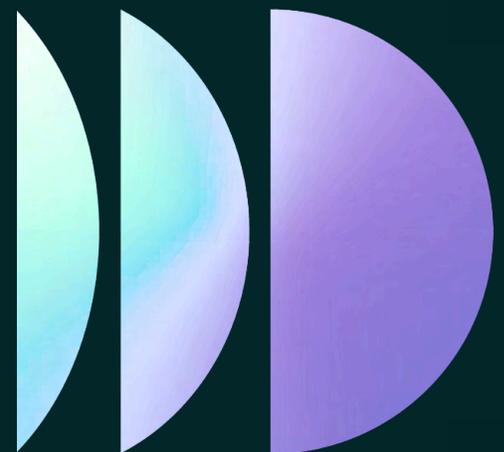


# From Policy To Practice

Early Findings From The Field

Opus Group Insight Summary





# Executive Summary

## Ambition Outpaces Delivery

Across governments, the ambition to transform social services often exceeds the systems built to deliver them. Policy frameworks multiply while outcomes stagnate; reform cycles repeat with limited learning carried forward.

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### What The Evidence Shows

Research and field experience from adaptive systems design, behavioral policy, and implementation practice consistently point to a small set of actions that dramatically improve success:



co-designing with users,



testing in real conditions,



and maintaining continuous feedback loops between practice and policy.

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### From Insight To Application

This brief synthesizes that research base and outlines the principles underpinning the Policy Accelerator, a delivery model that helps governments move from intention to implementation with clarity, speed, and measurable impact.

**It helps public institutions integrate testing and validation cycles directly into their existing accountability and budget processes.**



### The Goal

To identify what differentiates systems that deliver.



# 1 The Policy To Delivery Gap

## Why Reform So Often Stalls

Over the past decade, governments worldwide have acknowledged a widening chasm between policy ambition and lived outcomes. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as much as **75%** of major reform **initiatives fail** to achieve their intended impact, often due to breakdowns in execution rather than design.<sup>1</sup>

## Systemic Barriers To Execution

Common causes include:



fragmented governance,



short political cycles,



insufficient data feedback,



and the absence of structured mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration.

## Strategy Overload, Delivery Deficit

Traditional approaches tend to emphasize strategy formulation, producing frameworks, action plans, and consultations, but underinvest in the delivery infrastructure that turns ideas into measurable change. As Deloitte's Government Trends 2025 notes,

**“ Delivery is fast becoming the true differentiator of public sector performance.”<sup>2</sup>**



In Canada and comparable jurisdictions, the challenge is compounded by jurisdictional complexity. Federal mandates rely on provincial delivery systems, while local service providers interpret policy within resource constraints.

The result is what we call fragmented execution, where strong intentions become disconnected from the delivery systems and accountability structures required to turn policy into consistent results.

Source: <sup>1</sup> OECD (2024), Government at a Glance: Implementation Readiness and Public Sector Reform Success Rates. | <sup>2</sup> Deloitte (2025), Government Trends 2025: From Policy Design to Delivery.



## 2 What Research Shows Works

### A Discipline Of Delivery

Over the past two decades, the field once known as implementation science has evolved into a broader practice of delivery design and adaptive implementation across healthcare, education, and public administration. Pioneering studies from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) show that interventions supported by structured implementation frameworks are **2.8 times more likely to achieve sustained results.**<sup>3</sup>

### Learning While Doing Outperforms Planning Alone

OECD case studies from Finland, Australia, and the Netherlands show that **reforms built on “learning while doing” consistently outperform traditional rollouts.**<sup>4</sup> These models treat reform as a cycle of testing, validation, and refinement. This approach mirrors continuous improvement and results-based management practices already used in many jurisdictions, but applies them from the design stage rather than after launch.

### The Four Predictors Of Success

The factors most predictive of success are remarkably consistent across sectors:



#### Co-design & Stakeholder Alignment

Programs developed with the people who deliver and receive them achieve adoption rates up to 65% higher than top-down designs.<sup>5</sup>



#### Iterative Testing

Structured pilot phases reduce implementation problems by more than 50%, allowing teams to surface real-world barriers before scale.<sup>6</sup>



#### Feedback Loops & Adaptive Learning

Continuous monitoring and adjustment extend program durability far beyond initial rollout.



#### Delivery Infrastructure

Dedicated teams, data systems, and leadership routines maintain momentum once political attention moves on.

Source: <sup>3</sup> Fixsen, D., et al. (NIRN, 2022), Implementation Science: Core Components and Practice Outcomes. | <sup>4</sup> OECD (2023), Innovation in Government: Learning While Doing  
<sup>5</sup> NIRN (2023), Stakeholder Co-Design and Adoption Patterns in Social Program Implementation. | <sup>6</sup> PCORI (2024), Iterative Testing and Adaptive Evaluation in Public Services.



## 3 The Policy To Practice Approach

### Turning Insight Into Action

The Policy Accelerator applies these field-tested principles to the realities of government delivery. The model supports departments to move from problem definition to tested, validated **solutions within 12 to 18 months**, compressing the traditional reform timeline by years.

### Structured Support For Faster Delivery

Each Accelerator partnership combines structured methodology with practical support:

- 1 Discovery & Alignment**  
Mapping system context, stakeholder priorities, and readiness for change.
- 2 Co-Design & Validation**  
Building and testing prototype solutions with users and implementers.
- 3 Implementation Toolkit**  
Translating design insights into operational plans, communication templates, and measurable indicators.
- 4 Continuous Improvement Coaching**  
Embedding feedback loops that sustain learning and adaptation beyond the pilot phase.

### Capability Built In, Not Bolted On

Unlike conventional consulting models that end with recommendations, **Policy Accelerator engagements build internal capability while helping departments demonstrate measurable progress within existing mandate and budget cycles**. Each phase produces actionable, stackable insights such as discovery reports, tested prototypes, and validated metrics that together form a reusable infrastructure for future reform. Each phase produces outputs that align with standard government processes, helping departments embed learning into ongoing operations.

### The Three Operating Beliefs

The approach is grounded in three operating beliefs:



#### Design with, not for.

The people closest to the problem are closest to the solution.



#### Speed with validation.

Rapid iteration and real-time data drive progress without sacrificing rigor.



#### Delivery is built in.

Lasting change comes from systems that turn ideas into results.



## 4 Implications For System Reform

### Why Delivery Discipline Matters Now

#### Results Under Pressure

As governments confront intertwined challenges such as workforce shortages, housing crises, childcare reform, and digital equity, the ability to deliver and demonstrate outcomes efficiently under tighter budgets becomes the decisive factor in public trust. Citizens increasingly judge effectiveness not by the scale of announcements but by the reliability of outcomes.

#### Doing More With Less

In an era of fiscal restraint, effective delivery also means demonstrating results with fewer resources. Departments that embed **structured testing and iterative learning consistently achieve better outcomes** under flat or declining budgets, showing that the discipline of delivery is as much about focus and adaptation as it is about funding.

The findings are consistent.

Systems that embed delivery discipline from the start tend to:

Achieve More

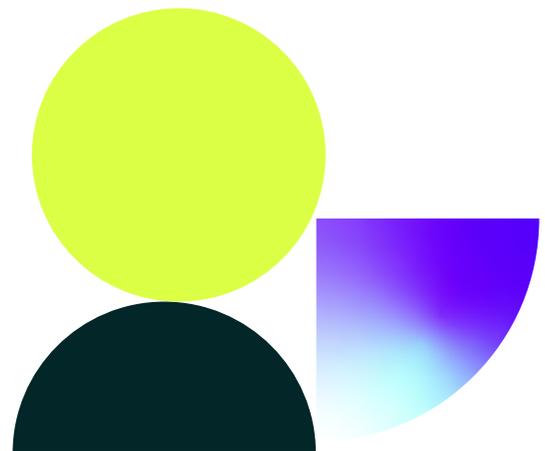
Waste Less

Sustain Change Longer

#### Systems That Learn

Research and practice give us the proof; the Policy Accelerator framework offers the pathway. By connecting policy design to the practice of delivery, the Accelerator helps institutions build what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) calls systems that learn.<sup>7</sup>

In this model, transformation becomes a managed process that is planned, tested, and measured within the same cycles that govern program delivery. For deputy and assistant deputy ministers, this means reform can advance within the risk tolerances of existing oversight bodies, **turning delivery discipline into a governance strength rather than a constraint.**



Source: <sup>7</sup> OECD (2024), Building Systems That Learn: Adaptive Governance in Practice.

# From Proof To Practice

*Transformation moves from principle to practice, making reform achievable within real timelines and institutional realities*

Research and practice provide the proof; the Policy Accelerator framework offers the pathway. By linking policy design with disciplined delivery, governments can build what the OECD calls systems that learn, structures that adapt, test, and improve over time. Most reforms fail not from weak intent, but from weak delivery design.

**When implementation capacity is built in from the start, policy ambition becomes achievable within existing systems.**

**The Policy Accelerator helps institutions make that shift:**



from strategy to delivery,



from pilots to proof,



and from ideas to impact that lasts.



For more information on the Policy Accelerator or to contribute to an interview, contact [partnerships@opus.group](mailto:partnerships@opus.group)

To learn more about Opus Group, visit [opus.group](https://opus.group)