

# Tracking delivery

Global trends and warning  
signs in delivery units





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# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2 Global trends in delivery units</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3 Conditions for success</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4 Warning signs</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>5 Conclusion</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>33</b>

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## Summary

It is a challenging time to be running a government. Political leaders around the world are grappling with sluggish economies, growing inequality and a palpable sense of disenfranchisement among voters. In this demanding environment, one government innovation is proving to be especially popular internationally: delivery units. But just how effective are they?

Originating in the UK under Tony Blair's Government in 2001, delivery units are small teams that work to embed an evidence-based culture in government. They gather and analyse a constant stream of performance data, and they investigate and intervene if desired results do not appear to be materialising on the ground. Delivery units now support heads of government in some 25 countries, with many more operating at local and regional levels.

Sierra Leone's President, for instance, set up a new delivery unit in 2015 to help revive the national economy in the wake of the Ebola epidemic and a collapse in commodity prices. Canada's newly elected Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, adopted the delivery unit model in early 2016 as part of an effort to restore public trust in government institutions. The past two years alone have seen more than a dozen other governments – including Costa Rica, Ghana, Kenya, New South Wales (Australia), Pakistan, Peru, Saudi Arabia and Serbia – create such units.

This innovation has become a multi-million pound industry in its own right, with national governments and international aid organisations handing out contracts to consultancies to assist with the creation of new units.\* But whether delivery units live up to the current hype and actually help improve government performance depends entirely on getting their set-up right.

Although the overall number of delivery units continues to rise, advocates of this innovation should take note of a parallel (and so far unreported) trend in governments becoming disillusioned with their delivery units. Many units that were once announced with great fanfare are quietly being axed. Eight have closed since 2014, including units in Australia (2015), Chile (2014), Tanzania (2017) and, closer to home, Wales (2016). There are also a handful of other units that are limping on without the sense of momentum and political backing that they once enjoyed.

**If delivery units are to produce results in today's challenging climate, it is more important than ever to capture lessons on what works.**

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\* For instance, the Department for International Development (DFID) has agreed a £2.9 million contract with McKinsey to set up Sierra Leone's Presidential Delivery Team; the New South Wales Government has paid AUS \$485,000 to Boston Consulting Group to help set up the Premier's Implementation Unit; and the federal Government of Canada has agreed a contract with Delivery Associates worth CAN \$200,000 to help get its Results and Delivery Unit off the ground. See Department for International Development, 'DFID 7168 support to the Presidential Delivery Team – Sierra Leone', 31 August 2015, <https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/89cc9f3d-a63b-4665-aa2e-5f9c7482cb62>; Department of Premier and Cabinet, *2015–2016 Annual Report*, New South Wales Government, Sydney, Australia, 2016, [www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/186029/Department\\_of\\_Premier\\_and\\_Cabinet\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2015-16.pdf](http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0008/186029/Department_of_Premier_and_Cabinet_Annual_Report_2015-16.pdf); and Zilio, M., 'Liberals spend \$200,000 for advice on delivering campaign pledges', *The Globe and Mail*, 30 September 2016, [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/liberals-spend-200000-for-advice-on-delivering-campaign-pledges/article32187629/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/liberals-spend-200000-for-advice-on-delivering-campaign-pledges/article32187629/).

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This report explores:

- why so many delivery units around the world are closing or struggling
- the characteristics of failed units and what makes for a successful unit
- the warning signs that today's units would do well to heed.

## Recommendations

Drawing on interviews with officials who have worked in delivery units, as well as the consultants and sponsor organisations that have assisted them, this report makes six recommendations for a successful delivery unit:

- 1. Make sure there is strong, highly visible political backing.**
- 2. Commit to a tightly defined remit.**
- 3. Select a physical location close to a political sponsor.**
- 4. Adopt the right hiring strategy, organisational structure and leadership model.**
- 5. Ensure cross-government ownership of the delivery unit's results agenda.**
- 6. Put routines in place to review effectiveness and refresh operations.**

Governments can pay a heavy price for weak or ineffective units, and not just in terms of wasted resources. When units lose influence, for example, their continued existence can cultivate a false sense of security that government projects and programmes are being properly monitored. But simply abolishing them in these instances isn't necessarily the answer either. Many governments have found that they fulfil an otherwise unmet need. In the UK, David Cameron's Government axed the original Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) in 2010. By this point the PMDU was by no means the effective operation it once was – having been weakened by a lack of political backing, an unmanageably broad remit and a move from the Cabinet Office to the Treasury.<sup>1</sup> But rather than reform it, the administration got rid of it, and in doing so, deprived themselves of a mechanism for understanding why results were not materialising and what could be done about it. The minister responsible for this decision, Oliver Letwin, has since called it "a terrible mistake".<sup>2</sup>

The Cameron Government reinstated the unit in 2012 and later introduced a series of ministerial implementation taskforces to ensure that its top priorities had the necessary level of ministerial ownership. The UK Government is certainly not alone in seeking to re-activate such units.

The lessons in this report are particularly important for the UK Government at a time when many Whitehall departments are establishing their own delivery units and the Department for International Development continues to be a major sponsor of such units overseas.

With Brexit and budget cuts demanding so much of Whitehall's attention, the effectiveness of the central Implementation Unit in the Cabinet Office will also play a critical role in keeping the Government focused on implementing its top priorities.

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# 1 Introduction

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It is just over two years since the Institute for Government first reported on the global trend in governments setting up delivery units.\* Since that time, the international landscape has changed dramatically. There are now many more units in existence, but also a growing list of governments for whom delivery units have not lived up to their expectations.

Most of what has been written on delivery units is either in-depth case studies of individual units or guides by practitioners on how to set them up and run them.\*\* Very little attention has been paid to what can be learnt by comparing the experiences of units (both past and present) on a global scale, with today's trend of units closing being overlooked.

This report fills that gap. It looks at the dynamics of the current global trends in delivery units, sets out six conditions for success that have emerged from the experiences of current and abolished units, and identifies the warning signs that governments and sponsor organisations alike would do well to heed.

## What are delivery units?

Delivery units are small teams that help political leaders to stay focused on the delivery of key policy priorities. The nature of these units varies from one jurisdiction to the next. But broadly speaking, they fulfil two main functions:

- **tracking progress** against a select number of top priorities through collecting, analysing and routinely reporting on a constant stream of performance data
- **investigating and intervening to solve problems** where progress appears to be slipping off track (e.g. by conducting in-depth investigations, convening stakeholders or providing technical assistance).\*\*\*

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\* This report, *International Delivery*, was published in partnership with the Mowat Centre in Canada (see Gold, J., *International Delivery: Centres of government and the drive for better policy implementation*, Institute for Government, London and Mowat Centre, Toronto, 2014, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/international-delivery-centres-government-and-drive-better-policy-implementation>).

\*\* For a broad range of case studies on individual units, see the Centre for Public Impact's Public Impact Observatory ([www.centreforpublicimpact.org/observatory](http://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/observatory)) and Princeton University's Innovations for Successful Societies ([successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/](http://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/)). For guides by practitioners, see, for example, Barber, M., with Moffit, A. and Kihn, P., *Deliverology 101: A field guide for educational leaders*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2010; and Shostak, R., Watkins, J., Bellver, A. and John-Graham, I., 'When might the introduction of a delivery unit be the right intervention?', World Bank, Washington, DC, [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/285741-1368636830774/When\\_Might\\_the\\_Intro\\_of\\_a\\_DU\\_Be\\_the\\_Right\\_Intervention\\_FINAL.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/285741-1368636830774/When_Might_the_Intro_of_a_DU_Be_the_Right_Intervention_FINAL.pdf).

\*\*\* Shostak et al. identify a third core function: "build[ing] understanding and capability for strengthening the underlying actors and systems/processes" (see Shostak, R., Watkins, J., Bellver, A. and John-Graham, I., 'When might the introduction of a delivery unit be the right intervention?', World Bank, Washington, DC, [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/285741-1368636830774/When\\_Might\\_the\\_Intro\\_of\\_a\\_DU\\_Be\\_the\\_Right\\_Intervention\\_FINAL.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/285741-1368636830774/When_Might_the_Intro_of_a_DU_Be_the_Right_Intervention_FINAL.pdf), p. 3).

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Some delivery units also perform additional functions, the most common being:

- **scrutinising policy proposals** to see whether implementation plans are feasible
- **addressing delivery capability gaps** in the public sector workforce, through activities such as training and co-designing implementation plans.

Some delivery units are introduced as standalone additions to a government structure (e.g. in Colombia and Peru), while others are created as part of a broader transformation of central functions or delivery systems (e.g. in Canada and Sierra Leone).

## Where have delivery units achieved results?

The delivery unit model has been credited with driving striking improvements in programmes and services, including:

- After the introduction of the Special Monitoring Unit's **childhood immunisation** GPS (Global Positioning System) tracking programme in the Punjab province of Pakistan, the vaccinator attendance rate rose from 22% to over 90% between 2014 and 2015.<sup>3</sup>
- **Infant mortality** in Maryland in the United States dropped from 8 per 1,000 live births in 2008 to 6.5 per 1,000 live births in 2014, after it became a focus for the Governor's Delivery Unit.<sup>4</sup> The unit's data analysis enabled resources to be targeted at high-risk areas and groups, with regular stocktake meetings convened to review progress with the Governor and heads of relevant agencies.
- In Malaysia, reported **street crime** fell by 35% between 2009 and 2010, after 'reducing crime' became a National Key Results Area.<sup>5</sup> Malaysia's Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) worked with the Minister of Home Affairs and key stakeholders to develop and assign responsibility for a detailed implementation plan.
- **Hospital waiting times** fell in the UK between 2001 and 2003, after the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) began tracking and investigating delays in patients' 'journeys' through the system. The number of people waiting more than a year for surgical procedures fell from over 40,000 to below 10,000.<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to isolate the precise 'value add' of delivery units. Few have mechanisms in place to capture their impact and most – either implicitly or explicitly – are careful not to take the credit for results away from practitioners on the ground.<sup>7</sup> Equally, because units are set up to intervene early and remove obstacles to delivery, it is hard to measure the benefits of a problem avoided. There are also persistent fears that delivery unit methodologies create incentives for people to 'game' results.

But the Institute for Government's own research points to major projects, such as the UK's Sure Start Children's Centres programme, where delivery teams themselves have credited units with influencing key strategic decisions (in that instance recognising the need for an arm's-length delivery partner).<sup>8</sup> Equally, a number of ministers have credited delivery units with helping them to understand why results were not materialising on the ground. For instance, the former UK Minister for Government Policy in the Cabinet Office, Oliver Letwin, reflected:

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*I very often found, even at the very end, that the small team in the Implementation Unit who were very clear-minded – and we hired people who were specifically very clear-minded – could do more in a few weeks than a whole Department had done in a year to get straight why something was going wrong. ... it is actually necessary to get some data and find out what exactly is going on.<sup>9</sup>*

## **Where did the delivery unit model originate?**

The delivery unit model first emerged in the UK, in 2001, with the creation of the now-defunct PMDU. It owes much to the 'stat model' of performance management developed by the New York Police Department in the 1990s, where a small team gathered and analysed police data, mobilised resources in response to identified problems and relentlessly scrutinised performance until outcomes improved.<sup>10</sup>

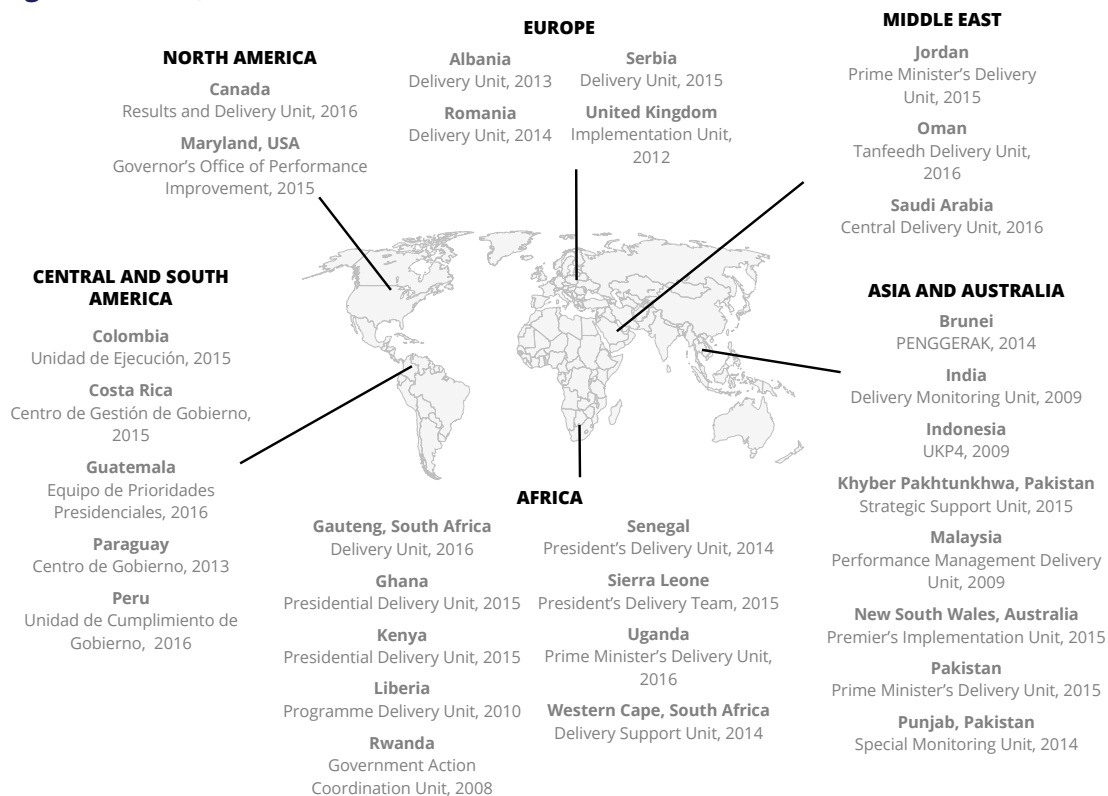
These tools and techniques were adapted and used by Sir Michael Barber in the Department for Education and Employment's Standards and Effectiveness Unit from 1997. In 2001, frustrated by the lack of headway made on Labour's manifesto commitments in his first term in office, and the absence of a mechanism for keeping track of departmental progress in delivering on core priorities, Tony Blair invited Barber to head up a new delivery unit in the Cabinet Office – the PMDU.<sup>11</sup> The PMDU underwent many changes in form and function before being axed by the incoming Coalition Government in 2010. However, in the early years, the unit was focused on tracking and improving performance in priority areas around health, education, security and transport (see Table 3 in the next section).



## 2 Global trends in delivery units

Delivery units are a global phenomenon that shows no sign of letting up (see Figure 1). Over half of today's centre-of-government units at national and regional levels have emerged in just the past two years, and other governments – such as in France, Myanmar, Namibia and South Africa – are now exploring whether to import the model. This section unpacks the dynamics of this trend, focusing on five main characteristics.

**Figure 1: Location of existing centre-of-government delivery units (national and regional levels)**



### 1. Units are not only found in the centre of government

While this report focuses on centre-of-government units at national and regional levels, units are also springing up elsewhere in government:

- **Within line departments and agencies:** ministers have sometimes replicated central delivery units in their own departments (e.g. Liberia's Ministry of Public Works) or multiple ministerial delivery units have been created as part of a government-wide re-organisation of performance management systems (e.g. in Albania and Tanzania).
- **Within local government:** mayors (e.g. in Buenos Aires) and local chief executives (e.g. in the London Borough of Haringey) have introduced delivery units to transform the performance of locally administered public services.

Both these trends have been seen in the UK (see Table 1).

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**Table 1: Delivery units in the UK**

Level of government		Units
National	Centre of government	Implementation Unit (Cabinet Office)
	Whitehall departments	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Department for Communities and Local Government Department for Education Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Department of Health Ministry of Defence
Local		Blackpool
		London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
		London Borough of Haringey
		Norfolk

Note: The Welsh Government's First Minister's Delivery Unit closed in 2016.

## 2. Units often have a limited lifespan

If the past is anything to go by, many of today's units will not be permanent fixtures in government. Alongside the proliferation of new units is a parallel trend in older units closing (see Figure 2).

Some of these former units were swiftly axed following transitions in power (e.g. in Chile, the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, Mongolia and the Netherlands). Others followed a trajectory common to many failed institutional reforms: initial enthusiasm and an injection of resources, followed by a period of consolidation, before the reform tailed off.<sup>12</sup> The eventual decision to close many of these units was often preceded by a period of uncertainty when political sponsorship waned, key staff members left and the unit's influence evaporated. This happened in jurisdictions such as Australia and Tanzania (detailed later in this report).

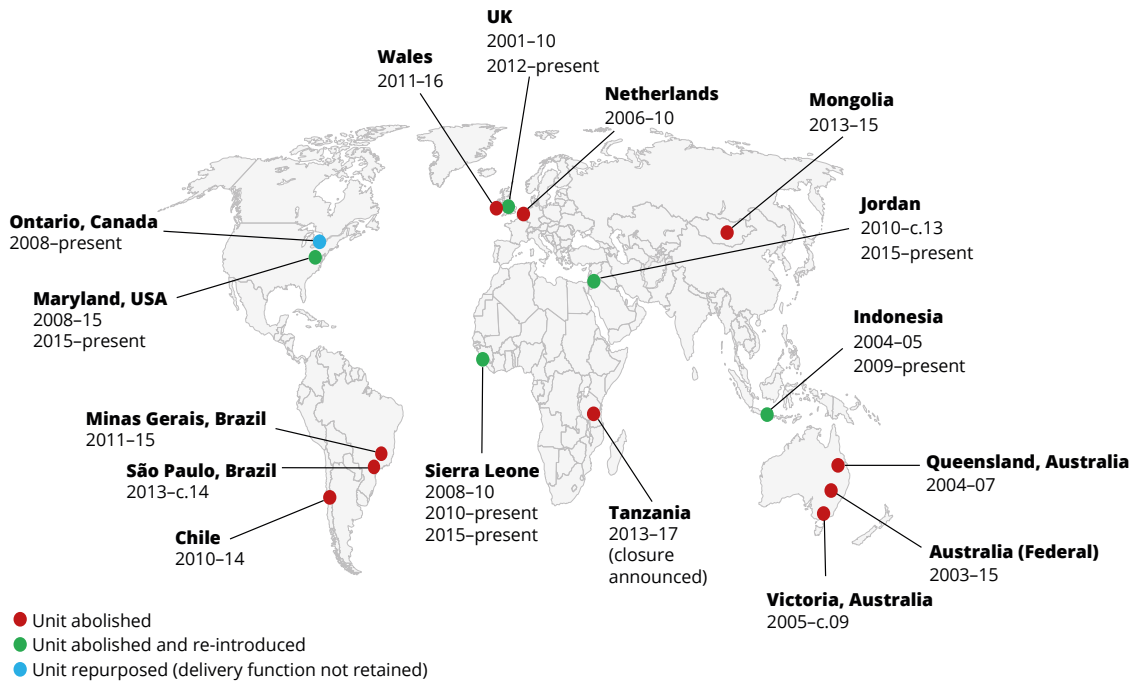
There are also a handful of other units – including India's Delivery Monitoring Unit – that continue to limp on without the momentum and political backing they once enjoyed.

But the delivery unit model has also proven remarkably resilient. Some governments have abolished units only to reinvent them in some form (see Figure 2). They have taken different approaches. Indonesia, Jordan and Sierra Leone have designed very different second-generation (or even third-generation) units – taking account of design flaws in earlier iterations of the model in their respective jurisdictions. In contrast, Maryland and the UK have sought to build on what was there before, with a greater degree of continuity in terms of tools, staff and routines. But they have also sought to carefully rebrand their units in order to distance them from associations with previous administrations.\*

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\* It should be noted that, in the case of the UK, there was a two-year gap between the PMDU closing and the new Implementation Unit being set up.

**Figure 2: Location of past delivery units**



Note: Sierra Leone created a new delivery unit (the President's Delivery Team) in 2015 but has not disbanded its former delivery unit, the Strategy and Policy Unit. Despite its name, the Strategy and Policy Unit operates as a delivery unit and does not carry out strategy or policymaking functions.

### 3. There is growing investment from the international development industry

Much of the rapid take-up of the delivery unit model, and the methodologies associated with it, is down to growing interest from the international development industry. This reflects the fact that where, traditionally, efforts to strengthen governance focused on transparency initiatives such as election monitoring, much more emphasis is now being placed on the need to reinforce delivery mechanisms in government in order to achieve demonstrable results.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, more and more organisations – ranging from national aid agencies to international organisations and global consultancies – are now offering financial and technical support to jurisdictions setting up or re-organising units (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Organisations that have provided financial or technical assistance to at least one delivery unit**

National aid agencies	International organisations	Consultancies	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department for International Development (DFID), UK</li> <li>• Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)</li> <li>• United States Agency for International Development (USAID)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)</li> <li>• United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</li> <li>• World Bank</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adam Smith International</li> <li>• Africa Governance Initiative (AGI)</li> <li>• Boston Consulting Group (BCG)</li> <li>• Delivery Associates</li> <li>• Deloitte</li> <li>• Gatsby Charitable Foundation</li> <li>• Isos Partnership</li> <li>• McKinsey</li> <li>• PricewaterhouseCoopers</li> <li>• Tony Blair Institute for Global Change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British Council</li> <li>• European Union (EU)</li> </ul>

Notes: (1) This table does not include self-employed individuals who have acted as consultants. (2) Some consultancies are charitable foundations, while others operate on a commercial basis. (3) The governance programmes and activities funded and run by the AGI began transitioning to the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change in March 2017. AGI is expected to cease operating sometime in 2017. The consultancy services previously undertaken by Tony Blair Associates have already been incorporated into the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

There is also a small but not insignificant amount of peer-to-peer support. For instance, Colombia’s delivery unit has assisted its counterparts in Costa Rica and Peru, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank. Malaysia’s PEMANDU have also provided intensive technical support to Tanzania’s President’s Delivery Bureau and Oman’s Tanfeeth Delivery Unit.

There is no doubt that financial and technical assistance has been critical to getting many units off the ground within timescales that satisfy political imperatives. But practitioners have also voiced concerns about the way in which some organisations have packaged up and marketed the delivery unit model to governments around the world without paying sufficient attention to local circumstances.\* Equally, there is concern that funders are sometimes undermining political leaders’ commitment to delivery units by insisting on development priorities that are not shared by leaders themselves.<sup>14</sup>

\* See, for example, Alari, C. and Thomas, P., *Improving Government Effectiveness Across the World*, Institute for Government, London, 2016, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/improving-government-effectiveness-across-world>; Barber, M., *How to Run a Government*, Allen Lane, London, 2015, p. 47; and Hymowitz, D., ‘Shoulder to shoulder’, Africa Governance Initiative, London, 2016, [www.africagovernance.org/article/agi-launches-final-art-delivery-paper](http://www.africagovernance.org/article/agi-launches-final-art-delivery-paper).

## 4. There are key variations in the delivery unit model

The delivery unit model is by no means static. Even the UK's PMDU itself went through some major changes in form and function before it was abolished in 2010 and later brought back as the Implementation Unit.\* Jurisdictions have adapted the original PMDU model to suit their own purposes (see Table 3). Some of these second-generation units have themselves served as the model that others have replicated (e.g. the President's Delivery Bureau in Tanzania was modelled on Malaysia's PEMANDU).

**Table 3: Key variations in the delivery unit model**

	Original PMDU model	Key variations
<b>The type of priorities being tracked</b>	A select number of <b>key service delivery targets in specific departments</b> : health (e.g. waiting times), education (e.g. literacy), Home Office (e.g. crime rates) and transport (e.g. rail delays)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Outcome targets</b> that are not the responsibility of any one department to deliver. Canada's 11 'horizontal priorities' include expanding the middle class and building a diverse, inclusive Canada. Units typically track the performance of a portfolio of programmes expected to contribute to particular outcome targets. This approach is favoured by the UK's current Implementation Unit. Both Canada and the UK use cross-government ministerial-level taskforces to complement the work of the central unit.</li> <li>• <b>Completion of priority major projects</b>, such as infrastructure (e.g. Kenya, Paraguay and Serbia).</li> <li>• Policies and programmes that form part of a <b>national development plan</b> (e.g. Jordan's Vision 2025, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and Brunei's Wawasan Brunei 2035).</li> <li>• <b>Departmental priorities</b> that are either determined by departments themselves (e.g. the UK's Implementation Unit co-ordinates and tracks single departmental plans) or mandated by a head of government (e.g. Canada's Results and Delivery Unit tracks the implementation of mandate letters).</li> </ul>
<b>How priorities are selected</b>	Prime Minister's personal priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Input from international donors</b> (e.g. World Bank and the EU in Romania).</li> <li>• <b>Collective agreement between head of government and ministers</b> (e.g. Malaysia and Serbia).</li> <li>• Use of <b>design labs</b> to sharpen the focus of broader priority areas selected by the head of government and ministers (e.g. the Western Cape, South Africa).</li> </ul>

\* For a detailed history of the PMDU, see Panchamia, N. and Thomas, P., *Civil Service Reform in the Real World*, Institute for Government, London, 2014, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/civil-service-reform-real-world>.

<b>Routines for reporting on whether delivery is on track</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery notes to the Prime Minister every month</li> <li>• Delivery reports to the Prime Minister every six months</li> <li>• Stocktake meetings with the Prime Minister, head of the PMDU and relevant ministers and officials to review performance data</li> <li>• Site visits to the front line</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Online dashboards</b> that pull together performance data and show whether delivery is on track in almost real time. In jurisdictions such as New South Wales (Australia) and the Punjab (Pakistan), and in the UK's Department for Communities and Local Government, political leaders can access dashboards through apps on smartphones and tablets.</li> <li>• <b>'Mini-stocktake' meetings</b> to keep track of lower-order priorities. In New South Wales, the Premier's chief of staff, ministers' chief of staff and the relevant delivery leads come together to discuss priorities that are not the main focus of the Premier's stocktakes.</li> <li>• Use of <b>cabinet meetings</b> to update the President and ministers (e.g. Guatemala and Indonesia).</li> </ul>
<b>Approaches to solving problems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep-dive reviews to investigate delivery problems and design an appropriate action plan</li> <li>• Stocktake meetings (see above) to brainstorm solutions to delivery problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Scrutiny of the feasibility of departmental policy proposals</b> to identify design flaws that could derail delivery and suggest solutions (e.g. Canada and New South Wales).</li> <li>• Use of <b>design labs</b> that bring together delivery experts to solve programme and service delivery problems (e.g. Malaysia).</li> <li>• Use of cross-government <b>communities of practice</b> to identify solutions to delivery problems (e.g. Canada's monthly meeting of chief results and delivery officers (CRDOs) chaired by the Results and Delivery Unit).</li> </ul>

Source: Information compiled from interviews.

## 5. Delivery units have proven to be remarkably adept at innovation

Many delivery units have embraced new methodologies and technologies to transform their operations. This subsection highlights a number of common trends in the way some units have sought to innovate. Other innovative practices are picked up in the next section of this report ('Conditions for success').

### Exploiting new digital technologies

**Smart monitoring systems** are enabling data to be collected and organised at unprecedented speed. In the Punjab, smartphones and tablets are being used in the field to collect and geotag data, which in turn is fed into a centralised dashboard. This reporting mechanism enables automatic SMS (short message service) messages to be sent out to under-performing institutions and 'stocktake' meetings to consider performance trends in real time.<sup>15</sup>

New data visualisation techniques are also helping to engage political sponsors. As Sir Michael Barber has pointed out: "Chief Ministers or Prime Ministers are busy people. They don't want to look at scatter graphs and distributions and lots of dots on a page." They want compelling stories.<sup>16</sup> Digital tools such as 'heat maps' (where data are represented graphically in a matrix as colours) and real-time performance dashboards can tell simple but powerful stories and are being used in Malaysia, New South Wales, the Punjab, and by the UK's Department for Communities and Local Government.

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### Making use of experimental design

A growing number of delivery units are making use of design labs – experimental spaces that bring together a diverse set of stakeholders to analyse policy problems, to prototype solutions and to draw up implementation plans. Already increasingly popular with policymakers in a number of countries, Malaysia’s PEMANDU was the first to import design labs into the delivery unit model and has since helped other governments to do the same, including those in South Africa and Tanzania.

Since 2010, PEMANDU has used design labs to develop action plans for the Malaysian Cabinet’s core priorities for government. These labs are not an easy option. They are expensive to run, and require skilled facilitators and very careful planning. There are a couple of features that make Malaysia’s model particularly successful:

- ***It is engineered to ensure that participants take ownership.*** The lab avoids the trap that so many innovation labs fall into – of creating well-designed outputs that wither away because no one accepts responsibility for taking them forward. Key stakeholders – from across government, frontline services, industry and the non-profit sector – are required to invest a considerable amount of time (up to nine weeks) in developing an action plan and to take responsibility for key deliverables.
- ***It is integrated into the budget planning process.*** Ministers or executives from both the Treasury and the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister’s Department meet with lab participants at roughly the halfway point. Lab participants are then able to revise their proposals in light of feedback on what would be feasible in future budgets.<sup>17</sup>

### Embracing transparency

The first generation of delivery units (e.g. the UK’s PMDU, 2001–10, and Australia’s Cabinet Implementation Unit, 2003–15) were conceived as internal transparency mechanisms – allowing heads of government to hold officials to account for the performance of key programmes. Some still follow this approach, including the UK’s Implementation Unit and Albania’s Delivery Unit. However, in a bid to enhance confidence in government reform efforts, many of today’s units are also pro-actively putting information into the public domain – providing stakeholders and the wider public with access to delivery plans and performance data (see Table 4).

Such moves can help to depoliticise delivery units. Furthermore, transparency over targets that are off track lends credibility to reported achievements. Wales’ now defunct First Minister’s Delivery Unit was regularly criticised by opposition politicians for being “shrouded in secrecy”.<sup>\*</sup> With a lack of public knowledge about the unit’s activities, it was inevitably undermined by public discussion in the National Assembly that focused – and could only focus – on its cost to the taxpayer.<sup>\*\*</sup>

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\* See, for example, Davies, A.R.T., ‘Costly “Delivery Unit” still shrouded in secrecy’, Andrew R.T. Davies’ website, 10 August 2015, <https://www.andrewrt Davies.co.uk/news/costly-delivery-unit-still-shrouded-secrecy>.

\*\* See, for example, Bodden, T., ‘First Minister’s civil service briefings unit costs us £300,000’, *Daily Post*, 16 June 2012, [www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/first-ministers-civil-service-briefings-2658789](http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/first-ministers-civil-service-briefings-2658789); and Sandbach, A., ‘FM’s Delivery Unit: 23 briefings for £300k’, Antoinette Sandbach’s website, 15 June 2012, <https://www.antoinettesandbach.org.uk/news/fm%E2%80%99s-delivery-unit-23-briefings-%C2%A3300k>.

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**Table 4: Transparency initiatives undertaken by delivery units**

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Publication of priorities	Numerous jurisdictions – including <b>Liberia, Malaysia, New South Wales, Uganda</b> and the <b>Western Cape</b> – publish the delivery priorities that they are monitoring.
Open days	PEMANDU in <b>Malaysia</b> holds open days for the public to share action plans produced by design labs.
Annual report or summary of results	Jurisdictions – including <b>Malaysia, New South Wales</b> and the <b>Punjab</b> – produce annual progress updates.
Online results dashboard	The <b>Punjab</b> has made its results dashboard publicly accessible online.
Open data portal	The Governor’s Office of Performance Improvement in <b>Maryland</b> runs the state’s open data portal and publishes performance data collected from agencies.
Independent verification of results	Each year, external auditors independently verify the results reported by PEMANDU in <b>Malaysia</b> .
Public broadcasts	In <b>Sierra Leone</b> , the President’s Delivery Team has a fortnightly radio programme ( <i>Leh we make Salone grow</i> ), which provides progress updates on the President’s Recovery Priorities. <sup>18</sup>



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## 3 Conditions for success

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Commentators are right to argue that delivery units should be 'assessed on the basis of how well they operate in their given context, not how well they replicate a standard model'.<sup>19</sup> But this is not to say that there aren't some important features that are common to successful delivery units, as well as traits that are shared by failed units, irrespective of form and function. As one delivery unit staff member put it:

*There is no point calling yourself a delivery unit if the components that have been shown to work aren't present. ... Obviously all units will adapt to local circumstances as we have done. But I do think it is important to reflect on [how the model has been introduced] in a semi-regular way and continue to ask questions about it.*<sup>20</sup>

This section sets out six recommendations for a successful delivery unit that stand out from the experiences of units examined in this study. It pays as much attention to the features of axed units as it does to those still in existence. In doing so, this section highlights where some jurisdictions are getting it right and where others are showing cause for concern.

### **Recommendation 1: Make sure there is strong, highly visible political backing**

*// [W]hen a delivery system which relies on high level commitment, does not get this commitment, there is no workaround. //*

*Department for International Development, 2016*<sup>21</sup>

Political commitment is essential. First and foremost, the use of a delivery unit and its associated methodologies is a "leadership strategy", as Harvard Professor Robert Behn has observed. Its strength therefore comes from concerted political sponsorship, not some formal institutional structure.<sup>22</sup>

Units don't always survive transitions in power. In some instances they don't suit the leadership style of an incoming leader. In others, units are too closely associated with a previous administration – "governments always have a problem of crediting the previous government with anything", as Claudio Seebach, the former head of Chile's unit, has lamented.<sup>23</sup>

Like Chile in 2014, the UK's incoming Coalition Government scrapped the PMDU in 2010. It was perceived as a mechanism for driving top-down targets – an approach that was the antithesis of the decentralisation agenda promoted by the Prime

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Minister.\* Many other units have suffered a similar fate, including those in Minas Gerais (Brazil), Mongolia, the Netherlands and Queensland (Australia).

Other units have limped on, despite political support evaporating, but have found it increasingly difficult to secure departmental co-operation. As one former PMDU staff member put it: "Civil servants are very attuned to whether you have the ear of the Prime Minister ... As soon as people suspect that you don't, then it's over. It doesn't matter how skilled and capable you are."<sup>24</sup>

This was the case for Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit towards the end. Departments had become slow in responding to the unit's requests for progress updates. The unit's perceived lack of prime ministerial and ministerial backing removed any sense of urgency from information requests.<sup>25</sup> This stands in stark contrast to successor arrangements for the unit (see Box 1).

### **Box 1: Australia's successor arrangements for the Cabinet Implementation Unit**

Australia's Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) now has a new Strategic Co-ordination Unit (created in 2016), which resides in the DPMC and works with the Prime Minister's Office, which engages directly with ministers' offices. As one official observed: "Now, because the directive is coming from a higher being if you like, it's quicker, more tangible, [and there is] more ownership."<sup>26</sup> The updates received are now analysed by policy teams within the DPMC.

Stocktake meetings – used by the majority of delivery units – serve as a good indicator of the health of a unit (see Table 5). Devised by the original PMDU under Sir Michael Barber, these meetings, facilitated by delivery units, bring together heads of government and senior departmental officials to discuss performance and brainstorm solutions to delivery problems. They are most effective when heads of government stick to a schedule of regular meetings that they conduct in person. In the Western Cape, for instance, bi-monthly stocktake meetings "are sacred in the premier's diary and don't get moved for anything".<sup>27</sup>

In Maryland, under former Governor O'Malley, the Governor's presence at his delivery unit's fortnightly stocktake meetings ensured that departmental executives did "a very diligent job" scrutinising performance data before each meeting. For departments, as the former unit head recalled, the opportunity to call on the "raw power of the Governor's Office" for help in removing obstacles to delivery that were outside of their control was an attractive "value add".<sup>28</sup> Stocktake meetings under the new Governor's Office of Performance Improvement have been delegated to the Lieutenant Governor and now take place on an *ad-hoc* basis (see Table 5).<sup>29</sup>

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\* It should be noted that many aspects of the PMDU model were later brought back under the new Implementation Unit in 2012 (see Gold, J., *International Delivery: Centres of government and the drive for better policy implementation*, Institute for Government, London and Mowat Centre, Toronto, 2014, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/international-delivery-centres-government-and-drive-better-policy-implementation>).

**Table 5: Stocktake meetings across jurisdictions**

Jurisdiction	Are they conducted by the political sponsor?	Is there a set routine?
Canada	✓	✓ Fortnightly
Colombia	✓	✓ Quarterly
Malaysia	✓	✓ Every 6 months
Maryland	✗ Delegated to Lieutenant Governor	✗ <i>Ad hoc</i>
New South Wales	✓	✓ Every 3 months
Peru	✓	✓ Bi-monthly
Punjab	✓	✗ Usually every 2 to 3 months
Sierra Leone	✓	✓ Fortnightly
Tanzania	✓	✗ All meetings stopped prior to the 2015 General Election; even before that point, intended monthly meetings tended to occur roughly once a quarter
Western Cape , South Africa	✓	✓ Bi-monthly

Source: Information compiled from interviews.

## Recommendation 2: Commit to a tightly defined remit

*// Make sure priorities are priorities. //*

*Jonathan Batty, formerly of the PMDU<sup>30</sup>*

A tightly focused remit is critical to the effectiveness of delivery units. Former staff members attribute the early success of the UK’s PMDU to its concentration on just a handful of key priorities that both lent themselves to direct measurement and matched the subject matter expertise and skills of staff members.<sup>31</sup> When the PMDU’s mandate broadened to include responsibility for monitoring a wide-ranging set of inter-departmental delivery targets, the unit rapidly expanded and quickly lost credibility as a centre of expertise.<sup>32</sup> Many other units have also come unstuck when they have taken on too much (see Table 6).

**Table 6: The overstretched mandates of past units**

<b>Delivery unit</b>	<b>Nature of the overstretched mandate</b>	<b>What happened?</b>
Jordan (2010–c.2013)	The unit took on responsibility for tracking so many projects that it essentially became a project management office.	<b>The unit was abolished.</b> The unit lost the attention and support of senior government officials. When it was re-activated in 2015, it had a new, sharper focus on tracking and enabling priority initiatives within Jordan’s Vision 2025 strategy.
Ontario, Canada (2008–c.2011)	The unit was tasked with leading a number of flagship cross-government policy initiatives as well as tracking key performance indicators.	<b>The unit was repurposed (its delivery function was lost).</b> Staff found it hard to reconcile these responsibilities and the political urgency of the flagship initiatives overrode the results-monitoring work. The unit’s tracking function fell away over time and it now focuses on building policy capacity and offering strategy advice on key initiatives.
Sierra Leone (2008–10)	A lack of clarity on the unit’s mandate resulted in the unit being tasked with monitoring and advising on a bewildering array of complex projects as well as undertaking some strategy work.	<b>The unit was abolished.</b> The absence of a clearly and tightly defined mandate undermined the unit’s operations. Aside from helping to turn around a hydro-electric dam project, little progress was made on the President’s development agenda. The unit was disbanded in 2010.
Tanzania (2013–17)	Despite facing significant capacity constraints (see below), the unit came under pressure to oversee more national key results areas.	<b>The unit is in the process of closing.</b> The unit took on additional results areas in healthcare and the business environment, but did not have the resources to adequately support the development of delivery roadmaps.

Source: Information compiled from interviews.

It pays to direct resources to a very select number of top priorities.<sup>33</sup> A number of new units are adopting this approach. The New South Wales Premier’s Implementation Unit has selected four of the Premier’s 12 core priorities as “deep dives”.<sup>34</sup> Out of the 11 horizontal priorities tracked by Canada’s Results and Delivery Unit, it is the Prime Minister’s top four priorities that receive the most attention.<sup>35</sup> Units in Ghana and Senegal have undertaken even more substantial prioritisation exercises.<sup>36</sup>

### **Recommendation 3: Select a physical location close to a political sponsor**

*// Choose a close location over a fancy office 20 minutes away. //*

*David Halpern, Director of the former Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team<sup>37</sup>*

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Physical location matters. So much of the business of government is done through informal – often chance – meetings in the offices and corridors of key government buildings (and the streets around them).<sup>38</sup> Close proximity to both delivery departments and the head of government allows formal performance-tracking procedures to be supplemented by more impromptu interactions that strengthen working relationships.<sup>39</sup>

Location has symbolic as well as practical value. Being located in the same building as a head of government carries “a certain gravitas”, as one delivery unit staff member pointed out:

*I think one of the things central agencies can do is sometimes call people into meetings in head office ... Being in the same building as the Premier I think that is helpful at times when you want to just remind people that you are from a central agency and you've got a hotline through to the Premier.<sup>40</sup>*

While most units are located in the same building as the head of government, a small number have ended up in satellite locations (see Table 7). While the facilities on offer may be more conducive to the unit's work, the task of exerting influence is considerably more difficult.

This was the case for Tanzania's President's Delivery Bureau, which selected an office some distance from the State House and the main cluster of government ministries: “[I]f there is no traffic it is a 20-minute drive but traffic is a big issue in Dar [es Salaam]. It could easily be an hour or an hour-and-a-half. So [the unit was] quite considerably distant.”<sup>41</sup>

It is even more challenging for units that are relocated to satellite locations, where civil servants may perceive the move as a barometer of the unit's influence. In May 2016, just seven months after its creation, Maryland's Governor's Office of Performance Improvement vacated its downtown Annapolis office (close to the State House) and relocated to Crownsville, Maryland – eight miles away.<sup>42</sup>

Even decisions to undertake short moves, such as the UK Implementation Unit's relocation from the Cabinet Office to a government building several streets away in 2015, should not be taken lightly, for similar reasons.

If units have little choice as to location, perhaps because space is limited, there are ways of lessening the impact. Malaysia's PEMANDU retains a small team in the same building as the President, as well as a larger office in central Kuala Lumpur. Similarly, Colombia's unit is based in a building in front of the Presidential Palace, while the unit head is based at the Palace.

**Table 7: Physical location of delivery units**

	Same building as political sponsor	Building within walking distance of political sponsor	Satellite location
Australia*		✓	
Canada	✓		
Colombia	✓	✓	
Costa Rica			✓
Guatemala	✓		
Jordan	✓		
Kenya		✓	
Liberia	✓		
Malaysia	✓		✓
Maryland, US			✓
New South Wales, Australia	✓		
Paraguay		✓	
Peru	✓		
Punjab, Pakistan	✓		
Rwanda	✓		
Serbia	✓		
Sierra Leone		✓	
Tanzania			✓
UK		✓	
Victoria, Australia*	✓		
Wales*	✓		
Western Cape, South Africa	✓		

Notes: (1) \* Denotes former location of axed unit. (2) Colombia's unit is based in a building in front of the Presidential Palace, with the unit head based at the Palace. (3) Malaysia's PEMANDU has two offices: one close to the head of government and one downtown. (4) Punjab's unit is in the same building complex as the Chief Minister.

Source: Information compiled from interviews.

## Recommendation 4: Adopt the right hiring strategy, organisational structure and leadership model

*// Dedicated capacity is not enough ... The composition, credibility and way of working are critical to combat the default assumption that the team is 'just another central unit' that chases progress and updates reports in a way that creates a bureaucratic burden but adds no value. //*

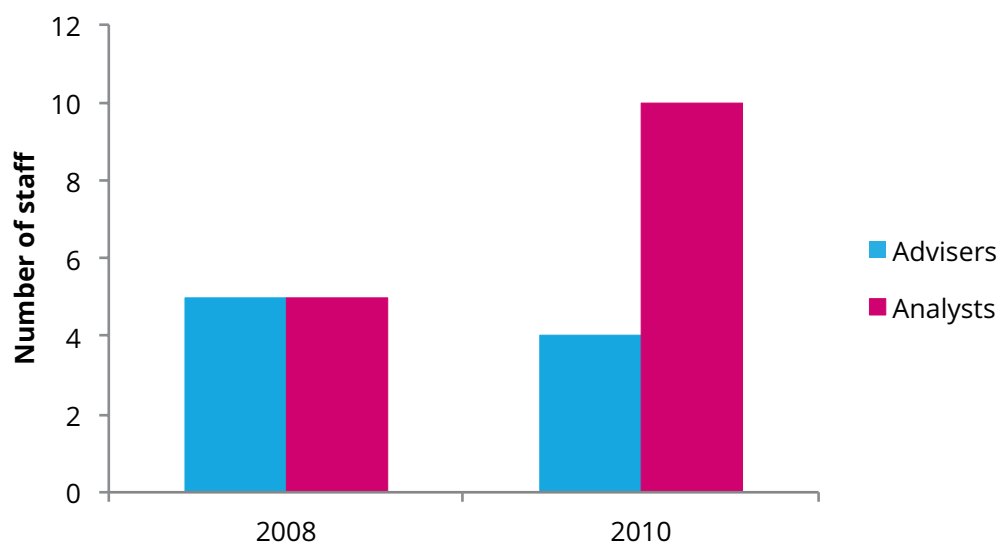
*Panchamia and Thomas, 2014<sup>43</sup>*

The choice of staffing model has a lasting impact on a unit's effectiveness. There are a number of important elements, which are described below.

### Hiring strategy

A delivery unit's credibility relies on being able to have conversations about performance that are based on evidence.<sup>44</sup> Units have struggled where analytical support has been weak. When Sierra Leone set up its first delivery unit in 2008, for instance, the ratio of analysts to advisers restricted its evaluation activities and damaged its reputation as a source of technical expertise. When the unit was re-activated in 2010, its analytical capability was considerably bolstered (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Different staffing composition in Sierra Leone's first and second delivery units**



Source: Compiled from data in Scharff, 2012<sup>45</sup>

Units also have to decide on the balance they wish to strike between external and internal hires. As one interviewee put it:

*In terms of staffing there is a question as to how much you bring in outsiders who might not understand government and government systems and not have the relationships with government, versus bringing people [in] from [other] bits of government who might not have the fresh ideas and the willingness to challenge and shake things up.<sup>46</sup>*

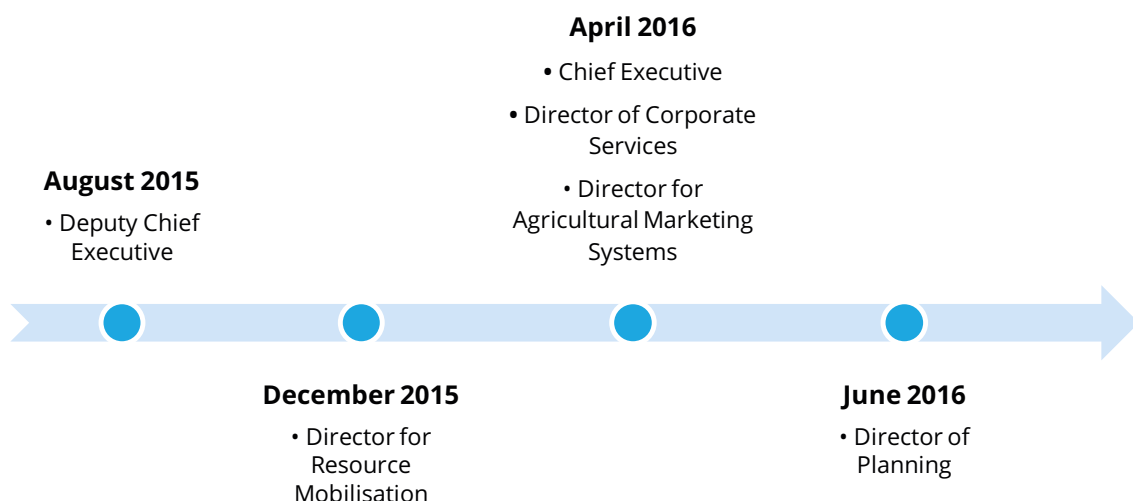
Units also need to think about practical matters. The decision to staff Tanzania’s unit largely through external hires led to considerable delays in getting the unit fully up and running. Vetting procedures for successful applicants took the best part of a year, leaving the unit with only 37% of posts filled after the first 12 months.<sup>47</sup> The unit had to rely on secondees from other parts of government as a temporary stopgap. Canada’s Results and Delivery Unit has also found that human resources processes make it difficult to bring outsiders on board.<sup>48</sup>

Most units have found that a mix works best – bringing in individuals from outside with audit and consulting experience in particular, to work alongside existing public servants. Where units enjoy particularly focused remits, subject matter expertise is also sought (e.g. Western Cape recruited one staff member from the alcohol industry to work on its Alcohol Harms Reduction Game Changer programme).<sup>49</sup>

### Retention

High turnover means that units constantly have to rebuild critical relationships with departments.<sup>50</sup> This was a particular problem in Tanzania, where the President’s Delivery Bureau’s reliance on secondees and consultants as temporary staffing solutions (see above) exacerbated turnover. The situation only worsened in the unit’s final year of operation, when uncertainty over its future led to huge turnover in the most senior posts (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Senior turnover in Tanzania’s President’s Delivery Bureau, August 2015 to June 2016**



Source: DFID, 2016<sup>51</sup>

Some turnover is inevitable – especially as units tend to attract high-calibre recruits – and even desirable if it brings in some new recruits with fresh experience of frontline delivery. But this needs to be managed carefully.



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## Organisational structure

Top-heavy organisational structures – seen in a number of axed units – can hugely constrain daily operations. From the start, as DFID has observed, the Tanzanian President’s Delivery Bureau was ‘far too top heavy both on paper and in practice’. The resulting shortage of junior-level analysts meant that outside consultants were used to boost capacity rather than for their intended purpose – namely to cultivate skills among the President’s Delivery Bureau workforce.<sup>52</sup>

The impact of such a top-heavy structure was even starker in Sierra Leone’s first unit between 2008 and 2010. The unit’s five advisers were all senior-level appointments and included a former minister and a former attorney general. As Michael Scharff recalls:

*[T]hey had big personalities and egos to match. They sometimes resented engaging with lower-level ministry staff as required by their positions and preferred high-level ‘blue skies’ thinking rather than engaging in the detail of how to make sure implementation actually happened.<sup>53</sup>*

## Leadership

The head of a delivery unit can make or break it – so political leaders need to appoint wisely. The choice of Marsillam Simanjuntak as head of Indonesia’s first delivery unit, for instance, caused tensions within the country’s Coalition Government. In his former capacity as an attorney general, Simanjuntak had called for the Vice-President’s political party to be disbanded. It took the Vice-President – who saw the unit as a threat – a little over a year to successfully lobby for the unit’s closure.<sup>54</sup>

Table 8 sets out a number of important leadership attributes that stand out from the units examined in this study.

**Table 8: Important leadership attributes of unit heads**

Leadership attribute	Examples
<b>Credibility derived from a strong track record in improving performance:</b> Unit heads have come from a broad array of backgrounds – including finance, legal and public policy. However, when it comes to enhancing a unit’s reputation as a centre of expertise, the most successful heads have tended to have experience of either frontline delivery or turning around poor-performing projects and institutions.	When Indonesia’s delivery unit was re-established in 2009, Kuntoro Mangkusubroto was appointed to lead it. Mangkusubroto had previously won international praise for spearheading the reconstruction of Aceh and Nias in the aftermath of successive natural disasters. Similarly, Sierra Leone’s President successfully re-activated his Government’s delivery unit in 2010 by choosing Victor Strasser-King, who had played a leading role in turning around a severely delayed hydro-electric dam project.
<b>Strong interpersonal skills:</b> Line departments typically greet the creation of delivery units with considerable suspicion – seeing them as ‘another central diktat to avoid’. <sup>55</sup> Interpersonal skills are as important as technical expertise when it comes to overcoming institutional opposition.	The first head of the UK’s former PMDU, Sir Michael Barber, is credited with getting the unit off to a strong start through adopting a collaborative approach to problem-solving and forging close working relationships with key departmental officials and ministers. <sup>56</sup>
<b>Staying power:</b> While high turnover can be problematic, high leadership turnover can completely destabilise a unit.	Malaysia’s PEMANDU has benefited from having a highly respected chief executive, Idris Jala, who has led the unit since its creation in 2009.

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## Recommendation 5: Ensure cross-government ownership of the delivery unit's results agenda

*// No one person or unit owns this [agenda]. It is everyone being responsible. //*

*Australian Government executive<sup>57</sup>*

It is all too easy for central delivery units to find themselves operating in isolation – either because there isn't sufficient capacity within government to support the unit's mandate or the unit ends up institutionalising tensions between the centre and departments. Sometimes it is a consequence of both.

Sierra Leone's Strategy and Policy Unit (2008–10), for instance, had a "confrontational rather than cooperative" relationship with line departments and agencies, as Michael Scharff observed. He went on: "Ministry staffers complained that the SPU [Strategy and Policy Unit] monitored their activities and scolded them for shortcomings but provided little of the support that they required."<sup>58</sup>

The types of data-tracking systems, delivery plans and performance metrics required by delivery units are both resource-intensive to set up and necessitate a distinct culture shift within governments.<sup>59</sup> Many of the heads of delivery units interviewed for this report freely admitted the scale of the challenge they face. As one put it:

*I think we underestimated the capacity building that was going to be done with data and data systems. A lot of time was spent engaging with teams just getting them on board with what is an outcome, how do we define an outcome properly.<sup>60</sup>*

Many past units – including those in the Netherlands and Australia – ultimately proved unable to transfer sufficient responsibility for performance tracking to line departments and agencies. The Netherlands' central unit suffered from limited departmental co-operation in granting access to meaningful performance information,<sup>61</sup> while Australia's former Cabinet Implementation Unit was viewed by some departments as a tick-box compliance exercise.<sup>62</sup>

Two very different models have emerged to tackle these issues head-on and these are outlined below.

### **Embedding delivery unit staff members within the wider delivery system**

Sierra Leone's new President's Delivery Team uses a 'hub and spoke' model, consisting of a central team and unit staff members embedded both in relevant line ministries and in the country's 14 district councils (see Table 9). This approach is designed to "genuinely support departments' monitoring of progress and programmes, support capacity building [and] try and address the challenge that so many delivery units face of being the 'remote watchdog' – [a sense of] them and us".<sup>63</sup>

**Table 9: Sierra Leone’s ‘hub and spoke’ model**

<b>President’s Delivery Team</b>		<b>Description of responsibilities</b>
Central team		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The central team collates and analyses performance information for the President and his Chief of Staff</li></ul>
Line departments and agencies	For each of the President’s 7 priority sectors, one co-ordinator and 1 facilitator are posted to relevant line ministries and agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-ordinators are senior-level appointments (several are ex-ministers) tasked with building effective working partnerships with ministers and the leads for the key results areas in each sector.</li><li>• Facilitators help ministries understand what information the central team needs and help to build capacity.</li></ul>
Sierra Leone’s 14 district councils	3 President’s Delivery Team staff members are based in each district council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 facilitator</li><li>• 1 data analyst</li><li>• 1 community engagement officer.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• District facilitators serve a similar role to their line ministry counterparts (see above).</li><li>• Data analysts and engagement officers are more junior-level roles designed to help districts use data to hold national actors to account, as well as collect performance information for the central team.</li></ul>

Source: Information compiled from interviews.

Sierra Leone’s model allows the unit to build partnerships with key actors in the system and address capability gaps.

### **Building a leadership coalition**

When it comes to centre-of-government reforms such as delivery units, previous Institute for Government research has shown that broadening ownership to a wider group of civil servants and political leaders over time is critical to preventing these units “from limping on, tailing off or being discarded”.<sup>64</sup>

New South Wales and Canada have adopted innovative approaches in this regard. New South Wales’ unit has established a coalition of departmental priority leads who meet four times a year to review progress. The Premier attends alternate meetings, helping to underscore the importance of their collective leadership. The unit is also in the process of developing a slightly broader community of practice that will include the delivery teams working under the departmental leads.<sup>65</sup> Canada has gone much further to encourage collective ownership of the Government’s results agenda and data capacity issues (see Box 2).

## Box 2: Canada's collective ownership strategy

Canada's federal government has created two posts in departments and agencies:

- *Chief results and delivery officers* (CRDOs) who are tasked with working across government on the delivery of the Prime Minister's horizontal priorities, as well as with supporting the implementation of ministerial mandate letters within their own departments.
- *Data leads* who are responsible for ensuring that there are systems in place to enable the timely gathering and use of high-quality performance information.<sup>66</sup>

The Results and Delivery Unit (RDU) chairs the respective monthly meetings of both groups. The purpose of the CRDO group is to identify solutions to delivery challenges, share lessons, develop routines and mirror the collaboration on horizontal priorities that is taking place at the ministerial level.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile the data leads group is designed to create a "self-conscious community" where none has existed before and:

*... ensure that in the immediate aftermath of the election of the new government, [with] all of this pent-up demand for data and evidence from both within departments and outside stakeholders, that departments didn't go off in all directions and start collecting data. So we wanted some co-ordination.*<sup>68</sup>

The RDU is using the data leads group to develop and take ownership of a government-wide data strategy that will address data requirements and holdings, human resource needs (especially analytical capabilities) and processes to absorb data and evidence into decision making.<sup>69</sup> This will tackle the data capacity issues that the RDU is currently grappling with.

## Recommendation 6: Put routines in place to review effectiveness and refresh operations

*// All reforms need to be refreshed and renewed. //*

*Thomas and Etheridge, 2015<sup>70</sup>*

A critical success factor for all units is their ability to review the effectiveness of their operations on a regular basis and adapt to changing circumstances.<sup>71</sup> Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit (2003–15) was initially very effective at adjusting its activities to suit the leadership styles of different prime ministers. But this resilience waned over time. As one executive put it: "[M]odels generally need to be constantly refreshed or reviewed to see whether they are meeting the needs of the government. ... I think the CIU [Cabinet Implementation Unit] would have benefited from such a refresh or review in its life."<sup>72</sup>

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The Institute for Government has shown in previous research that a failure to “review, refresh and reset” institutional reforms can trigger delivery units’ decline.<sup>73</sup> The danger for governments is not just that units lose influence and find themselves in the wilderness, but also that in these circumstances their presence may cultivate a false sense of security (see Box 3).

### **Box 3: Australia’s Cabinet Implementation Unit and the Home Insulation Programme**

In 2010, Australia’s Home Insulation Programme (HIP) hit the headlines following the death of four workers in separate incidents. The initiative had been a flagship component of the Government’s Stimulus Package to help the country’s economy. It was one of many priority programmes that the Cabinet Implementation Unit was monitoring and reporting on in its monthly and quarterly submissions to the Prime Minister and Cabinet.<sup>74</sup> Yet neither the unit nor the Office of the Co-ordinator General – a body set up to monitor and drive the implementation of the Stimulus Package – flagged problems with the HIP’s design or early roll-out, raising difficult questions about the continued effectiveness of reporting routines.

As the Royal Commission into the HIP concluded in 2014:

*[A]ll reports from before the commencement of Phase 2 of the HIP, which were displayed in a ‘traffic light’ format stated that the HIP was ‘green’; indicated no cause for concern. In view of the evidence given to this Inquiry, I find that astounding.<sup>75</sup>*

Part of the problem is that so few delivery units have adequate external or internal assessment procedures in place. There “is an irony”, as the former head of one axed unit conceded, “that we hold everyone else to very objective, quantifiable standards and there is almost a good faith understanding that this works”.<sup>76</sup> It is of course difficult to measure the precise ‘value add’ offered by a unit that is set up to help ensure that delivery problems are averted. But it is important to find ways of routinely reflecting on a unit’s effectiveness and refreshing its activities where necessary.

In Malaysia, PEMANDU’s results are reviewed by external auditors (PricewaterhouseCoopers) on an annual basis and an international committee of senior experts meets once a year to review progress and offer suggestions for improvement. More informal approaches can also be effective. As part of a dedicated effort to refine and improve the way it operates, New South Wales has done the following:

- **It has put routines in place to get regular feedback on the unit’s operations.** The unit, for instance, runs ‘Outside In’ sessions every two weeks where an official involved in the delivery of one of the Premier’s priorities is invited to share their experiences. This has helped the unit to apply a “customer-focused” lens, pointing to areas where the unit could do more to support line departments and agencies.<sup>77</sup>

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- **It has used crowdsourcing platforms to generate improvement ideas.** The unit is using MindHive – a website that enables questions to be posed to a community of experts.<sup>78</sup> While still in its infancy, in many ways the approach models itself on the New South Wales Behavioural Insights Unit’s very successful use of an online community of practice to refresh and develop its work.\*

Sierra Leone has also demonstrated the value of being responsive and reconfiguring a unit in response to new evidence on what works. The Ebola crisis demonstrated that the only way to combat the epidemic was to use the monitoring and problem-solving capacity of sub-national authorities. The President’s Delivery Team’s current set-up, with staff embedded in district councils (see Table 9), is transforming the unit’s ability to drive the recovery priorities.<sup>79</sup>

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\* See the New South Wales’ Department of Premier & Cabinet’s Behavioural Insights Community of Practice forum: <http://bi.dpc.nsw.gov.au>.

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## 4 Warning signs

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If delivery units are to produce the results that political leaders hope they will, it is vital that lessons on what works are shared, and governments and sponsor organisations alike recognise when a unit is in trouble. There are a number of warning signs that today's units would do well to heed, which are set out below.

### Political sponsor

- The head of the unit has little, if any, direct access to the political sponsor.
- Stocktake meetings are *ad hoc*, routinely cancelled and/or responsibility for chairing them is delegated to another official.

### Remit

- The unit has a poorly defined mandate, is responsible for tracking too many priorities or has competing responsibilities that are hard to reconcile (e.g. policy and delivery).

### Location

- The unit is set up in (or moved to) a satellite location, making daily interactions with the rest of government more difficult and creating the impression that the unit has limited traction with the political sponsor.

### People

- There is a heavy imbalance between external and internal hires, leaving the unit either with too few staff members who can understand government and utilise existing relationships, or with too few 'disruptive thinkers' who are able to challenge the status quo.
- There is a top-heavy organisational structure that constrains day-to-day operations, such as routine data analysis.
- There are high levels of turnover among staff members and unit heads, meaning that critical relationships with departments have to be rebuilt continually.

### Mainstreaming

- There is insufficient capacity within the wider delivery system to support the unit's data-tracking systems and/or develop good-quality delivery plans.
- There is no leadership coalition outside of the unit taking ownership for the government's results agenda.

### Reviewing and refreshing operations

- There is a lack of routines in place to review the effectiveness of the unit's operations and generate improvement ideas.

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## 5 Conclusion

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Delivery units sit alongside a number of innovations – from policy labs to behavioural insights teams – that have captured the interest of governments all over the world.\* But with delivery units the stakes are generally higher.

Weak or ineffective units don't just represent a waste of resources. Their continued existence can cultivate a false sense of security that government projects and programmes are being properly monitored, sometimes with devastating results. Or they can institutionalise confrontational relationships between centres of governments and line departments.

But simply abolishing them in these instances isn't necessarily the answer either. Governments – including those in Indonesia, Jordan, Sierra Leone and the UK – have re-activated abolished units after finding that they fulfil an otherwise unmet need.

If delivery units are to fulfil their potential as a means of achieving results in today's challenging operating environment, it is more important than ever to heed the lessons on what works that have been set out in this report.

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\* For more information, see Buerkli, D., '10 government innovations and their place in the hype cycle', blog, *The Huffington Post*, 5 May 2018, [www.huffingtonpost.com/danny-buerkli/10-government-innovations\\_b\\_10031858.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/danny-buerkli/10-government-innovations_b_10031858.html).



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## About the author

Jen Gold is a Senior Researcher at the Institute for Government. She was previously a Senior Policy Associate at the University of Toronto's Mowat Centre in Canada, where she led the government transformation research programme. She has also worked at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Demos. She holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge and was a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

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