountability

Many reports made comments around the need for clearly defined roles and associated accountabilities. They identified the importance of outcomes being shared and potentially jointly developed. For instance, the Commonwealth Auditor-General identified that a better practice principle relating to cross-agency agreements is to:

clarify the scope and roles and responsibilities of each party, primarily by including key provisions: objectives of the arrangements, including desired outcomes and timeframes; roles and responsibilities; details of the activity, including specification for services or projects; resources and budgetary issues; shared risk management; and agreed dispute resolution mechanisms (ANAO 2010, 24).

In the report on coordination arrangements for Indigenous programs, the Commonwealth Auditor-General identified that in a lead agency arrangement, clarity of purpose is a central issue:

Creating structured, workable arrangements, with sufficient authority and clarity of purpose for the lead agency to undertake its role without diluting the accountabilities of other agencies involved, is a challenging but important element of effectiveness (ANAO 2012, 14).

Several emergency preparedness and response reports related to aspects of the New Zealand earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, and it is notable that a whole chapter of the subsequent report by the Canterbury Earthquakes Royal Commission focussed on roles and responsibilities. The report noted that "the majority of submissions received identified a lack of clarity in relation to the roles and responsibilities of participants within the building and construction sector". They addressed uncertainty about who should develop building standards and when (2012, 74).

The NSW Auditor-General's report on reducing alcohol related crime identified consistency of approach and avoiding duplication as problems occurring where two agencies were both involved in enforcement. It observed that:

both agencies now need to clarify their roles and responsibilities to reduce this risk [of duplication] and achieve a consistent approach across the state (2008, 3).

The Ombudsman NSW report on child protection commented on the need for inter-agency operational frameworks that, amongst other things, support the core components of successful collaborative practice, including "collective responsibility for delivering results" (2014, 28).

The Ombudsman New Zealand considered the importance of role clarity between staff groups within an organisation in a report on the provision of prisoner health services, commenting that:

[a]ny conflict between Health Services staff and custodial staff could have adverse consequences for prisoners. At prisons we visited it was clear to us that the roles and responsibilities of Health Services staff and custodial staff were sometimes blurred (2012, 67).

It was observed that the line between medical care and treatment under an Act, and health needs

under regulations was not clear. They "suggest that consideration be given to aligning more clearly the terms used in the regulations with that used in the Act" (2012, 67).

The report recommended that:

the Department require all prisons to develop Service Level Agreements that clearly establish the roles, responsibilities and expectations of Medical Officers, Health Services staff and custodial staff (2012, 68).

Accountability is a related and important consideration. The Commonwealth Ombudsman in the report on Remote Housing Reforms in the NT highlights this:

The housing reforms involve all three tiers of government and constitute a major change in the delivery of housing services. As noted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, a coordinated 'joined-up' approach to delivering human services can be more effective than a silo-based approach. It is important, however, that accountability mechanisms keep pace with increasing investment in integrated service delivery. Joint arrangements, particularly when they include shared governance, may obscure lines of accountability (2012, 6).

The Commonwealth Auditor-General Better Practice Guide on Public Sector Governance raised the issue of shared accountabilities, observing that:

[s]uccessful collaboration requires an appreciation of the responsibilities of other parties. It benefits from clear purpose, defined outcomes, and the recognition of shared risks and accountabilities (ANAO 2014, 67-68).

Similarly, the Auditor-General commented jointly with PM&C in the Better Practice Guide on policy implementation issues that:

setting up formal arrangements requires an understanding about the limits of individual accountabilities, such as where there is shared ownership of policy and delivery and where policy owners cannot delegate responsibility and accountability for outcomes to deliverers (ANAO and PM&C 2014, 25).

The reports reviewed did not address specifically how accountabilities are shared where there are shared responsibilities, but it is evident that it is a critical issue for successful collaboration and warranting further development by practitioners and researchers.

Key learnings in this context are:

> • Ensure a shared understanding of clearly stated roles and the design of robust accountability arrangements suited to the specific context and collaboration model selected;
>
> • Consider in detail the implications of governance models that are based on shared responsibilities and how each party will be held accountable and for what.

Plans, processes, formal agreements

The Commonwealth Auditor-General (2010) observed in a report reviewing 200 agreements that formal written agreements between Commonwealth agencies are frequently used to facilitate productive cross-agency relationships, with each establishing a foundation for a working relationship. But he noted that many overlooked key provisions and important aspects of relationship management, risk management, outcome reporting and review, and that as such

"[i]n many instances, the agreements provided only a perfunctory basis for building inter-agency collaboration" (ANAO 2010, 17).

A 2013 report by the Commonwealth Auditor-General that reviewed a formal partnership arrangement made the point that the partnership between the two agencies involved was supported by a formal agreement, and that:

[c]ross agency agreements are an important mechanism for supporting collaboration and coordination between agencies. These agreements provide a framework for governance and operations by: establishing individual and joint roles and responsibilities; outlining agreed structures (ANAO 2013, 12).

The Auditor-General commented jointly with PM&C in the Better Practice Guide on policy implementation issues that:

[w]hen engaging other Australian Government entities or State Government bodies, an agreement outlining the objective, roles, responsibilities and reporting requirements of those involved is considered better practice (ANAO and PM&C 2014, 25).

The Victorian Auditor General identified the need to connect plans, strategies and performance measures in his report on the environmental impacts of the transport system. He recommended that the Department, in consultation with other transport agencies, develop a state-wide strategy that sets out clear strategic priorities and actions, with state-wide objectives, targets, and performance measures. The Department should ensure that the priorities and these performance measures are reflected in the department's and relevant portfolio agencies' corporate plans (2014a, xv).

Integration of planning across levels of government is a significant feature of the Commonwealth Auditor-General report on preparedness for pandemics: "[f]or deployment arrangements to work effectively the national, State and Territory plans have to be well integrated and underpinned by cooperative planning and information sharing" (ANAO 2007a, 106).

The 2006 report by the Auditor-General of NSW on agencies working together emphasised the importance of the content of agreements (be they formal or informal). It argued, on the basis of the three case studies (Aboriginal employment and training, court liaison and road safety), that:

[w]hat appears critical for the success of collaboration is not what form this agreement takes but rather its content. As a minimum, the accountability arrangements need to be comprehensive, clearly articulated and documented in some form (2006, 4).

The minimum accountability arrangements specified were:

• project objectives, outcomes and timeframes
• the roles and responsibilities of each partner including service standards or specific contributions
• resources to be applied by each partner
• how partners identify and share risks and benefits
• how the project will be evaluated
• how progress and outcomes will be reported (2006, 4).

The Queensland Ombudsman report on asbestos identified that:

[d]espite there being a number of agencies and statutes involved, there is no whole-of-government, integrated strategic plan for coordinating the agencies' responses to asbestos issues (2013a, vii).

It identified that a lead agency, once created, should:

facilitate the development of a coordinated, strategic response to asbestos regulation in Queensland, including by providing strategic oversight, developing an integrated strategic plan for the management and regulation of asbestos in Queensland and ensuring interagency coordination on operational issues (Queensland Ombudsman 2013a, vii).

In the recent report on support for local government, the Victorian Auditor-General identified that "there is scope to document and formalise how they can work together in the future" (2015a, iii). He found that there were no established protocols for coordinating planning and identifying opportunities for collaboration and recommended that the entities:

review and document how and when they should work together to ensure the efficient, effective and economic delivery of support to councils, including clarifying roles and responsibilities for support activities, and communicate this to councils (2015, 65).

In a report on the regulation of licensed premises, the Queensland Ombudsman identified that two agencies co-regulate the Liquor Act 1992 (Liquor Act), and identified factors hindering more effective regulation. These included insufficient coordination of liquor compliance activities between the agencies (2013b, 5). The report identified that:

the regulatory framework is impacted by insufficient coordination between the [agencies] under the Liquor Act. In particular, there is no formal agreement facilitating coordination between the co-regulators. Consequently, there:

• is a lack of shared understanding about roles and responsibilities

• is a lack of coordination around information sharing, including case information, data, enforcement/ investigation outcomes, policies and procedures

• are inconsistencies in inspection practices

• are inconsistencies in enforcement practices, including use of enforcement tools and escalation (2013b, 11).

A key learning in this context is:

> • When formalising arrangements ensure that they document how and when the parties will work together and that plans, strategies and performance measures form a coherent system.

Risk management, monitoring and evaluation

Two key governance processes are risk management and assessing performance. Both receive attention by watchdogs.

The Auditor-General of NSW 2006 report on agencies working together identified that collaboration creates a set of risks that need to be managed. Citing a UK National Audit Office 2001 report, it identified the following risks associated with collaboration:

- partners working towards different goals

- partners failing to achieve desired outcomes

- information on client groups not accessible to partners

- insufficient funding or funding not pooled, leading to delays

- not addressing variations in results due to inadequate performance monitoring

- partners not committed to the aims and benefits of joint working

- partner responsibilities not clear to Parliament or the public (2006, 22).

The report then went on to observe:

> None of the case studies had identified risks or developed risk management strategies specific for the collaborative project, although they were aware of some of the risks associated with this approach. And none of the case studies had identified flow on benefits or costs to partners (2006, 22).

A set of risks that needs particular attention relate to the period near the end of an agreement. The 2011 report by the Commonwealth Auditor-General on cross-agency agreements identified that it is important to prepare for the termination of an agreement and "give early attention to aspects of cross agency agreements that will not be needed immediately, such as review and termination provisions" (ANAO 2010, 25).

In relation to risk management, the Auditor General Tasmania, in a report on managing bushfires, concluded that:

> although most entities covered by this audit had addressed bushfire risk in some way, the approaches varied widely. In part, that reflected the distinct perspectives of entities, with some more focused on managing hazards, others on preparing households and others on emergency response. While those differences are valid, we believe that, to ensure that all aspects of fire management are collectively and efficiently addressed by all entities, there is a need for a more coordinated approach to risk management (2011, 35).

The Commonwealth Auditor-General commented jointly with PM&C in the Better Practice Guide that:

> [i]mplementation initiatives that involve other Australian Government entities, state and territory bodies, or non-government entities, face increased risk management complexities. It is important to ensure that there is a common understanding of the risks associated with shared implementation … A clear and agreed identification of who carries which risks, including those risks that are shared or are interdependent, is also a necessary part of effective risk management. Having clear accountabilities for each risk assists to identify gaps in the capabilities and authorities necessary to manage risks (ANAO and PM&C 2014, 32).

Monitoring and evaluation is a broad concept covering the assessment of performance progressively and through intermittent, more detailed reviews that may seek to establish causal relationships. As such, the strength of these agency processes are frequently of interest to watchdogs. For instance, the ANAO (2010) better practice principles relating to cross-agency agreements included that:

> Monitoring of agency wide practices, including performance or compliance in a particular administrative

function, can provide useful information for improving agency policies and developing better controls and quality assurance procedures (2010, 25).

The coordination of reviews can be an issue. The Queensland Ombudsman noted, in a report relating to agencies' responses to the Hendra Virus, that:

> we were aware that several of the agencies involved had conducted internal reviews, and in some cases had commissioned external reviews, of their handling of particular Hendra virus incidents. However, it appeared that these reviews had narrow terms of reference and that none of the reviews had properly examined the level of coordination of responses across agencies (2011, xiv).

The Ombudsman of Western Australia report on care planning recommended that agencies collaborate in performance monitoring and evaluation of health care planning for children in care, to look at the health gap between children in care and those not in care (2011, 15).

The Commonwealth Auditor-General, in the 2014 Better Practice Guide, identified the importance of a coordinated approach to monitoring, review and evaluation, and noted that consideration needs to be given to risks of incompatible data between agencies and agreement on performance indicators and targets. The report notes that:

> [in some cases, the implementation parties may settle on a common set of performance indicators to measure the success of the initiative. Equally, however, the parties may agree to maintain separate, but complementary, performance indicators. In such cases, it is important that the lead entity understands how each of the party's measures contribute to the overall success of the initiative (ANAO and PM&C 2014, 59).

Interestingly, none of the watchdog reports reviewed gave detailed consideration as to how collaboration should be evaluated. It could be that collaboration is seen as a means to an end and that a focus on what is being achieved or a high level assessment of the practical aspects of collaboration is sufficient. ARACY (2013) expressed the view that different evaluation approaches are needed to evaluate collaboration directly, commenting that there should be an emphasis on assessing:

- the relationships and processes that enable collaboration

- the level and participation and engagement of collaboration members

- how well the structure of the collaboration allows participants to contribute to and influence the collaboration's work and outcomes (ARACY 2013, 1).

Key learnings in this context are:

> - Ensure collaboration between the parties in the identification of risks and opportunities arising from collaboration, and implementation of risk management responses that take into account the complexities created by the collaboration arrangements;
>
> - Pay particular attention to risks that relate to the period near the end of the agreement;
>
> - Ensure collaboration in performance monitoring and evaluation, that programs are coordinated across agencies and include specific consideration of the collaboration arrangements.

4. Capacity

Capacity issues were raised less often than governance issues in the watchdog reports reviewed. There were relatively few specific references to capacity building as an important strategy to achieve effective collaboration. This chapter assesses the issues raised in terms of: capacity, including system capacity; leadership, commitment, resources, relationships and trust; and team, training and guidance.

Capacity, including system capacity

The most common examples of watchdog reports addressing capacity as a broad concept arise from investigations looking at the NFP sector and government's relationships with NFPOs. For instance, the Victorian Auditor-General (2013b) comments that good progress had been made implementing the Strengthening Community Organisations Action Plan, a four-year plan developed to strengthen the capacity and long-term sustainability of the community sector (2013b, iii). The specific capacity related actions reviewed were:

- Investing in leadership and development
- A Community Services Workforce Capability Framework
- Community sector placement and mentoring
- Increasing the skills and engagement of volunteers
- Developing organisational support services and networks
- Building capacity for innovation and growth (2013b, 9).

Similarly, a report by the Commonwealth Ombudsman on funding agreements with regional and remote Indigenous organisations highlighted the importance of assessing the capability of those Indigenous organisations. It draws on the Commonwealth Grant Guidelines that:

> promote key principles of robust planning, design, collaboration and partnership in grants administration … Key elements of these principles include:
>
> • encouraging a constructive and cooperative relationship between the administering agency, the grant recipient and other relevant stakeholders
> • promoting effective consultation, with a shared set of understandings and expectations (2010, 6).

A key learning in this context is:

> • Ensure that capacity considerations developed in relation to the not-for-profit sector are taken into account in developing collaboration practice in other contexts.

Leadership, commitment, resources, relationships and trust

Issues around leadership, commitment, resources, relationships and trust received relatively little or no attention in the reports reviewed. Most comments on leadership are general in nature. For instance a report on Indigenous service delivery by the Commonwealth Auditor-General identified that:

> [l]eadership promotes and supports collaboration in whole of government initiatives. It can also

foster and develop an information sharing infrastructure and governance arrangements that focus accountability on the whole of government outcomes that the Government is seeking (ANAO 2007b, 86).

Similarly, a 2013 report by the Auditor-General, which assessed a formal partnership agreement, observed that "[s]trong executive leadership will be critical to the effective implementation of [the report's] recommendations" (ANAO 2013, 16).

Commenting more directly on the leadership observed through an investigation, the Victorian Auditor-General, in a report on services for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, pointed to a lack of authoritative leadership:

> Perhaps the issue of greatest concern is the lack of regular collaboration among departments working to address the needs of the same cohort, and the lack of authoritative leadership and oversight to monitor and report on whether services are meeting the needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (2014e, vii).

In a report on services for Aboriginal Victorians tabled on the same day, he commented similarly on an absence of leadership and pointed to specific consequences:

> In common with other whole-of-government initiatives that focus on vulnerable Victorians, there is an absence of effective leadership and oversight in Aboriginal affairs which has affected mainstream service delivery over many years. The Secretaries' Leadership Group on Aboriginal Affairs (SLG) is responsible for overseeing implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013–18 (VAAF), and this has not been effective. To ensure that services are accessible—and to achieve its intended outcomes— VAAF needs to be implemented with strengthened oversight and improved collaboration between departments (2014f, vii).

The Victorian Auditor-General (2014c) also commented on an absence of leadership in a report on the effectiveness of planning and coordination for mental health across Victoria's criminal justice system:

> There is currently no overarching strategy or leadership for mental health and the justice system that focuses on improving outcomes for people with a mental illness … While there is evidence of agencies working together, this is neither uniform nor sufficiently coordinated across the justice system to address mental illness effectively. Further collaboration and coordination would likely enhance the overall outcomes for people with a mental illness (2014c, iii).

A rare reference to 'commitment' occurs in an Ombudsman NSW recommendation regarding the need for inter-agency operational frameworks. It identified the first core component of successful collaborative practice as "a clear and practical commitment to collaboration" (2014, 28).

Provision of resources, including time to support collaboration, is occasionally addressed. As a more general observation, the Ombudsman NSW commented that investment in a comprehensive NFPO industry development strategy for the child and family sector was a "welcome initiative" (2014, 19).

The Tasmanian Auditor General report on managing bushfires raised an issue of resourcing directly, in a recommendation that:

funding be sought to enable the State Fire Management Council to take a greater coordination role for bushfire risk management and mitigation (2011, 38).

The Western Australian report on the Swan River pointed to the governance issue of clarifying responsibility, but unusually added a responsibility to "identify the additional resources required to enable this to occur" (Auditor General Western Australia 2014, 9).

This is also important in relation to support that may need to be provided to community consultation groups. For example, the Commonwealth Ombudsman report on remote housing in the Northern Territory recommended that the Territory agency should, in consultation with the Commonwealth agency, review the approach and support provided to community groups (HRGs). It should identify "lessons and opportunities to build the capacity of others … improving communication practices … clarifying roles and responsibilities" (2012, 31).

In a related aspect of capacity, there was also relatively little coverage of the importance of relationships and relationship management for collaboration. The Commonwealth Auditor-General's report on cross-agency agreements identified that "the success of cross agency arrangements is often dependent on relationship management and the good will and cooperation of the respective parties" (ANAO 2010, 14). In this context it pointed to the importance of "skilful negotiation and the early establishment of communication channels" (ANAO 2010, 51).

The Commonwealth Ombudsman commented in the report on remote housing reforms about relationships between levels of government and that there is a need for more investment in "relationships with shires and frontline service providers to ensure the housing reforms are consistent, effective and sustainable" (2012, 9). It was recognised that the Commonwealth agency does not have direct relationships with frontline service providers, but it still needed to ensure that the Territory agency supported both shires and housing service providers to deliver quality housing services on its behalf.

Trust between agencies was not raised as a relevant collaboration consideration in the watchdog reports reviewed. This finding is consistent with a review of Dutch and Canadian audits of collaborative arrangements, which observed that audit institutions may prefer to focus on transparency rather than the less tangible quality of trust (Bemelens-Videc 2003). However, there is an emerging research literature in this regard, and it has been argued that "trust and distrust both have functionalities and dysfunctionalities for interorganizational interactions in public administration". There has also been "a framework developed to guide the assessment of both trust and distrust in this context" (Oomsels and Bouckaert 2014, 577).

A key learning in this context is:

> • Include strategies that address critical aspects of capacity including leadership, commitment, resourcing, relationships and trust.

Teams, training and guidance

The reports reviewed only occasionally focus comments on teams and teamwork. Exceptions include the 2006 report by the Victorian Ombudsman that called for consideration of cross-government project teams (p. 26) and the Ombudsman NSW report on child protection that identified the establishment of a team to enable a more co-ordinated approach to policy and practice in relation to school attendance and suspensions (2014, 21).

Training and skills are addressed on occasion. For example, the Victorian Ombudsman recommended development on a collaborative basis of targeted training packages relating to sexual assault for use in schools, by disability workers, and by others required to report child sexual abuse (2006, 13).

Similarly, the Tasmanian Auditor General, in the report on managing bushfires, based his audit of state entities on recommendations made in a COAG report (National inquiry on bushfire mitigation and management). In relation to professional development, he reported a range of views including:

> [An agency]noted the availability of several tertiary programs, but commented that there was no coordinated approach to accessing them … the concept of each partner entity delivering a component of a nationally coordinated program had not happened in the way envisioned by the COAG recommendation … [n]either was there a suite of training materials or standards focussed on bushfire mitigation and management delivering nationally coordinated professional development services ... Councils generally responded that they regarded themselves as interested consumers of relevant professional development materials and were concerned at the lack of available professional development. They viewed the recommendation as requiring state or national level coordination (2011, 35).

He recommended that the relevant state agencies:

> continue to encourage the relevant national bodies to further implement the COAG 2004 recommendation, namely... that the Australasian Fire Authorities Council and Emergency Management Australia — in partnership with state and territory agencies and other education and research institutions — coordinate a national program of professional development focused on bushfire mitigation and management. Under the program, partners would deliver nationally coordinated professional development services to all jurisdictions (2011, 5).

The provision of guidance was the most commonly identified capacity issue amongst the nine reports. For instance, the Commonwealth Auditor-General, in the report on cross-agency agreements, noted that:

> [a]gencies can promote the development of better practice agreements by providing their staff with guidance material that is appropriately designed to meet the needs of their agency and promote good public sector governance. In doing so, they should consult with other agencies that may be more progressed in this area (2010, 61).

Guidance was raised similarly in a report by the Auditor-General of NSW, whose first recommendation called for guidance to be updated routinely, including regarding critical success factors, contemporary examples of best practice in collaboration, the role of the central agency, and the monitoring of cross-agency initiatives (2006, 14).

A key learning in this context is:

> • Include strategies that address teamwork, training and the provision of guidance to support effective collaboration.

5. Information

Information issues were raised less often than governance issues, and at a similar rate to capacity issues (Appendix B). Collaboration-based approaches to communication and information were identified as significant underpinnings for effective collaboration, with a focus on drawing together, sharing and managing information.

Communication, consultation, engagement

The Queensland Ombudsman noted in the Hendra Virus report that "A coordinated approach is required from [agencies] in communicating with private veterinarians and the public about the risk of human infection from Hendra virus" (2011, xx). Further, "[t]he most effective way to provide information about Hendra virus to private veterinarians and other stakeholders, especially during a Hendra virus incident, is by the government agencies involved in responses [taking] joint responsibility and a coordinated approach" (2011, xxxiii).

An innovative approach to communication identified by the Commonwealth Ombudsman (2009b) was the establishment of the network of Government Business Managers during the Northern Territory Emergency Response program. They were an important network for information and communication flows to and from the communities and the various Commonwealth and Territory agencies delivering programs. The Ombudsman observed that Government Business Managers:

are key liaison points in communities and their role includes communicating the NTER measures and other Indigenous programs at the local level, engaging with acknowledged and respected Elders and working collaboratively with other Australian and NT Government agency representatives on the ground. They play a valuable role in engaging and empowering Indigenous people and in coordinating the flow of information about asbestos (2009b, 7).

Some watchdog reports identify consulting and involving stakeholders to enhance collaboration. For instance, the Auditor General of Western Australian's report on the Swan River recommended that the agency work with businesses and the community as well as with government and agencies, and that the agency "continue the high level of community involvement in protecting and enhancing the river system and in educating the public in ways they can assist" (2014, 9).

As mentioned earlier, the Commonwealth Auditor-General in the report on cross-agency agreements recommended consulting with other agencies that may be more progressed in the area of developing agency policies and guidance material to provide clear direction (ANAO 2010, 61).

As a significant issue for engagement processes, the report by the Commonwealth Ombudsman on Remote Housing Reforms in the NT pointed to ensuring decisions made following community group input are transparent and accountable (2012, 31).

A key learning in this context is:

> • Adopt communication and consultation approaches suited to the specific circumstances, and enable innovation in support of effective collaboration.

Drawing together, sharing and managing information

The report by the Ombudsman NSW on child protection stressed that an efficient child protection system must be able to identify those children who are most in need in order to direct an appropriate level of resources to this group. While a single piece of intelligence may justify determining that extreme risks exist, an effective intelligence-driven child protection system involves the systematic analysis of risk-related information held by key agencies, including identifying each agency's high-end users (2014).

In the youth suicide report the Ombudsman Western Australia (2014) drew together information from multiple sources and identified through detailed analysis four distinct groups of young people who had either died by suicide or were suspected of having died by suicide. Those in the largest group were recorded as having allegedly experienced one or more forms of child maltreatment, and had extensive contact with State government departments and authorities, schools and registered training organisations. The Ombudsman indicated that different suicide prevention activities may be relevant to each of the four groups of young people and recommended that in developing the State Strategy consideration be given to differentiated strategies relevant to each of the four groups (p. 17).

A different perspective on drawing information together was provided by the New Zealand Auditor-General report on the Primary Growth Partnership (PGP), where monitoring had been focused on individual programs but had moved towards a system designed to measure and report on PGP programs as a portfolio. Given the information available at the time, the Auditor-General observed that the Ministry "has not yet been able to show what PGP as a whole has achieved" (2015, 37).

The ACT Auditor-General recommended in the child protection report that the relevant agencies develop a system to ensure that information they share and publicly report is accurate and comprehensive. The Auditor-General also recommended that an agency should facilitate a process to assist two other agencies to better undertake their roles, amongst other things by identifying legislative amendments to facilitate the releasing of information (2011, 34, 36).

An empirical study of cross-agency information sharing practices in New Zealand highlighted:

> the contribution of information sharing protocols and co-location to effective information sharing; and information sharing challenges due to issues around data ownership, a lack of technical interoperability, and a lack of technical capability and knowledge (Lips et al. 2011, 255).

The Commonwealth Ombudsman report on an investigation into the administration of the Economic Security Strategy Payment identified that greater integration with the policy agency of complaints and feedback data received by the service delivery agency could have enabled more targeted and appropriate refinements to the program. This could have helped to ensure the policy intent and outcome was going to be met. The report observed that there appeared to have been little or no systematic analysis of complaints data and that "[t]his absence leaves any decision on an administrative scheme—whether to put one into effect or not—without a strong evidentiary base" (2009a, 14).

In a foreword to a report arising from a single complaint about a pharmacy approval program jointly administered by two agencies, the Commonwealth Ombudsman raised concerns about the design of the program. The complainant believed that a neighbouring pharmacy had been

incorrectly approved to dispense medications and that this affected the viability of his business. An error had come to the attention of one agency before the approval was finalised, but the information was not relayed to the other agency, which granted the approval without knowing that the application did not meet the requirements. The Ombudsman observed that:

> [w]e found problems in the design of the pharmacy approval program, which focussed primarily on the interests of the applicant pharmacist without considering how to protect the interests of other pharmacies in the area. The program was delivered by two separate agencies, without sufficient regard to the need to share information in a timely way to ensure the integrity of the scheme (2014, 4).

The Ombudsman recommended that:

> [w]here more than one agency is engaged in the delivery of a program, administrative processes should ensure that decision-making is not fragmented, that all decision-makers are able to receive all information relevant to a decision, and that staff training material refers to the provision of information to participants engaged in program decision-making located in other agencies (2014, 21).

The Ombudsman (2014, 22) also recommended that a "joint service recovery process should be developed for the pharmacy location program if it continues to be delivered across more than one agency". This highlights the potential for wider application of this principle to complaint and feedback processes, including place and area-based approaches.

The report by the Commonwealth Ombudsman on remote housing reforms in the Northern Territory recommended that Commonwealth and Territory agencies take immediate action to ensure there is adequate IT system support to manage remote housing. It provided detailed and accessible public information about the approach they will adopt for addressing possible rent arrears accrued as a result of this issue (2012, 24).

The report also recommended that the Commonwealth and Territory agencies raise issues nationally about a problem defining and reporting on local Indigenous employment numbers, and seek clarification of the current statistics (2012, 15).

Similarly, the ACT Auditor General observed that terms used in the electronic data and case management system were not defined – "[f]or example, 'event', 'action' and 'incident' are used as headings for collecting information. Similar information could be recorded under each of these headings. Without defining terms used … there is a risk that caseworkers understanding of them will vary and therefore there is likely to be inconsistencies in the type of information recorded or no recording made" (ACT Auditor-General's Office 2013, 92).

In a similar vein, the Victorian Ombudsman, in a report focused on the importance of common terminology, recommended development on a collaborative basis of "common terminology in plain language" for incidents involving sexual assault. It also recommended reporting on "any legislative amendments necessary to ensure clarity and consistency" (2006, 13).

Key learnings in this context are:

> • Draw information together and analyse it systematically to support collaboration;
>
> • Participate in information sharing exercises to assist in focussing and targeting agency programs and in identifying additional opportunities for collaboration;
>
> • Ensure that definitional issues are resolved and common terminology developed;
>
> • Ensure the appropriateness and quality of information, and that there is adequate IT system support to managers.

6. Conclusion

This research project makes observations about how the topic of public sector collaboration in treated in watchdog reports, and sets these observations in the context of the broader public administration literature on collaboration.

The watchdog reports identify a wide range of practices and factors that support and hinder working together. While many are specific to the circumstances of the individual report, the analysis has shown that the issues identified can be clustered in three domains: governance, capacity and information.

This research has found that watchdog reports consistently identify governance arrangements and practices as pivotal for effective collaboration; governance issues make up a large proportion of all issues identified. Key governance issues that are identified frequently are the basic concepts of collaboration, coordination and cooperation; role clarity and accountability; plans, processes and formal agreements; and effective risk management and monitoring and evaluation. The reports mostly treat the governance arrangements as a given and do not assess them in the context of other models that were available. There is extensive coverage of 'lead agency' arrangements, with the term having different meanings in different reports, but at a minimum meaning the agency that has a broad oversight role.

The focus on governance is consistent with a review of the work of the Dutch audit office in relation to collaboration (Bemelens-Videc 2003), which identified key audit standards of clear and controllable goals. The review pointed to the importance of audit institutions accommodating partnering by not requiring hierarchical relationships in terms of clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.

Less common are specific references to capacity as an important contributor to effective collaboration. Leadership, culture and relationships are identified as significant aspects of capacity, and some reports have identified a lack of leadership, relationships and aspects of resourcing collaboration as significant issues. Trust between agencies is not addressed in the reports reviewed, and commitment to collaboration is only commented on in general terms other than the provision of resources for collaboration. The provision of guidance was identified as an important issue, with the allocation of time and resources also being identified as a significant issue.

Collaboration-related approaches to information are identified at a similar rate to capacity issues, with the key information issue relating to drawing together, sharing and managing information. Reports also raised communication, consultation and engagement. In a range of contexts, combining information from multiple sources and using it to focus and target agency programs has the potential to enhance effectiveness and may lead to the identification of additional opportunities for collaboration.

Overall, this project has identified many pointers to addressing the challenges of working together effectively. These can assist both public sector managers and researchers. In the following listing, the lessons we identified that are not typically found in the literature (i.e. novel advice) are marked with an asterisk (*):

Governance

• Consider the merits of assigning a central agency the overarching responsibility for collaboration by the agencies in the jurisdiction (page 22);*

• Consider a full range of governance models in terms of benefits, costs, risks and opportunities (page 22) ;*

• Be clear about responsibilities, powers and accountabilities if adopting lead agency or other models that are not tightly specified (page 22);

• Actively monitor for barriers to collaboration in legislation and address through business case analysis (page 23) ;*

• Enable and encourage innovation in the design and implementation of collaboration arrangements, and engage watchdogs as active supporters of flexibilities that enhance innovation (page 26) ;*

• Ensure a shared understanding of clearly stated roles and the design of robust accountability arrangements suited to the specific context and collaboration model selected (page 27);

• Consider in detail the implications of governance models that are based on shared responsibilities and how each party will be held accountable and for what (page 27) ;*

• When formalising arrangements ensure that they document how and when the parties will work together and that plans, strategies and performance measures form a coherent system (page 29);

• Ensure collaboration between the parties in the identification of risks and opportunities arising from collaboration, and implementation of risk management responses that take into account the complexities created by the collaboration arrangements; (page 31) ;*

• Pay particular attention to risks that relate to the period near the end of the agreement (page 31) ;*

• Ensure collaboration in performance monitoring and evaluation that programmes are coordinated across agencies and include specific consideration of the collaboration arrangements (page 31) ;*

Capacity

• Ensure that capacity considerations developed in relation to the not-for-profit sector are taken into account in developing collaboration practice in other contexts (page 32) ;*

• Include strategies that address critical aspects of capacity including leadership commitment, resourcing, relationships and trust (page 34) ;*

• Include strategies that address teamwork, training and the provision of guidance to support effective collaboration (page 35) ;*

Watchdog reports support the view that collaboration is a strategy available to achieve outcomes where the matter benefits from the input of more than one agency. However, while leadership, commitment, resourcing, trust and relationships are often identified as key requirements for effective collaboration (Phillips 2013, 2), they are often not addressed in any detail. Similarly, factors such as the political context and the impact of the jurisdiction's budget system are not addressed explicitly. While it is challenging to address these areas through evidence-based analysis, exploration of these areas could assist watchdogs to make more insightful contributions to improving collaboration.

As with the general literature, the watchdogs make relatively few direct findings on the effectiveness of collaboration that are based on an explicit methodology. Nevertheless, there are a range of indications that the body of work by the watchdogs has contributed significantly to improvement, learning and accountability in relation to accountability.

Some reports indicate that an agency made changes during the conduct of the investigation. For instance, the Queensland Ombudsman asbestos report indicated that an agency had been nominated as the lead agency for "the coordination of asbestos regulation and, where necessary, incident response" (2013a, 60). Commonly, the reports indicate whether the agencies involved have accepted recommendations, and comments provided by agencies may convey action that is being (or will be) taken.

There may be debate in Parliament about watchdog reports, and they may be followed up by a Parliamentary Committee as a formal inquiry, with its findings reported to Parliament. For instance, the NSW Public Accounts Committee followed up the Auditor-General's report on domestic and family violence, and observed a lack of progress in the implementation of collaboration-related recommendations. It made its own recommendation that the agencies "re-address the Auditor-General's recommendations to ensure they are fully implemented in the context of that framework, as action to date has been inadequate" (2013, v).

We suggest that watchdogs may have a role in examining in greater detail the models of collaboration considered by public sector managers, and more frequently detail and classify the type of collaboration in place, applying particular methodologies that evaluate directly collaboration quality and effectiveness.

Watchdog reports only rarely identify implications for the wider public sector, and this limits their potential to contribute to improved collaboration. While this is sometimes addressed through occasional comments in newsletters and similar communication channels, there may be opportunities to increase the impact of their work by developing wider evidence bases that complement the evidence gathered that is specific to the subject matter of the individual report.

For an individual watchdog there is potential for reports to find the same underlying problems and make similar generic recommendations in different operational contexts. For example, the Victorian Auditor-General (2014a) report on the environmental impacts of transport made collaboration related recommendations that called for a lead agency in consultation with others to develop a state-wide strategy, a review of governance arrangements, and establishment of mechanisms to monitor and coordinate related agency actions. These recommendations have the potential to be applied to many areas of collaboration.

The identification by watchdogs of numerous issues related to collaboration indicates that collaboration is one of the more challenging public administration strategies. The number of watchdog reports addressing collaboration issues (as listed in Table A1) suggests that this is the case for many areas of government activity, and the wide range of issues identified further confirms this view. Collaboration in the face of complex issues that don't fit in the remit of a single agency is potentially the hardest of all public administration strategies.

In seeking to learn from watchdog reports about the impact of public sector approaches to collaboration on non-government organisations, it is significant that watchdogs' frame of reference is to support accountability processes as well as encourage learning by agencies. Wanna et al. observe that agency-based perspectives play a significant role in collaboration:

> Most organisational cultures and administrative incentive structures remain risk averse. Silos and silo-mentalities can adversely affect collaborative engagement. The institutional walls that serve to protect the organisation and provide defensible structures for officials carrying out administrative duties within a single entity can impede cooperative partnerships. All forms of cooperation require different types of commitments and skills. All instances of collaboration involve hard work and dedication to establish and maintain. These requirements place additional burdens and responsibilities on the participating actors (government or non-government) (2009, 23).

This agency-based perspective may not sit well with non-government entities, Head (2014) having commented that:

> [e]valuation from the perspective of a funding agency (measurable results, value for money) and from the perspective of various non-government players (benefits for local interests, greater voice in planning, reshaping service options) may be rather different. Thus, the perceived merits and achievements of collaborations reflect stakeholder positions, including their relative power (p. 149).

However, it is evident that a number of watchdogs have considered the perspective of non-government entities, in particular NFPOs, in matters such as their advocacy role.

In conclusion, this project has confirmed from an extensive evidence base that collaboration remains very problematic for the public sector. There is a large array of evidence regarding issues arising where collaboration is required, with lessons that are relevant beyond the specific areas investigated. However, it is not evident that the wider public sector is drawing on this evidence as

a body of work to learn and improve. There are also lessons for watchdogs from this research that might assist them to improve the contribution of their work to better public sector collaboration.

Areas for potential further research

There is very limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of collaboration by the public sector assessed in a consistent manner across multiple programmes and initiatives. This project has developed an approach to add to this evidence by data-mining existing sources of evidence from watchdog reports. The source material of the watchdog reports has the advantage of being independent from the agencies involved in the collaboration. However, while there are formal standards for the conduct of performance audits and implied standards for ombudsman reports, there is no consistent approach between reports in the collaboration issues addressed and the criteria applied. Each of the watchdog reports is designed around topic-specific issues and criteria for expected performance. Noting these reservations, there is nevertheless potential for further research collaboration and other key public administration issues and strategies using methods similar to this project.

The project has also highlighted a number of issues for consideration by watchdogs. These arise from the underlying general approach of each report being a record of a unique investigation. Watchdogs could independently or jointly make explicit links between investigations and develop data systems that enable assessment of patterns and trends across groups of reports. This could be of value to the watchdogs, to better target their work programs and their accountability for their own performance. It could be particularly useful if it helped identify underlying factors that inhibit agency performance and the extent to which the findings of their reports are shaped by the mindsets and value frames of their work. The example of potentially replicated collaboration-related recommendations between reports raises a number of questions that could be explored fruitfully, including whether this is due to similar weaknesses recurring or due to a fixed frame whatever the circumstances.

Specific to collaboration, watchdogs should consider the benefits of focusing specific investigations on the quality and effectiveness of collaboration, including identifying and classifying the types of collaboration involved and applying methodologies that directly assess the quality of the collaboration. To gain greater insight into the factors contributing to and inhibiting effective collaboration, they should also consider giving greater emphasis to factors such as leadership, commitment and relationships.

There is evidence that watchdogs learn from each other, and there are areas where they collaborate while maintaining their independence. For instance, Auditors General coordinated independent reports on the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, as listed in Table A1. Research that looks at how watchdogs collaborate could assist in strengthening the institutional bases and practices involved.

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Appendix A. Pool of 112 reports

We scanned the listings of reports for the period of 2009 to 2014, and identified some significant earlier reports. Discussions with the Heads of Performance Audit and Deputy Ombudsman enabled us to identify additional reports that addressed collaboration in some way. This created a pool of 112 reports found to have content relevant to collaboration in the context of this project. These reports have been grouped in eleven subject area clusters in Table A1.

Table A1. Watchdog reports identified as having content relevant to collaboration

Cluster	Report
Child protection	Auditor General ACT 2013. *Care and Protection System.*
	Ombudsman NSW 2011. *Keeping them safe.*
	Ombudsman NSW 2013. *Responding to Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities.*
	Ombudsman NSW 2013. *The continuing need to better support young people leaving care report Aug 2013.*
	Ombudsman NSW 2014. *Review of the NSW Child Protection System - Are things improving Special report to Parliament April 2014.*
	Ombudsman NT 2011. *A Life Long Shadow.*
	Ombudsman WA 2011. *Planning for children in care: An Ombudsman's own motion investigation into the administration of the care planning provisions of the Children and Community Services Act 2004.*
	Ombudsman WA 2011. *Investigation into ways that State Government departments can prevent or reduce sleep-related infants deaths.*
	Ombudsman Vic 2009. *Investigation into the Department of Human Services Child Protection Program*.
	Ombudsman Vic 2010 *Investigation into Child Protection – out of home care.*
	Ombudsman Vic 2011 *Investigation regarding the Department of Human Services Child Protection Program (Loddon Mallee Region).*
Environment/regulation	Auditor-General NZ. (2007). *Sustainable development: Implementation of the Programme of Action.*
	Auditor General WA 2014. *Our Heritage and Our Future: Health of the Swan Canning River System.*
	Auditor-General Vic 2014. *Managing the Environmental Impacts of Transport.*
	Ombudsman NSW 2010. *Responding to the asbestos problem: The need for significant reform in NSW.*
	Ombudsman Qld 2013. *The Asbestos Report: An investigation into the regulation of asbestos in Queensland.*
	Ombudsman Vic 2009. *Brookland Green Estate – Investigation into methane gas leaks.*

Cluster	Report
Emergency preparedness/response	Auditor-General ACT 2013. *Bushfire Preparedness.* Auditor-General Aust. 2007b. *Australia's Preparedness for a Human Influenza Pandemic*. Auditor-General NZ 2013. *Effectiveness and efficiency of arrangements to repair pipes and roads in Christchurch*. Auditor-General NZ 2013. *Earthquake Commission: Managing the Canterbury Home Repair Programme* Auditor-General NZ 2012 *Roles, responsibilities, and funding of public entities after the Canterbury earthquakes.* Auditor-General NZ 2014 *Effectiveness of arrangements for co-ordinating civilian maritime patrols: Progress in responding to the Auditor-General's recommendations*. Auditor-General NZ 2012. *Public entities' progress in implementing the Auditor-General's recommendations 2012: Part 3 Effectiveness of arrangements for co-ordinating civilian maritime patrols.* Auditor-General Qld 2004. *Audit of the Queensland Disaster Management System.* Auditor-General of Qld 2011. *National Partnership Agreement for Natural Disaster Reconstruction and Recovery.* Auditor-General Qld 2014. *Bushfire Preparedness*. Auditor-General Qld 2014. *Preparedness for 2018 Commonwealth Games*. Auditor General Tas 2011. *Bushfire Management.* Auditor General Vic 2009. *Preparedness to Respond to Terrorism Incidents: Essential services and critical infrastructure.* Auditor General Vic 2013. *Flood Relief and Recovery*. Auditor General Vic 2014. *Heatwave management.* Auditor General WA 2004. *Responding to major bushfires.* Auditor General WA 2009. *Coming ready or not: Preparing for large-scale emergencies.* Ombudsman Queensland 2011. *The Hendra Virus Report*. Ombudsman Vic 2009. *Brookland Green Estate – Investigation into methane gas leaks.* Ombudsman Vic 2012. *Investigation into allegations concerning rail safety in the Melbourne Underground Rail Loop.* Ombudsman Vic 2014. *Investigation into Latrobe City Council's failure to reinstate Summerfield Track following a landslip in June 2012.* Ombudsman Vic 2014. *Investigation into Latrobe City Council's failure to reinstate Summerfield Track following a landslip in June 2012.*

Cluster	Report
Homelessness/housing	Auditor-General ACT 2013. *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.* Auditor-General Aust. 2013. *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.* Auditor-General NT 2010. *Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program.* Auditor-General NT 2013. *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.* Auditor-General Qld. 2013. *Implementing the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Queensland.* Auditor-General Tas. 2013. *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.* Auditor-General Vic. 2013. *Addressing Homelessness: Partnerships and Plans.* Auditor General WA 2012. *Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Western Australia.* Commonwealth Ombudsman (2012). *Commonwealth and Territory agencies delivering Indigenous Housing programs - Remote Housing Reforms in the NT.* Auditor-General New South Wales 2007. *Responding to Homelessness.* Auditor-General NSW 2013. *Making the best use of public housing.* Auditor General WA 2010. *Fitting and Maintaining Safety Devices in Public Housing.* Auditor-General Vic 2010 *Access to social housing*. Auditor-General Vic 2012. *Access to public housing.* Ombudsman NSW 2009. *The implementation of the Joint Guarantee of Service for People with Mental Health Problems and Disorders Living in Aboriginal, Community and Public Housing.*
Suicide	Auditor General WA 2014. *The Implementation and Initial Outcomes of the Suicide Prevention Strategy*. Ombudsman WA 2014. *Investigation into ways that State government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people.* NSW Child Death Review Team 2013. *Annual Report 2012*. Commonwealth Ombudsman (2013). *Suicide and Self-harm in the Immigration Detention Network.*
Justice/crime prevention	Auditor-General NSW 2007. *Addressing the Needs of Young Offenders.* Auditor-General NSW 2008. *Working with hotels and clubs to reduce alcohol related crime*. Auditor-General Victoria 2014. *Mental Health Strategies for the Justice System.* Auditor-General Victoria 2014. *Prisoner Transportation*. Auditor General WA 2008. *The Juvenile Justice System: Dealing with Young People under the Young Offenders Act 1994.* Ombudsman NSW 2011. *Kariong Juvenile Correctional Centre - Meeting the challenges.* Ombudsman NZ 2012. Investigation of the Department of Corrections in relation to the Provision, Access and Availability of Prisoner Health Services. Ombudsman Vic 2010. *Investigation into conditions at the Melbourne Youth Justice Precinct.* Ombudsman Vic 2013. *Investigation into children transferred from the youth justice system to the adult prison system.*

Cluster	Report
Not for profit organisations	Auditor-General Victoria 2013. *Implementation of the Strengthening Community Organisations Action Plan.*
	Auditor General WA 1998. *Accommodation and support services to young people unable to live at home.*
	Auditor General WA 2000. *A Means to an End: Contracting not-for-profit organisations for the delivery of community services*.
	Auditor General WA 2003. *Contracting not-for-profit organisations for delivery of health services.*
	Auditor General WA 2012. *Working Together: Management of partnerships with volunteers.*
	Auditor General WA 2013. *Delivering Western Australia's Ambulance Services*.
	Auditor General WA 2013. *Sustainable Funding and Contracting – Component I Funding to the Not-For-Profit Sector*.
	Commonwealth Ombudsman 2010. *Administration of funding agreements with regional and remote Indigenous organisations*.
	Ombudsman Vic 2011. *Investigation into the Foodbowl Modernisation Project.*
Contracting	Auditor General Australia 2013. *Administration of the Agreements for the Management, Operation and Funding of the Mersey Community Hospital.*
	Auditor General Australia 2014. *Air Warfare Destroyer Program.*
	Auditor General NSW 2006. *Condition of state roads*.
	Auditor General WA 2012. *Major Capital Projects*
	Auditor General WA 2010 *ICT Procurement in Health and Training*
	Auditor General WA 2009. *Maintaining the State Road Network*.
	Victorian Auditor-General 2008. *Maintaining Regional Arterial Roads*.
	Ombudsman Vic 2009. *Investigation into the tendering and contracting of information technology services within Victoria Police*.
	Ombudsman Vic 2012. *Investigation into allegations concerning rail safety in the Melbourne Underground Rail Loop.*
Public/private partnerships	Auditor-General Victoria 2009. *The New Royal Children's Hospital - a public private partnership*.
	Auditor-General Victoria 2010. *Management of Prison Accommodation Using Public Private Partnerships.*
	Auditor-General Victoria 2013. *Operating Water Infrastructure Using Public Private Partnerships.*
	Auditor-General NSW 2006. *The New Schools Privately Financed Project.*
	Auditor-General NSW 2009. *Handback of the M4 Toll way. Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW.*
IT	Ombudsman Victoria 2011. *Own motion investigation into ICT-enabled projects.*
	Auditor-General Victoria 2013. *Clinical ICT Systems in the Victorian Public Health Sector.*
	Auditor General Western Australia 2010. *ICT Procurement in Health and Training.*

Cluster	Report
Service coordination	Auditor-General Aust. 2007a. *Whole of Government Indigenous Service Delivery Arrangements*.
	Auditor General Aust. 2010. *Effective Cross-Agency Agreements.*
	Auditor General Aust. 2013. *Cross-agency coordination of employment programs.*
	Auditor General Aust. 2012. *Australian Government Coordination Arrangements for Indigenous Programs.*
	Auditor-General NZ 2015. *Ministry for Primary Industries: Managing the Primary Growth Partnership*.
	Auditor-General Qld 2011. *Systems to coordinate delivery of the Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland target: Halve the proportion of Queensland children living in a household without a working parent.*
	Auditor-General Victoria 2013. *Managing Traffic Congestion*.
	Auditor-General Victoria 2014. *Coordinating public transport.*
	Auditor General Vic 2014. *Access to Services for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers.*
	Auditor General Vic 2014. *Accessibility of Mainstream Services for Aboriginal Victorians*.
	Auditor General WA 2006. *Behind the Evidence: Forensic Services*.
	Auditor General WA 2013. *Follow-up Performance Audit of Behind the Evidence: Forensic Services.*
	Auditor-General New South Wales 2006. *Agencies working together to improve services.*
	Auditor-General New South Wales 2011. *Responding to domestic and family violence.*
	Commonwealth Ombudsman 2009. *Administration of the Economic Security Strategy Payment.*
	Commonwealth Ombudsman 2009. *Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER): FaHCSIA asbestos surveys: communication issues.*
	Commonwealth Ombudsman 2014. *Department of Health: Avoiding, acknowledging and fixing mistakes.*
	Ombudsman NSW 2006. *Domestic violence: improving police practice.*
	Ombudsman NSW 2011. *Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage - the need to do things differently.*

Appendix B. Watchdog coverage across the three domains

Nine reports were selected for detailed analysis to ensure a cross-selection of cases and issues. These reports were grouped in three subject-area clusters, each containing three reports (section 1.5). The clusters were selected so that comparisons could be drawn between a human services subject area (child protection), a technical area (environmental management), and a third cluster where collaboration is central to the subject area. Of interest is whether the different contexts and drivers for collaboration in each subject area make a discernible difference – for human services there is the widely recognised complexity of the social issues, for environmental management there is the systems perspective of ecology, and for collaboration-focussed reports the many sources of collaboration principles and guidance.

To assess the coverage across the three domains the nine reports (Table 2) were analysed in relation to the number of distinct issues identified, and the results are presented for the three clusters in Table B1. To some extent, all of the reports addressed each of the three domains, however there were variations in the numbers of issues identified.

Governance issues make up more than half (54%), information issues make up 25%, and capacity issues 21%. The three clusters contribute in a broadly similar manner to the distribution across the three broad characteristics, with their contributions ranging from 31% to 36% of the total of 120 issues.

Table B1. Summary statistics of issues identified in each report for the three clusters in relation to the three domains

	Child protection	Environment	Collaboration	TOTAL
Governance	20	24	21	65
Capacity	7	8	10	25
Information	10	8	12	30
TOTAL	37	40	43	120

The three subject-area clusters were selected so that comparisons could be drawn between human services, technical, and collaboration-focussed subject areas. The summary statistics suggest that there is remarkably little difference between the issues identified across the three clusters, their contributions ranging from 31% to 36% of the total issues raised in the nine reports. In proportional terms, the spread of issues across the three broad characteristics is similar. The largest difference occurs for 'capacity', where the Child Protection reports made up 28% of capacity issues whereas the collaboration reports made up 40% of capacity issues. Reasons for this difference could be fewer capacity issues existing in the human services subject area, or greater attention to them by watchdogs in collaboration-focussed subject areas. However, with only three reports in each subject area cluster it is not possible to explain with any certainty differences between the three subject area clusters.