

Mid-Term Review of Australia’s APEC Support Program | MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Recommendation	Response	Action plan	Timeframe
<b>STRATEGIC LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>			
<p><b>1. The design for the successor phase of AASP should be commenced in early 2025.</b> This is an important step to ensure that AASP continues to maintain the momentum it has generated to date. Management should consider this a key consideration moving forward to avoid the risk of disruption of momentum between the two phases.</p>	<p>AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation.</b> The Investment Manager of the AASP will commence the planning phase of the design process in early 2025, in accordance with DFAT’s International Development Programming Guide. Starting the design processes early (i.e. least 18 months before the investment end date), would ensure that the design of the next phase is of high quality while allowing sufficient time for analysis, consultation, priority-setting, quality assurance, peer review and approvals. DFAT will continue to build and expand on its capacity-building efforts in line with evolving APEC priorities. The design for the successor phase will be guided by this mid-term review findings and recommendations.</p>	<p><b>Timeframe:</b> Planning for the design of the successor program will commence in February 2025</p>
<p><b>2. Multi-year funding options need to be considered in the next iteration of the program, within the overall investment timeframe and budget envelope.</b> This requires sensible allocation of finite funds for the capacity building work to a small number of Australia’s APEC priorities to avoid risking fragmentation of efforts to multiple small one-off events. This would involve continuing to provide finance to Sub-Funds (such as the Women and the Economy; EAASR and its successor) managed by the APEC Secretariat and supporting PMU to administer those</p>	<p>PARTIALLY AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation, in principle, with respect to the next iteration of the program (noting increasing the number of multi-year funding options is not feasible for the remainder of the current AASP investment</b> as the 2024-2025 budget pipeline is nearly full of existing and planned project commitments). During the design phase of the successor investment, DFAT could explore mechanisms that would allow sensible allocation of annual funds to a few large multi-year projects that meet high-level priority areas. It would also be important given the nature and structure of capacity building in APEC to also allocate funds for a number of smaller/one off projects, especially for those led by agency partners. This combination approach could assist filling the pipeline early in the financial year and achievement of longer-term</p>	<p><b>Timeframe:</b> During the successor phase of the AASP.</p>

<p>funds. For the design of the next phase, to consider funding a few large multi-year projects, rather than multiple small-value, one-off projects, which are often low-impact and cannot be sustained. For example, the AASP currently has 20 individual active agreements, most of which involve one-off small outputs that require complex procurement processes, which APS agencies find challenging.</p>		<p>outputs that will provide enduring benefits to the AASP project beneficiaries.</p>	
<p><b>3. In the design of the next phase, thought should be given to how to involve new partners and stakeholders with ‘capacity, expertise and interest’, to avoid reliance on existing whole-of-government partners.</b> It might be desirable to establish a small grant program (noting that it would need to be carefully designed so as not to overburden the AASP’s very small program management team) for stakeholders from industry, private sector, and academia who would be keen to access DFAT funds and are better resourced and equipped to implement an initiative in line with their expertise. Noting the recent reduced interest from current whole-of-government partners on leading projects in APEC due to resource constraints, this might be a fresh way of choosing the right delivery partners. This also fits in</p>	<p>PARTIALLY AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation, in principle, with respect to the next iteration of the program, however it will be subject to resources available to design, implement and oversee this recommendation, especially noting external partners may be less familiar with APEC and DFAT aid approvals and procedures and would need to be consistent with applicable procurement rules and guidelines.</b> To reduce sole reliance on the Australian whole-of-government partners to bid for AASP funds, DFAT could explore options for targeting new implementation partners in the next iteration of the program. With a new internal APEC communication strategy in place, DFAT is now better placed to promote the APEC ODA program on its website and potentially invite ideas and proposals for projects from private organisations, research and analysis bodies and institutions, think-tanks and other organisations, interested in APEC issues. Such organisations would need to have relevant expertise and be willing to partner with DFAT to effectively utilise ODA funds towards concrete capacity-building projects that meet Australia’s APEC priorities. The funding would continue to remain available to the whole-of-government</p>	<p>During the successor phase of the AASP.</p>

<p>neatly with DFAT’s ongoing attempt to have an increased online presence, be more transparent, and have a robust communication strategy for APEC.</p>		<p>partners, but new partnerships could be explored. Key considerations and limitations to implementing this approach would be the additional resourcing needed within DFAT to move to a ‘demand-based’ model and would also need to comply with applicable procurement policies and procedures. DFAT would need to seek guidance from the contract manager on how to implement this on a practical level.</p>	
<p><b>4. Support the creation of Community of Practices, where practical, for individual projects.</b> The AASP’s projects have engaged with more than 4,000 participants, the vast majority of whom have been highly enthusiastic about the experience, have appreciated the value of the events, and have often drawn on the outputs of projects to influence change within their own economies. Consideration should be given as how to leverage this informal network of participants in a more coherent and coordinated fashion, noting that several projects are already doing this, and could provide guidance (including lessons learnt) to inform the design of projects in the future, and should be a considered as part of the design and planning for the successor phase of the AASP.</p>	<p>PARTIALLY AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation, in principle.</b> While DFAT appreciates the value and benefits of establishing a more coherent, coordinated network of alumni and participants from all AASP projects, it is practically difficult to implement this recommendation across all of the AASP projects within the existing AASP budget envelope and investment timeframe. However, there is scope to encourage the creation of alumni networks and Communities of Practice between cohorts within future phases of specific existing projects. Two key examples are the Women’s Activator and the Growing Indigenous Trade projects. DFAT could also consider asking the project overseers of certain AASP projects to encourage project attendees/participants during the project implementation stages to form informal networks that go beyond the project life, to facilitate sharing of lessons and experiences, thus adding to the longevity of the project benefits. As noted in the recommendation, encouraging the formation of communities of practice/alumni networks in the design of projects could be a feature of the successor phase of the AASP.</p>	<p>Throughout 2025 for specific projects only, and during the successor phase of the AASP</p>

OPERATIONAL LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS			
<p>5. DFAT to continue support through the AASP of APEC's Project Management Unit (PMU) and the Policy Support Unit (PSU). Supporting a DFAT officer in the Secretariat who oversees all projects managed by the APEC Secretariat enhances effectiveness and reduces risk. The PMU has implemented various approaches to improve efficiency, including the introduction of new online tools for project management and training.</p>	<p>AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation.</b> The value of the AASP lies not only in its funding for capacity building projects, but also is the support it provides to the APEC Secretariat by funding the position of APEC's Project Management Unit (PMU) Director. Through DFAT's funding of this position, the PMU has been empowered to improve efficiency, including introducing new online tools for project management, as well as improve quality, including through increased training, for projects supported by APEC-funding, including funds provided by Australia to various APEC Sub-Funds. Continued funding will enhance Australia's efforts to ensure project quality, innovation and technical assistance across the whole of APEC's capacity-building projects.</p> <p>On-going support of the PSU will ensure it continues to undertake high quality and research on the request of APEC economies. The PSU's independent research, analysis, reporting and recommendations are vital to APEC implementing its agreed goals and programs and supporting capacity building, and in assisting achieve Australia's policy priorities in APEC on trade, investment, structural reform and inclusive growth</p>	<p>Throughout 2025, and during the successor phase of the AASP.</p>
<p>6. AASP must continue to proactively manage its pipeline, including:</p> <p>a) <b>Designing and implementing projects that promote disability equity and inclusion in trade</b>, which involves collaborating with people with disabilities and/or organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) during</p>	<p>AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation.</b></p> <p>a) DFAT is actively pursuing scoping a study focusing on <i>structural reforms to promote disability inclusion in the economy</i> in the 2024-2025 AASP pipeline. The study would explore structural reforms that promote disability equity in the economy.</p>	<p>Throughout 2025, and during the successor phase of the AASP.</p>

<p>the planning and execution phases. Conducting in-house scoping of such a project with the support of the managing contractor would provide a useful starting point.</p> <p>b) <b>Encouraging project overseers to design innovative approaches to project delivery</b> that move beyond simply conducting a workshop and preparing a report. Such outputs could include video content, interactive databases and web resources, communities of practice and more. In designing new activities, project overseers can draw on a growing portfolio of projects that have already been delivered by AASP, which incorporate creative and imaginative ways to transfer knowledge and build capacity.</p> <p>c) <b>Finalising and implementing a coordinated Communication Plan for the AASP.</b> Such a plan should also include additional resourcing to share social media content generated by individual projects to continue to increase the awareness of the AASP, highlight successes, and share lessons.</p>		<p>b) DFAT will work with the contract manager to encourage project overseers to incorporate innovative approaches to outputs in the design phase of projects. Engagement with project overseers will include developing ideas relating to innovation in project design and outputs, as well as inviting creative ideas from stakeholders.</p> <p>c) In addition to an APEC communications strategy, DFAT, in partnership with SDG, is developing an AASP-specific communications plan to further promote project outputs and the benefits of the overall program and to potentially increase the reach of the capacity building efforts. Once adopted in early 2025, the strategy will be monitored, reviewed and updated throughout the investment. Appropriate clearances and consent for publishing materials will be sought.</p>	
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<p>7. Project Overseers must ensure outputs are publicly available, including ensuring that:</p> <p>a) All AASP Projects routinely upload outputs onto accessible/online repositories. Several economies requested summaries, handouts, or policy briefs immediately after workshops to share with domestic stakeholders.</p> <p>b) All AASP projects finalise and upload completion reports to APEC’s project database to report back on how the project achieved its intended objectives, what the learnings and lessons were, and to raise AASP’s profile as an organisation</p>	<p>AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation, noting however, that some elements of an output (such as PowerPoint slide decks from individuals or organisations) may need to be restricted to APEC members only, due to, for example, privacy concerns or other sensitivities.</b></p> <p><b>Action plan:</b></p> <p>a) For future AASP projects, DFAT will consider requesting that the project contractors or project overseers produce a succinct handout (hard copy and/or electronic) on key policy lessons or recommendations relating to the workshop or event, to be disseminated immediately following the workshop or event, to the participants. This request may be added to the new Guidelines for implementing AASP projects. In addition, DFAT will encourage project overseers to work with the APEC Secretariat to distribute event materials/presentations as necessary and subject to any restrictions due to privacy/sensitivities, for example, by arranging to load them on the Secretariat-managed ‘meeting document database (MDDDB)’. Some of the AASP projects’ achievements and performance stories will also be shared on DFAT internet website routinely as case studies throughout 2025 and 2026.</p> <p>b) All AASP project overseers will continue to finalise and upload high quality completion reports to APEC Project Database upon completion of projects. DFAT will ensure implementing partners and contractors are aware of and actioning this requirement diligently and it has been added to the new Guidelines for implementing AASP projects.</p>	
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<p>implementing effective capacity building projects.</p>		<p><b>Timeframe:</b> Throughout 2025, and during the successor phase of the AASP.</p>	
<p><b>8. Continue to build a portfolio of Case Studies highlighting successful projects</b> in order to convey a powerful narrative about the effectiveness of the AASP and to strengthen the argument for the next phase of the investment.</p>	<p>AGREE</p>	<p><b>DFAT agrees with this recommendation.</b> Producing a portfolio of successful case studies will be an important component of our overall APEC communications strategy as well as our AASP-specific communications strategy. These case studies will communicate the benefits of our capacity building projects under the AASP, potentially expand the reach of our capacity building efforts, and will provide inspiration for the design and implementation of innovative projects into the future.</p>	<p><b>Timeframe:</b> Throughout 2025, and during the successor phase of the AASP.</p>