



The Interdepartmental Executive Board Model

Lessons learned

What is an interdepartmental executive board?

The Public Service Act 2020 established new organisational models for addressing complex issues that have impacts and policy levers across a range of portfolio areas and that therefore cannot be solved by a single agency. One of these models is the interdepartmental executive board (IEB). While informal cross-agency models have existed and been tested for some time, the formal IEB model was legislated in response to the limitations of more informal models.

An IEB is a board of public service chief executives brought together to align strategy, policy, operations, and budgeting around a shared issue. Responsibility for delivery activities that contribute to the IEB's priorities remains with individual agencies. The Prime Minister designates a Minister responsible for the board. The board is responsible to that Minister for the board's functions, which in practice often operates through the board's chair (similar to how a Crown Entity board operates).

IEBs can enter into contracts, administer appropriations and employ staff, who are hosted by a servicing department. The servicing department is also able to carry out administrative and reporting activities under delegation from the board. IEBs are listed in Schedule 2, Part 3 of the Public Service Act 2020 and are subject to requirements under related legislation such as the Public Finance Act 1989 and the Official Information Act 1982.

Purpose of case study

Three years on from the establishment of the new IEB model, we are interested in understanding how IEBs are being used, if they are working as they should, and whether anything could be done to improve their effectiveness.

Since the 2020 Act, five IEBs have been established, many of which have been operating for less than a year. There are some obvious difficulties in assessing the function of the model in those cases (see Appendix 1 on evaluating collective impact). As an alternative approach, we have applied the principles of the collective impact methodology to a case study of the longest running board – the Border Executive Board. The case study covers the period up to February 2023. Despite being the longest running board, the Border Executive Board is still relatively new – in its 'early years' according to the collective impact framework. This has meant that our findings are primarily focused on the design and implementation of the model rather than its outcomes or impact. However, we have been able to recognise some significant achievements even at this early stage.

Our preliminary findings indicate that the model is working as intended. The case study highlights a few practical matters that would benefit from more detailed advice and the Commission is looking at how to address these through updated guidance on establishing and implementing IEBs. It also re-surfaces ongoing issues that we are aware of in terms of structural barriers to collaboration.



Border Executive Board: Case Study

Background

The Border Executive Board is the longest running interdepartmental executive board under the Public Service Act 2020, having been established in January 2021 to deliver an integrated and effective New Zealand border system. The border system has several characteristics that make it well suited to governance by an interdepartmental executive board: it has significance to the security, safety, and prosperity of New Zealand, and it involves complex trade-offs where activities and decisions made by one agency have impact on other agencies and people at the border. COVID-19 highlighted the value of have strong ownership and a dedicated forum for the end-to-end border process.

These agencies are within the Board's remit:

- New Zealand Customs Service
- Ministry for Primary Industries
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Transport

The Board is chaired by the Comptroller of Customs and supported by a small secretariat team hosted by the New Zealand Customs Service (as the servicing department). The Chair acts as the first point of contact for border system matters, including with ministers and stakeholders. The collective arrangements of the Board are also reflected at the deputy chief executive level, with a dedicated group that met fortnightly to deal with COVID-related matters throughout 2021/22. A broader group including the Civil Aviation Authority and Maritime NZ met monthly on matters relating to stewardship and systems improvements for the border. As the need for frequent COVID meetings reduced and the Board re-evaluated its strategic priorities at the end of 2022, a single DCE group was created and commenced fortnightly meetings from February 2023.

The IEB had a strong collaborative starting point from which to build on their leadership for the border. The New Zealand Customs Service, Ministry for Primary Industries, Te Manatū Waka Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment worked together informally as the Border Sector Governance Group from 2007 to 2020. The membership was expanded in 2020 to include Manatū Hauora Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Achievements (to February 2023)

The responsibilities of the Board are strategic border system improvements, addressing gaps and future risks, and managing fiscal challenges. These were set by Cabinet when the Board was established but are being reviewed as part of the development of a Border Sector Strategy that reflects the shift in how COVID-19 is managed.

The Board's work programme for 2021/22 had three pillars: stewardship, COVID-19, and systems improvements, all of which have progressed well, with some reprioritisation for the evolving



pandemic context. Key areas of focus were the border's contribution to the Reconnecting New Zealander's programme, developing a Border Sector Strategy, progressing areas of interest to Cabinet around data sharing and privacy, integrating targeting and risk management, and investment in new technologies.

For 2022/23 the Board has revised its work programme to align to the draft Border Sector Strategy and the shift in how COVID-19 is managed. The programme retains stewardship and splits the joint initiatives delivered with the border agencies into responding to current matters and improving the border for the future. This reflects how the Board manages immediate risks and opportunities while also driving strategic border improvements.

In the stewardship area, the Board commissioned risk and assurance reviews on several COVID response measures (for both the air and maritime borders, and in relation to managed isolation and quarantine) and oversaw the implementation of resulting recommendations. They also strengthened risk management with increased agency participation at the Integrated Targeting and Operations Centre.

In the more operational COVID-19 area, the Board connected agencies and ensured that there were no gaps, even through continually evolving policy settings. Specific initiatives included the Traveller Health Declaration System, quarantine-free travel arrangements, border worker vaccinations, pre-departure testing, safe travel advice, the Maritime Border Programme and consular support.

In the systems improvements area, the Board coordinated six initiatives, using collective leadership and programme management to

Working with industry

The Future Borders Sprint project was an eight-week collaboration in 2021 between the aviation sector and government agencies as part of the Government's Reconnecting New Zealanders with the World programme. The project provided ministers with jointly agreed options for a safe, streamlined, and scalable border process that would support the gradual reopening of New Zealand's air border in the context of COVID-19.

The project was co-sponsored by the Chief Executive of Auckland International Airport Limited and the Chair of the Border Executive Board (Comptroller of Customs). Other members included CEs of MBIE, Wellington International Airport Limited, Christchurch International Airport Limited, Air New Zealand, and the Executive Director of the Board of Airline Representatives of New Zealand

Each Board member took accountability for successful delivery from their individual agency, as well as the collective delivery of the project overall. The Board's commitment to this work generated visibility and support across the agencies, which was evident in agency staffing contributions. The Board model provided the mechanism for joint engagement and collaborative messaging with aviation sector partners and ministers, enriching relationships at the CE level and demonstrating commitment to a shared agenda.

The Sprint demonstrated co-creation across the industry and government sectors, with the Board acting as a positive mechanism for joint engagement. The Sprint supported mutual learning through changing health settings and provided all parties with better understanding of each other's settings, delivering significant ongoing value beyond the Sprint itself.



influence priorities within individual agencies. The initiatives cover data sharing and privacy, digitisation, integrated targeting, establishment of an ongoing health presence at the border, airport infrastructure, and finance.

The Board made significant progress in terms of establishing themselves as a unit with administrative processes, clarifying their purpose, and setting a collective work programme. That work programme gives clarity around prioritisation, contains realistic initiatives that add value for the Board's objectives, and plays to each agency's capabilities. In January 2023, the Board confirmed their satisfaction with how they were operating as a governance group and how they were being supported in that.

The Board performed well against its annual report measures, achieving a ministerial satisfaction rating of 'exceeds expectations' for its provision of coordination, information and advice. They successfully applied the risk and assurance framework for the end-to-end border process with respect to COVID-19, although this measure is evolving to reflect a broader management of border risk and system improvement. As an ongoing measure into 2023, the Board's work programme continues to include initiatives that respond to risk and drive border system improvement.

How the IEB model is operating

Strengths:

Many of these achievements have been supported by the unique arrangements possible under the IEB model. The Board has been functioning well, providing advice to Ministers, making decisions across multiple portfolios, and meeting the legislative purposes of the model to enable flexibility and cross-agency collaboration. They progressed longer-term activity where possible while maintaining momentum on the most critical work.

Members of the Board have a strong sense of collective ownership of their established aims. Having a common purpose enables them to work through challenges by regularly evaluating priorities and the distribution of resources, adjusting these as necessary. This is especially important as all border activities carry different emphasis across agencies, requiring clarity about

New Zealand Traveller Declaration

The New Zealand Traveller Declaration (NZTD) was successfully launched on 25 March 2022, initially as a tool for the COVID-19 health response at the border. The focus on COVID-19 allowed the NZTD to be prioritised for faster delivery. However, the pressures of COVID-19 did constrain resources and workforces elsewhere across the system; other aspects of the Systems Improvement work programme were slowed or paused, and resources were diverted from the 'data and privacy' and 'digital border' workstreams.

From when it was first implemented, the NZTD has been updated with more than 30 health settings and travel requirements to support the COVID-19 response, before the system was paused in October 2022. Given its functionality as a digital risk management tool (including for offshore risks) and arrival card, the NZTD system will also allow future changes to border settings to be implemented quickly.

The efficiency of the NZTD supports increased business effectiveness and sustainability for the border system as a whole. Working with key stakeholders like travellers and airports will continue to ensure delivery in June 2023 of a seamless border experience through the NZTD.



agencies' contribution to the joint border functions as compared to their non-border work. Building awareness and alignment of policy, funding and processes across border agencies is a key aspect of the Board's work, as is the ability to commission cross-agency work from the chief executive level.

The formalised accountability provided the impetus for regular meetings that might otherwise have been hard to get buy in for. The meetings included check-ins to ensure work was progressing and to ease any challenges or barriers, including by connecting up the right people. As well as enabling close to real time problem-solving, the frequency and regularity of board meetings strengthened chief executive relationships, building a sense of collegiality. The culture built through the chief executives' collegiality and support for each other also facilitated greater collaboration outside board meetings, including in times of non-urgency. The members are committed to attending meetings, taking their leadership role seriously and sharing their views freely.

The size of the governance board is considered effective for developing relationships, and creating the space for robust, free and frank discussions. Rather than widening the membership, other agencies and organisations are invited to join meetings for relevant items. This is the approach for accommodating varying levels of involvement, including of Crown entities that may have delivery responsibilities relevant to the Board's work, but that do not hold the accountability of a board member (e.g. Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand is the delivery arm for border-related health activity

and would therefore attend Border Executive Board meetings for relevant agenda items). Agencies outside the border remit are also able to attend DCE groups and senior officials' meetings for

Maritime Border Programme

The Board recognised that the maritime border was a gap in the Reconnecting New Zealanders initiative, which was focused on air passengers. They took leadership to address this by bringing agencies together, including Maritime NZ. The specific remit of the Board was an important enabler for this as Te Manatū Waka Ministry of Transport hold relationships with the maritime sector, while the Ministry of Health was committed to providing their specialist view of the situation.

The Board was monitoring possible supply chain risks, especially around the impact of COVID-19 on workforce capacity. Their assurance commissioning (e.g. Review of Maritime COVID-19 Border Incidents) revealed areas of possible improvement and they were able to implement the resulting recommendations, often in a process of continuous improvement.

The Maritime Border Programme led by the Board and secretariat enabled the full reopening of the maritime pathway, preserving supply chains and welcoming passengers on recreational vessels and cruise ships from 31 July 2022. The Programme closed in November 2022 as border agencies transitioned from a response approach into more enduring arrangements. For example, the Vessel Management Framework can be adapted for use at any port with minimal government input in order to manage ongoing COVID-19 situations or future pandemics. The Framework was a significant collaborative achievement across Customs, Maritime NZ, port operators and public health units. Updates to the BEB work programme will include maritime activity, as needed.



discussion on relevant items. Member agencies make the effort to keep them updated and the secretariat acts as an important communication link between the Board and member agencies.

The boards are an opportunity to collectively play to agencies' different areas of strength and expertise (e.g. policy, operations, etc.). This may result in agencies within the board's remit having different levels of importance, impact, engagement and capacity to contribute, depending on the current focus of the Board's work programme. The network of collaborative relationships is further strengthened by the presence of all member agencies at Board meetings even when agenda items do not directly impact their agency's delivery priorities. For example, the attendance of the Director-General of Primary Industries through the peak of COVID-19 provided important diversity of thought and other specialist expertise as the government lead on health and safety. This sets the scene for the ability to use the Board for wider sector issues, like foot and mouth disease, which may not directly impact all agencies but would likely benefit from their insights.

For stakeholder engagement, the Board makes use of existing relationships held by member agencies, using those channels rather than duplicating effort. The lead agencies on relevant Board work take responsibility for managing those engagements. Working in partnership with public and private sector organisations will be an important part of the Board's ongoing contribution to driving border improvements.

The Board has provided co-ordinated leadership for border settings and decisions about the COVID response. Specifically, the Board Chair operated as a single point of contact for the border system, acting as a conduit for a united border voice to ministers. The Chair attended ministerial meetings with the COVID-19 Minister, as well as being a contact point for other ministers with interests in the border. Similarly, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet attended the DCE COVID meetings to keep information sharing open. The Board's secretariat team is the contact point for the minister's office. At the more operational level, the Chair of the Board signed off on border vaccination exemptions, giving assurance that a border system view was provided.

The secretariat plays an important role in each of these strengths, supporting the Board with consistent coordination and enabling border agencies to connect up on their delivery of the work programme. Having a funded and capable secretariat that includes governance expertise and other skills relevant to the functions of the board such as programme management or policy skills, and relationship skills across levels of government have been key to the board's success. Along with Customs as the servicing department and employer of the secretariat team, and the [terms of reference](#) and [operating protocols](#) applied to Board members, these working arrangements provide a pragmatic and efficient foundation for the Board.

Opportunities:

In their 2021 self-assessment, the Board identified potential for improvement in two areas: understanding of the Board's role among other agencies (and to some degree among wider stakeholders), and timing of preparation for meetings. The latter was due in large part to the COVID-19 context, where information was constantly being updated. The changing pandemic context presents an opportunity to be more consistent with the timing of content distribution. It also presents an opportunity to shift focus out of the operational level to more strategic and



future-oriented issues. The Border Strategy is an example of one such piece of work that has been made possible as COVID pressures on the border ease.

For the former, the status of Customs as the servicing department as well as the predominant delivery vehicle for the shared work programme does present some perception issues in terms of the collective nature of the Board. Having one DCE group that mirrors the Board at the agency level will reinforce a multi-agency approach. The secretariat also has a key role to play here in terms of coordinating and connecting work at the agency level, enabling agencies to deliver on their strengths and core functions.

Although they have been operating successfully already, managing competing priorities across member agencies will be an ongoing challenge for the Board. This includes tensions both between border and non-border work, and between the varied approaches of different border agencies. The IEB model is intended as a mechanism to first surface and then work through these tensions, ensuring that the cross-agency collaboration is adding value for New Zealanders. There may also be some challenges around how less engaged members of the board can be re-engaged.

The Border Executive Board works alongside a range of other sectors and governance boards such as the Security and Intelligence Board, the Hazard Risk Board, the Maritime Security Oversight Committee, Transnational Organised Crime Oversight Committee, All-of-government Supply Chain Group, Economic CEs Group, and the national security system. Greater clarity over how an IEB fits into the wider sector or system it operates in would help avoid overlapping mandates and confusion about responsibilities.

Key challenges remain around the funding of collective arrangements like the Border Executive Board. The Border System Performance appropriation shifted to a club funding model from 1 July 2022. The ability of the border system to create or absorb new initiatives is impacted by the capacity of member agencies' own funding and workforce situations.

Differences in systems, policies and legislation across agencies also continue to present challenges for collaborative projects. Moving information and people around is possible but not necessarily fast or seamless. Employing and seconding staff comes with difficult and time-consuming on-boarding processes, including meeting the requirements of the servicing department as employer. Collaborating on documents and sharing information is cumbersome in the absence of any cross-agency document management or intranet notice board systems like those internal to individual border agencies.

Another challenge arises specifically for the Border Executive Board due to their focus on governance rather than delivery. Initiatives that have clear cross-agency value but are also heavily operational require careful management, as they are likely to still be delivered through a single agency. For example, the New Zealand Traveller Declaration is a key cross-border function but is run through Customs as a single agency to meet accountability requirements. A governance link is then drawn from Customs back to the Board.

At the most detailed level, there were some pragmatic questions around the branding and identity of the Board (web presence, te reo Māori name, etc.) and unspecified operating procedures such



as who answers parliamentary questions directed to the Board that have now been worked through. These could form the basis of more operational guidance to help future IEBs.

The overall success of the Board provides an opportunity to help explore and model solutions for some of these more common collaborative challenges, many of which are already on the radar in the broader public service (e.g. linking up with the Government Chief Digital Officer on investment in common systems). As with any board, success is down to a combination of different factors. In this case, the Border Executive Board has been well-served by a clear purpose, strong operating foundations, and a positive culture of working together.



Appendix: Methodology and evaluating collective impact

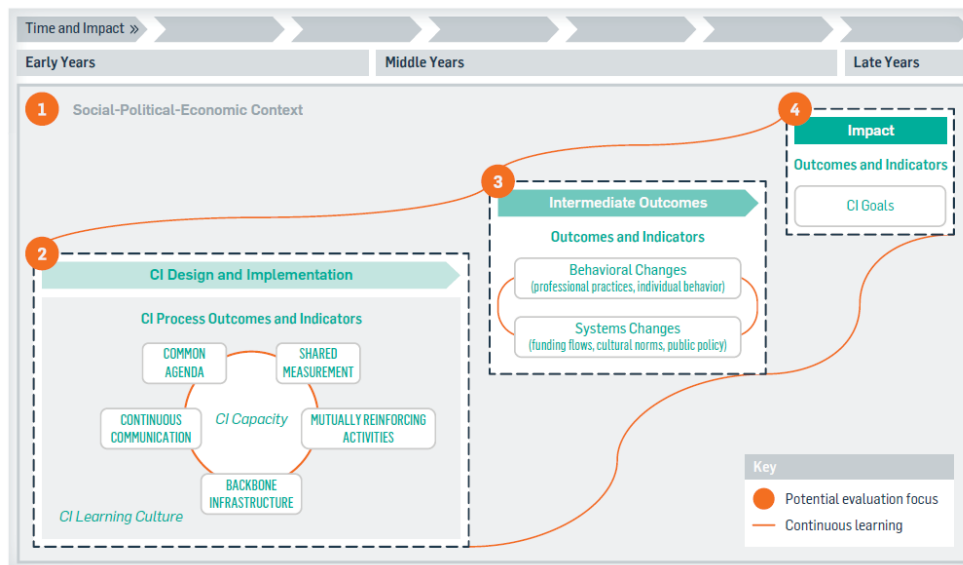
Evaluating Collective Impact

We have used a framework outlined in the Collective Impact Forum's *Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact* to evaluate the board model. This framework suggests that in the early years of a collective impact initiative, it is appropriate to focus the evaluation on:

- Social, political and economic context
- Design and implementation including:
 - *Common agenda*: whether all participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions
 - *Continuous communication*: whether there is consistent and open communication between the multiple players, to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation
 - *Backbone function*: whether the initiative is supported by dedicated staff with specific skills to coordinate participating organisations and agencies
 - *Mutually reinforcing activities*: whether participant activities are coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action
 - *Shared measurement system*: whether data is collected and results measured consistency across all participants, to ensure that efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
- Learning culture – i.e. whether parties know how to learn and freely share what they know and are willing to change based on the acquisition of new knowledge
- Capacity – i.e. the financial resources, staff, knowledge, skills, expertise, and infrastructure necessary for the initiative to work as planned

The framework further suggests that once the initiative is more established and in its middle years, evaluation can focus on intermediate outcomes, which it describes as shifts in the way people, organisations, and institutions function and interact. These shifts include both behavioural changes such as professional practices and/or individual behaviour, and systems changes, such as funding flows, cultural norms, and public policy.

It is only during the initiative's 'late years' that progress can begin to be measured against the initiatives' ultimate goals.



What we have considered in developing this case study:

- the relationships between the relevant agencies and between board members (e.g. the quality of communication, and the sense of a common purpose)
- how well the board is supported (e.g. is the supporting unit working as it should, and is the servicing department providing adequate support)
- how well the work programme is coordinated and driven (e.g. is the support unit getting the information it needs from agencies, and is it supporting the agencies in their cross-agency work)
- how well systems have been set up to support the work (e.g. are finance and resourcing systems working effectively).