



Mastering the Craft of Advising Government

Overview, product and price list*

Why we developed the workshops

The craft of analysis and preparing ‘frank and fearless’ advice to government is integral to good public policy. Despite the importance of their roles, our experience is that public servants learn advice and briefing skills on the job without too much formal guidance. If they’re lucky, they can be supervised and mentored by an experienced manager and get good professional development opportunities. That’s not always the case. Workloads are high and expectations tend to be tacit rather than explicit.

Our approach

With this in mind, we have developed a series of workshops to cater for a diverse audience ranging from new recruits through to senior public servants. These can be packaged to suit clients’ requirements.

Our offer ranges from a comprehensive, three-workshop series aimed at improving the quality of public policy advice, through to workshops focused on specific skills such as policy analysis, consultation, running a meeting or preparing Estimates Committee briefs. For busy managers and directors, we can compress the best of our workshops into a one-day masterclass.

All our workshops are dynamic, challenging, interactive and supportive of different learning styles. They offer engaging discussions peppered with real-life stories of highs and lows from two seasoned policy practitioners. Participants are given realistic scenarios and activities to work through, as well as a safe environment to talk freely. Our workshop design draws on adult learning principles and includes collaborative, experiential learning activities relevant to the public-sector environment. As the testimonials on page 7 illustrate, participants enjoy the workshops, as well as build their knowledge and capability.

In each workshop we explore the ‘tools of the trade.’ We provide each participant with unique resources to take away and use in their everyday work. We only wish we’d had these when we were embarking on our public service careers!

Before running a workshop, we meet with you to understand your specific needs and any customisation required for your team. We collect feedback after all our workshops and provide this in a report to you. For the three-workshop series, we also offer tailored feedback to all participants about written work samples, a briefing for supervisors before and after the workshop series, and a final session with you to discuss key themes or issues that emerged.

** Final workshop costs may vary due to client requirements. Price includes workshop preparation, delivery and resources. If required, venue hire, our travel and catering will be charged at cost.*

Mastering the Craft of Advising Government core workshop series

Workshop 1: Becoming frank and fearless (4 hours)

Best suited for: all levels across policy, programs or service delivery, including supervisors. Up to 14 people.

Do you want to become a more accomplished advisor?

We learnt how to!

This workshop will give participants the tools to improve their advice through a scenario where three distinct policy officer roles are acted out, followed by a resource which helps participants to assess the extent to which advice is frank and fearless.

The workshop concludes with the facilitators re-enacting two verbal briefings and providing two sample briefing notes on the topic as examples of good and not so good briefing approaches.

Subject to availability, we invite a departmental senior executive to join us for a panel discussion offering insights about frank and fearless advice and how best to prepare and present it.

Workshop 2: Nailing the brief (4 hours)

Best suited for: all levels across policy, programs or service delivery, including supervisors. Up to 14 people.

Do you want to write the brief that doesn't bounce back?

We learnt the hard way!

This workshop will help participants hone in on what decision makers do and don't need to read. Using real briefing material submitted by the participants, as well as mock briefing exercises, participants will learn what makes a brief effective.

The workshop provides practical resources to help public servants write succinct, effective briefings. All participants receive individual verbal feedback from the facilitators about their written work, identifying strengths and areas for sharpened analysis.

Subject to availability, we invite a departmental senior executive to join us for a panel discussion offering insights about the briefing preferences and expectations of the Minister and Director-General.

Workshop 3: Really nailing the brief! (4 hours)

Best suited for: all levels across policy, programs or service delivery, including supervisors. Up to 14 people.

Do you want to find ways to improve your brief (or your team's brief) before your supervisor does?

We did!

This workshop begins with a group exercise to improve a (not so good!) brief supplied by the facilitators, drawing on the resources provided to date.

Participants will again submit written work samples to the facilitators in advance and each participant receives up to ten minutes of individual verbal and written feedback on their brief from the facilitators. In pairs, participants then work on laptops to improve their briefs based on facilitator feedback and peer review.

The aim is to consolidate self-assessment, peer review and practical rewriting skills. The workshop concludes with our top tips for nailing the brief based on our review of over 100 briefing notes from numerous government departments.

Within two weeks of the final workshop, the facilitators have a one-hour check-in with supervisors and the client to discuss the 'before' and 'after' briefs prepared by their teams and the key themes from the facilitators' feedback to participants.

Mastering the Craft of Advising Government stand-alone workshops

Who's who in the policy zoo? (4 hours)

Best suited for: new recruits and junior policy officers, or more senior public servants in program and service delivery positions, who have had limited exposure to public policy. It would typically be run prior to the Becoming frank and fearless workshop. Up to 14 people.

Do you want to know the positions and people who are essential in the day to day life of a public servant?

We wish we'd known!

This workshop takes participants through a list of positions and people and uses real scenarios to highlight the different perspectives of the players in public policy. The workshop will explore the benefits of being 'nosey' (in the right way!) and how having the right information and the right networks can help public servants do their job better. The workshop includes practical resources to help participants build their networks and knowledge.

Subject to availability, we invite a departmental senior executive to join us for a panel discussion offering insights about the current public policy environment and key portfolio influencers and stakeholders. Clients may also wish to invite the departmental Cabinet Legislation and Liaison Officer and the Cabinet Secretary to discuss Cabinet and Parliamentary processes.

Mastering the Craft Masterclass (6½ hours training time plus ½ hour lunch)

Best suited for: managers and directors with responsibility for clearing briefing notes. Up to 10 people.

Do you need practical tools and tips to help lift the quality of your team's advice?

We can help you!

This masterclass for up to ten managers and directors delivers a compressed version of the Becoming frank and fearless and Nailing the brief workshops (see above). It is offered in conjunction with the Mastering the Craft of Advising Government workshop series, offering managers an opportunity to apply the workshop resources and improve the quality of advice from their teams.

Rather than bring their own written work samples, participants in this class are asked to bring a sample of a briefing note which they found challenging to improve or quality assure. The facilitators provide each participant with suggestions as to how their team's briefing note could be improved. Feedback is linked to the workshop resources as an example of how participants can embed these aids in their ongoing supervisory or quality assurance work.

Subject to availability, we invite a departmental senior executive to join us for a panel discussion to give participants insights into the briefing preferences and expectations of their Minister and Director-General.

Nailing the consultation (4 hours)

Best suited for: any level public servant. Up to 16 people.

Do you want to know whether or not you should consult and if so, how to do it well?

We can take you through the steps!

This hands-on workshop will equip participants with the information and resources to improve consultation activities that inform a significant decision or public policy outcome, have a significant impact, and require consultation with multiple stakeholder groups. It starts with the premise that consulting on policy issues is a dynamic and often contentious process, with competing interests and decisions to be made. Upfront critical thinking about whether or not this is genuine consultation and what's in and out of scope can distinguish a successful consultation from a mediocre or negative experience.

Subject to availability, we invite a departmental senior executive to briefly join the workshop and discuss expectations and experiences regarding consultation activities. Participants will then be taken through the ideal process for planning, conducting and reviewing a consultation exercise based on planned consultation exercises they will bring on the day.

Activities include nailing the purpose, scope and decision/s sought in one paragraph; categorising the stakeholders based on influence and interest; confirming the best consultation methods; and getting the governance right. Participants will use and take away resources specifically geared for public service consultation activities.

Nailing the Estimates brief!

Best suited for: briefing officers, managers and directors responsible for preparing Estimates briefs. Up to 30 people.

Want to avoid the urgent call from Parliament House during Estimates hearings?

We can help you!

This 1-hour lunchbox session recreates the Estimates Committee environment by putting participants in the 'hot seat.' Participants use real Estimates Committee briefing notes from their portfolio to answer mock Estimates questions, thereby gaining insight into what will and won't help their Minister and Director-General on the day.

Subject to availability, we invite a departmental senior executive to outline their Minister's and Director-General's expectations. The facilitators present participants with an overview of contentious portfolio issues raised in previous hearings. Participants receive tips on how to identify and research potential Estimates Committee topics and a 'top tips' resource for drafting Estimates briefing notes.

Not another meeting! (3 hours)

Best suited for: entry-level, junior to middle-level staff from policy, program and regional service delivery areas. Up to 14 people.

Have you been to meetings that could have gone better?

We'll show you how!

This workshop will hone skills in being able to run, participate in and brief on meetings that are effective. To set the scene, participants will hear from a senior executive in their department about the range of meetings they are involved in, what makes for a successful meeting, and how staff can best contribute. The workshop involves role plays showcasing a meeting that goes well and one which falls short, with participants playing various scripted roles including the Chair, a disruptor and a distractor. The workshop concludes with a helpful resource providing tips for effective meetings.

Nailing the policy analysis (3 hours)

Best suited for: any level public servant involved in policy. Up to 14 people.

Would you like to sharpen your skills in developing and advising on policy options?

We have the tools!

This workshop will help policy practitioners be more structured and rigorous in how they think and go about formulating policy options and advice to decision-makers. The workshop takes participants through a Policy Development Thinking and Planning Tool with a series of simple prompt questions designed to help reduce the complexity and confusion that can stymie the policy analysis phase. Participants will apply the tool to their particular policy project/s learning how to improve their understanding of the 'problem' at hand, the policy objective/s, the range of options available, and how to best present these for the decision-maker. The workshop includes resources for use back at the desk.

Individual coaching

As an adjunct to the core workshop series, individual coaching is available and negotiated on a case by case basis at a cost of \$250 + GST \$25 per hour. One coaching session would require a minimum of four hours to allow time for discussions with supervisors and participants.

Do you have another topic you'd like us to cover?

We're happy to meet with you to discuss other workshop offerings that might best meet your team's needs.