



# Critical Friend Framework



# Introduction

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Dimensions of critical friending:

→ **INPUTS**

- Skills & experience offered e.g. content expertise, systemic thinking, facilitation skills, organisational knowledge, fresh perspective

→ **PROCESS & STRUCTURE**

- Nature of relationship, roles & remit, contact arrangements, resource needs, organisational culture, review methods

→ **OUTCOMES**

- Deepen evidence base; develop policy; solve a specific problem; widen debate; reinforce strategy; develop new working methods

# 1. INPUTS: Skills & expertise

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- What is the critical friend “offer”?
  - Content expertise
  - Qualifications/experience in related areas
  - Generalist skills
  - Policy development skills
  - Outside perspective/freshness
  - Organisational knowledge
  - Constructive/non-threatening challenge
  
- The “offer” will vary among critical friends
  
- Should be matched to the needs, and demands of department

## 2. PROCESSES & STRUCTURE

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### → Relationship

- Who is a critical friend?
- What relationship will entail – 2 way process
- Expertise and intervention required by department
- Impact / results sought

### → Role and remit

- Clear definition
- Need to manage expectations
- Set out role in writing, and disseminate to interested parties
- Build in process of challenge and negotiation

### → Nature and type of contact

- Maximise impact through early intervention in policy process and/or policy review
- Decide whether one-to-one meetings, one-off seminar/training event, on-line support etc
- Ensure level of contact sustainable

## 2. PROCESSES & STRUCTURE (cont)

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### → Resource requirements

- Training of critical friends / guidance available
- Easy to underestimate

### → Organisational culture

- Supportive senior managers
- Exploratory intellectual culture

### → Evaluation / review mechanisms

- Arrangements to revisit progress
- Establish success measures, subject to mutual review
- Build in flexibility to allow for changing circumstances

# 3. OUTCOMES – focus & type of support

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## → Content

- Focus is on developing analysis of project / work area
- Support might include:
  - peer review of project;
  - guidance / challenge re strategic option generation;
  - support on difficult / cross-cutting issues;
  - sounding board on availability of evidence, workability of proposals etc

## → Processes, tools and frameworks

- Focus is on developing the policy process, and new ways of working
- Support might include:
  - seminars on policy development process, tools and techniques
  - peer review of policy process
  - sounding board on cutting edge tools

# 3. OUTCOMES – focus & type of support (cont)

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## → People development

- Focus is on developing new & improved ways of working, and skills development
- Support might include:
  - Coaching key decision-makers, and policy staff
  - Reviewing skill needs and gaps in department, and undertaking follow-up training
  - Seminar on key policy thinking skill set, and practical options for development
  - Focus groups which widen the policy debate to new groups in the department

## → Inter-departmental linkages

- Focus is on forging / improving linkages between departments and/or units in departments
- Support might include:
  - Identification of overlapping agendas
  - Communication of Govt priorities
  - Brokering policy agreements between departments

# Key questions for critical friending



## CONTENT

- What are the issues that the project is addressing?
- What data is needed to support the policy development?
- What analyses is needed to support the policy development?
- What are the systems and organisational context for the new policy?
- What are the guiding principles underpinning policy in this area?
- What is the vision for the future?
- What aims and objectives have been set to realise the vision?
- What is the preferred strategic direction?
- What are the policy options for realising each of the strategic objectives?
- Which strategies provide the most suitable option for implementing the policy?
- What kind of change will the new policy require?

# Key questions for critical friending (cont)



## PROCESSES, TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS

Is policy development being informed by the most appropriate tools and techniques?

### **Structuring the thinking**

Are issue trees being used to structure the thinking in the set-up phase of the project?

Is first principles thinking being used to take stock of policy – how it fits with and drives towards strategic outcomes, and whether it is still an effective means of addressing the underlying problem?

Is systems thinking being used to identify and map the inter-relationships between factors in a system?

Are SWOT analyses being used to frame the agenda for developing new policies?

Are PESTLE analyses being used to structure the thinking for policy projects?

Are creativity techniques being used to develop innovative solutions to problems? (e.g. thought showering, de Bono's thinking hats etc)

# Key questions for critical friending (cont)



## PROCESSES, TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS

### Collecting data

Have links been established with govt specialists to identify the full range of data types and sources available and the extent of work already done on related issues?

Is data not already available collected through methods such as surveys, or interviews and focus groups?

Is policy work being informed by the highest quality and most up-to-date data and knowledge possible?

Are those involved in policy work 'intelligent consumers' of data and know how to bring it to bear in a timely fashion to inform their thinking?

### ***Learning from others***

Are international comparisons used to compare the effectiveness of different policies aimed at the same or similar problems (in different institutional or cultural contexts)?

Is benchmarking used to understand capability and identify areas for development in the delivery of policy or strategy?

# Key questions for critical friending (cont)



## PROCESSES, TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS

### ***Looking forward***

Is forecasting used to make predictions about differences among people, firms or other objects?

Is scenario development being used to help build consensus on the key issues facing all stakeholders?

Is counterfactual analysis used to identify causality or attribution?

### **Appraising options**

Is multi-criteria analysis used to assess options?

Is cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis used to systematically choose between different options?

Is the rationale for Government intervention identified to decide when – and in what ways – governments need to get involved?

### **Planning delivery**

Is the need for institutional change (through changes to structures, processes and culture of organisation) considered as part of detailed policy design?

Has an implementation plan(s) been developed to ensure those responsible for implementation are aware of what activities are required, by whom and by when?

# Key questions for critical friending (cont)



<b>PEOPLE</b>	
	<p>Is there sufficient diversity among policy personnel?</p> <p>Does the policy function/project team have the right mix of skills and experience?</p> <p>Does the policy function/project team have sufficient resources at their disposal e.g. access to policy tools, techniques &amp; frameworks?</p>
<b>INTER-DEPARTMENTAL LINKAGES</b>	
	<p>Does the organisation have systems in place to identify and undertake cross-cutting reviews that cross departmental boundaries?</p> <p>Are the organisation's priorities aligned internally?</p> <p>Are the organisation's priorities aligned with those of other Government departments and/or tensions and trade-offs managed effectively?</p>

