FOR AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS

State of IT

Taland by Minister waller

Ranking the best and the worst of IT in Australia's states and territories.



State government IT can sometimes feel like a never ending groundhog day where multi-million dollar projects are launched, fall behind schedule, double their budgets and then trail off quietly having met some but probably not all of their intended goals.

These all-too-public disasters loom large in the imaginations of policy makers. Minister after minister and bureaucrat after bureaucrat has launched the silver bullet reform they hope will keep them out of the auditor-general's sights.

What is the secret to avoiding project failure? Is it better preparation and scoping? Tighter controls over investment? Hardline project governance? Outsourcing?

iThews has taken a close look at the policy and attitudes towards IT management in Australia's six state governments and the Northern Territory, to gauge who is leading the pack in terms of IT maturity and where work still needs to be done.

We have come up with a public sector IT maturity index to rate each state and territory on their progress. Read on to find out who is running ahead of the pack (and who has forgotten to turn up to the race).





New South Wales: The first state?

NSW Parliament's public accounts committee was so convinced that the state's public sector IT was in crisis that it kicked off a full inquiry into the matter in 2012.

Macquarie Street has overseen one or two corkers: Empty T-Card posts can still be found at Sydney train and bus stations, the last remaining artefact of the T-Card electronic ticketing system that never was. Education's mammoth LMBR rollout is also having a couple of wobbles. But by the standards set by its east coast neighbours, NSW has an IT disaster history that hardly even rates a mention.

The NSW Government nonetheless wasted little time getting a new IT strategy in place after it won March 2011's state election in a landslide, heaving out Labor's savings-focused plan and replacing it with a longer-term vision.

The foundations of success had arguably already been laid by the state's senior IT bureaucrats before the change of government took place. In late 2010, the ad-lib panel of agency CIOs and corporate services chiefs that made up the former CIO Executive Council was scrapped and replaced with a structured hierarchy.

At the pinnacle of the new governance scheme sits a board made up of secretaries from each of the eight agency clusters, who have the final say on ICT policy and projects. This means that decisions are ultimately being made by the same men and women who have responsibility for seeing them put into action at the agency level.

The new model also formalised channels of consultation between the private sector and agency CIOs – enshrining collaboration in mandated lines of reporting.

This meant that IT departments could no longer operate in the dark and hope no-one noticed if things went wrong. The Coalition wasted no time trying to sell the reform as its own idea. The state's central IT chiefs inside the Office of Finance and Services (OFS) also appear determined to win agencies over to cloud before wielding their legislative sticks.

Successful cloud roll-outs are being promoted through 'pilot' schemes, giving IT managers a tangible narrative to sell to their superiors rather than just hollow hype. While this approach might take a little longer to come to fruition than a procurement mandate it has the potential to produce a better long-term gain.

The biggest risk facing the state now is that they will undo all of this good work by outsourcing their technology brains trust to the private sector.

Last year the government updated the wish-list of capabilities it wants public servants to strive for to include an up-to-date understanding of contemporary technologies and their government applications, and has vowed to investigate gaps in its ICT workforce. Let's just hope that it can build up in-house skills faster than Macquarie Street sacks them.

with Businesslink already cut to the bone and bids currently coming in for the outsourcing of ServiceFirst.

Have an ICT Strategy?	Yes
Have a stance on cloud computing (including offshore) that is clear to IT executives?	Yes
Have a minister with clear ICT authority?	Yes
Is there a formal structure that allows CIO voices to be heard up the line?	Yes
Is investment into projects properly governed and awarded on business merit?	Yes
Is the progress of projects monitored beyond sign off (i.e. gateway reviews)?	Yes
Has it properly identified what the problems are (audit; review etc.)?	No
Has it left ample time to address legacy IT issues before they become urgent?	1/2
Is IT funded properly, or is it only paid attention when savings need to be found?	1/2
Is innovation rewarded?	Yes
Do agencies buy-in to the whole-of-government vision?	Yes
Does the government have the skills to realise its vision?	No



Many state governments have decided that agencies need an extra push in the direction of cloud computing. The 'cloud-first' mantra has been adopted by Queensland and is being seriously toeked at in Canberra too – but what exactly does it mean? In the UK: "When procuring new or existing services, public sector organsations should consider and fully evaluate potential cloud solutions first – before they consider any other option...Departments will remain free to choose an alternative to the cloud if they can

demonstrate that it offers better value for money."

In the US: "The Cloud First policy mandates that agencies take full advantage of cloud computing benefits to maximise capacity utilisation, improve IT flexibility and responsiveness, and minimise cost." NSW has opted for a more nuanced stance, requiring that agencies include at least one cloud solution in their procurement short-list – but stopping short of domanding it be selected by default. victoria has followed suit. Chief Technology Advocate Grantly Marles told iThews he doesn't think of it as 'cloud-first'.

"Cloud-first implies that there is a burden of proof on agencies to show there is no viable cloud offering they could select before going with a noncloud product," he said.

Theoretically, the end point under all of these policies should be the same. The best value, fit-for-purpose solution should win in all scenarios, be it cloud or on-premise. The rationale behind both policy stances is to make sure agencies aren't overlooking cloud options in their market assessments.

The difference, in the end, is in the rhetoric and not the outcome.





Haemorrhaging cash in the top end.

To be fair to the small Northern Territory government, there are at least a handful of IT workers doggedly working away at getting its public sector IT up to scratch.

The territory has a fully formed cloud computing policy, completed in July 2011, plus a hard line BYOD policy setting out which devices can and can't connect to the government network. It also has in place uniform standards governing printers, videoconferencing and other potential purchases as a means of simplifying procurement.

NT is starting to lift the profile of IT at higher levels too. In September David Tollner took over the Corporate and Information Services portfolio from Premier Adam Giles, under whom it languished unnoticed for a year.

After dumping its Labor predecessor's preliminary steps towards a whole-of-government IT strategy, the current government is close to throwing some of its own ideas to the legislative ring. And yet despite its small size (less than 20,000 staff), the NT has managed an IT faux par of eastern state proportions.

Efforts to build a government-wide asset management system have gone off the rails quite spectacularly, leaving the Giles government with a bill it claims to be in the vicinity of \$70 million. Tollner has described the Labor-project as bearing "many parallels to Queensland's Health payroll scandal."

Many of the NT's problems can be traced back to its remote location. The asset management system bills escalated very quickly when contractors had to be flown in and out to work on the remediation. The NT struggles to retain senior IT personnel, who are often tempted back to the larger southern cities. It is not an enviable position to be in.

The asset management system catastrophe may, in hindsight, prove to be the kick in the backside that the territory needs to get its house in order. Already Tollner has announced that an ICT governance framework will be put to cabinet, aiming to strengthen oversight of technology investments and to hopefully improve project management.

Tech projects have also been subject to a full parliamentary inquiry, which recommended – among other things – that the territory hire itself a whole-of-government CIO.

But the big hurdle will be skills, skills, skills. Unless NT can produce a mighty large carrot to coax IT workers into its ranks and make them stay, it will be stuck paying a premium for southern contractors whose experience and IP follow them back across the border as soon as the job is done.

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Seeking financial salvation-as-a-service.

Campbell Newman's LNP government knows a lot about criticising IT – the 1.25 billion failure of Labor's health payroll overhaul was one of the most successful barbs of the 2012 election campaign.

But can it walk the talk and do a better job itself?

Soon after the election then Queensland Government CIO, Peter Grant, was commissioned to audit sector-wide IT in forensic detail. The resulting 1000 page report revealed the extent of the state's IT decay – but not how the debt-burdened state should pay for the backlog of upgrades it urgently needs.

The Newman Government's first response was to embrace cloud sourcing with something approaching religious zeal. In May 2013 Minister for Science, IT, Innovation and the Arts, Ian Walker, announced that Queensland would become the first Australian jurisdiction to go 'cloud-first' in keeping with a procurement principle set by US and UK governments where cloud options are treated as the default and non-cloud purchases must be further justified. Now, more than a year later, the Minister has finally released detail on what that announcement

will really mean for agencies. Tech procurements "must consider first cloud-based solutions in preference to traditional ICT investments" the state has decreed.

Is the strong arm approach too dramatic? States don't have a great track record when it comes to trying to impose central mandates across a large and sprawling public sector.

If nothing else, the Department of Science, IT, Innovation and the Arts can finally get cracking on its much-vaunted cloud email migration now that the state has renewed its volume licensing deal with Microsoft to include Office 365.

It was a bad look having the state's flagship cloud project floundering nearly six months after the anticipated go live date.

But the Microsoft deal appears to be another signal that this government is stronger on rhetoric than action when it comes to technology. Promoted as a 149,000 seat cloud email migration, the deal offers no guarantee that agencies will take-up the 365 opportunity.

Outsourcing has been pinned as the other solution to breaching the divide between Queensland's technology needs and its bank balance.

The minister has vowed to "safely but aggressively" reduce the state's ownership of ICT assets and "non-critical software applications". Government owned infrastructure provider CITEC will be gone in a couple of years and each agency has been tasked with putting forward a roadmap for the divestment of its own selected internal functions.

But it still hasn't revealed its hand in terms of funding to prep agency IT shops to be outsourced. The dividends of this sort of move could still be several years off, while agencies need to start transitioning of Windows XP in huge numbers. DSITIA will be hoping that the IT strategist it might need in the future wasn't a member of the army of IT workers it has made redundant since coming into power.

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The IT dashboard was introduced to the world of public sector IT by US Government CIO vivek Kundra. He explained to a Sydney audience in 2013 that shining a bright light onto IT spending had immediate effects in the US. "As soon as it went live, one of the CIOs ended up halting dozens of projects and terminating four effective straight away," he said. "In six months we had seved \$3 billion by cracking down on wasteful technology spending." In recent months Queensland has launched its own version, with the state's IT minister hypothesising that if it had existed back in 2010, the billiondollar health payroll disaster would not have been allowed to run as far off the rails.

victoria's own version is due to be up and running by the end of this year, and the Federal Coalition has included one in its own plans too.

But will the big stick of transparency work in the way it is intended? Or will government CIOs become too wary to take risks and innovate as a result of this black and white measure of their operations?

NSW government IT exec William Murphy told. Thews earlier this year that he is looking forward to a time where governments are allowed to have small-scale failures and when these small failures are seen as "a normal part of the innovation process".

"In the past people got into trouble when overruns happened. I'm hoping we can move beyond this approach to a point where we learn from these experiences and feed that knowledge back into other projects to improve their chance of success, viewing it as a positive part of the innovation process," he said.





Western Australia might think that the Great Sandy Desert is enough to deflect attention from the fact that it has no plan for IT.

No excuses.

Unfortunately, WA finds itself well and truly at the bottom of ITnews' maturity rankings, with no IT strategy and no plans to put one together, no apparent ministerial responsibility for IT, and no excuses for its neglect.

Its not like things never go wrong in the west.

In 2005, the state launched a shared services scheme that involved migrating all 58 state departments and agencies onto a single ERP platform based on Oracle's eBusiness suite. Extensive customisation, however, made the system shaky and as a result nearly two-thirds of agencies were still refusing to make the switch six years later.

The Barnett government decided to cut its losses in July 2011 and begin rolling back the shared services office. According to budget papers, the process of decommissioning and replacing the ERP systems of agencies that had already transitioned to shared services is costing the state more than \$370 million. What is more, it seems to be sucking the government dry in terms of tech innovation. There is simply not much else going on.

That is, of course, except for the Fiona Stanley Hospital. Originally billed as a "paperless" facility, IT concerns have forced the state to put the opening of the \$2 billion health centre on hold and concede that there will be plenty of paper, at least for a few more years.

It all adds up to a pretty negative IT narrative for the state's public sector. Little wonder that no members of Premier Colin Barnett's cabinet are volunteering to take it on.

Despite this there are a few pockets of innovation sprouting through the cracks.

A dedicated geospatial data agency – Landgate – has produced what is probably one of the richest government data maps available at present, layering everything thing from fire warnings, mining tenements to census stats across an interactive map.

The withdrawal of centralised ERP has also opened up the opportunity for a handful of agencies to adopt cloud solutions in its place, despite a lack of whole-of-governance guidance on the issue (beyond a tacit endorsement of the Commonwealth policy).

But if IT maintains its invisibility within the Barnett government's agenda, and its immunity from ministerial scrutiny, then it is inevitable that at least some agencies are going to slip behind.

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ashidle. Squeezing every cent from IT.

Tasmania runs a pretty tight IT operation, made easier by the fact that its public service is roughly the size of one large government agency (about 30,000) in the major states. It enjoys a tradition of central IT control that appears to be (begrudgingly at least) accepted by departments. Most government IT happens behind the scenes, via the IT service agency TMD and in keeping with decisions made by the ICT Policy Board.

The Board meets every couple of months or so to forensically assess agency projects and applications for funding, plus upkeep on the state's ICT strategy.

However, internal IT matters didn't get much ministerial airtime under the old Labor Government. New IT and Innovation Minister, Michael Ferguson, has taken up the agenda with a bit more zeal, taking a policy to attract data centre business to the state and to set up a whole-of-government private cloud) to the March election.

Tasmania's emphasis on back-office coordination is necessary for a government that has next to no money to spend on IT.

In October this year TMD was due to have signed the final department onto its new whole-ofgovernment email service, under the \$8.9 million IT transformation program it commenced in 2008.

A common VOIP telephony system is also due to reach the final stages of its roll-out this year, which cost \$1.62 million in 2012-13. TMD's next target is data centres. It has set its sights on a long term transition to a bundled infrastructure-as-a-service arrangement that agencies will be mandated to use, to squeeze whatever cents are left out of its annual technology spend. It doesn't appear that there is a great deal left over in the budget pool to fund new capability beyond what is business critical, with the exception of a \$28 million grant dedicated to IT initiatives in the 2013 budget, to be dealt out to agencies as the ICT Policy Board sees fit.

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Have a stance on cloud computing (including offshore) that is clear to IT executives?	1/2
Have a minister with clear ICT authority?	Ves
Is there a formal structure that allows CIO voices to be heard up the line?	Yes
Is investment into projects properly governed and awarded on business merit?	YES
Is the progress of projects monitored beyond sign off (i.e. gateway reviews)?	No
Has it properly identified what the problems are (audit; review etc.)?	No
Has it left ample time to address legacy IT issues before they become urgent?	1/2
Is IT funded properly, or is it only paid attention when savings need to be found?	No
Is innovation rewarded?	No
Do agencies buy-in to the whole-of-government vision?	Yes
Does the government have the skills to realise its vision?	1/2

NSW: Originally due to be rolled out ahead of the 2000 Otympics, a handful of obsolete device stands are all that is left of the NSW government's first attempt at electronic transport ticketing, the T-Card. The project ended with the state and the vendor sung each other over their respective losses.

Queensland: Queensland Health continues to pick up the pieces of a rushed attempt at replacing its payroll system, now estimated to cost the state \$1.25 billion to fully remediate. It continues to be one of the major campaign tools the Newman ENP uses against Labor.

Victoria: It is a tough choice to switch off a project that has already cost \$500 million, but that is how bad HealthSMART get. The decision to impose a one-size fits all suite of ehealth technologies across a spectrum of hospitals was always going to struggle, which the state may have realised if it had done its due diligence at the outset.

South Australia: A budget revision in December has left SA Health's Oracle financial systems overhaul costing nearly three times its original budget, or \$62.5 million. It is also late, and the delays are threatening to incur a domino effect that could delay the department's wider eHealth program.

Northern Territory: A \$70 million IT bit is big for any state, let alone the tiny NT government. But that's how much its whole-of-government asset management system has now cost. The first-term Country Liberal government has decided to scrap the project spend \$12.5 million fixing up existing systems to do the job instead.

Tasmania: Tasmania's roads department was handed \$24.8 million in 2003 for the replacement of its motor registry system – only to have \$5 million docked from its budget four years later. Unsurprisingly an unfinished and unreliable product was delivered a year later, causing general strife across the state's service centres.

Western Australia: In 2005 WA set upon the daunting task of transitioning all of its agencies onto a single ERP platform as part of a shared services savings drive. Neary ten years later it is still picking up the picces, in a policy reversal costing more than \$3/0 million.





Setting the benchmark for failure.

Revelations of the Victorian Ombudsman's 2011 investigation into Victorian IT projects set the benchmark for technology mismanagement in the public sector.

None of the ten initiatives named and shamed eclipsed Queensland's payroll disaster in terms of expenditure on their own, but the frequency of failure exposed a more systematic illness behind-the-scenes in Melbourne and beyond. The report has cast a looming shadow over IT policy in the state ever since.

Legislators can be in no doubt about what went wrong, and it almost all comes down to compliance. The business case for Myki was signed off in spite of a ludicrously short implementation timeline. So was Ultranet's – a project that has since been cancelled. The \$500 million HealthSMART scheme was funded on the basis of what has been described as "a few pages" worth of project planning. How did any of this get past Treasury in the first place?

The Victoria example has made it abundantly clear that it's not enough to make a policy and walk away. Without conscientious oversight agencies can and will ignore regulation.

In response, technology minister Gordon Rich-Phillips says that under the state's new 'high value/high risk' investment protocol, funding will be withheld from agencies who aren't meeting the project milestones that were promised. He told iTnews in September that in the past the approach was "here is \$500 million, come back in eight years."

Now, he says "if agencies are not completing the feedback loop at stage one, they're not going to get funded for stage two."

If Rich-Phillips can stick to his guns, this may be just the wake-up call that the state needs. It is a big 'if', however. The state has had a 'mandatory' gateway review process in place for all large projects since 2003, which should have prevented any of the ten cases examined by the Ombudsman from reaching their embarrassing conclusions. But in ten years not a single Victorian agency completed all six gates.

Victoria is also trying to wash its hands of CenITex, the IT shared services unit set up to save \$40 million per annum which instead delivered only headaches and the auditor-general's scrutiny. It plans to outsource most of CenITex's hands-on operations, with job losses likely to follow despite a plea on the government's behalf for bidders to consider absorbing redundant government employees as part of the deal.

The government, which acknowledges that "demand for skilled labour continues to exceed supply in key areas of the ICT workforce" will need to be proactive about retaining and re-deploying valuable workers, lest it be forced to re-hire them at a premium six months down the track. The silver lining is that all of the components are there in Victoria to lock IT failure firmly into the past, as long as it can corral its agencies into line.

Have an ICT Strategy?	Yes
Have a stance on cloud computing (including offshore) that is clear to IT executives?	No
Have a minister with clear ICT authority?	Yes
Is there a formal structure that allows CIO voices to be heard up the line?	Yes
Is investment into projects properly governed and awarded on business merit?	1/2
Is the progress of projects monitored beyond sign off (i.e. gateway reviews)?	1/2
Has it properly identified what the problems are (audit; review etc.)?	Yes
Has it left ample time to address legacy IT issues before they become urgent?	No
Is IT funded properly, or is it only paid attention when savings need to be found?	1/2
Is innovation rewarded?	Yes
Do agencies buy-in to the whole-of-government vision?	No
Does the government have the skills to realise its vision?	1/2





Dreaming of a world without big projects

South Australia is not immune to the kind of optimism bias that so notoriously got the Victorian government into trouble.

The SA auditor-general revealed in October that the state's shared services scheme had still yet to break even, after five years of reforms and expenditure exceeding \$86 million. The shared services business case was approved based on an estimated \$190 million dividend between 2008 and 2011.

In 2010, the health department under-estimated the cost of its Oracle finance systems replacement by about \$40 million, or two-thirds. It still hasn't finished.

But unlike Victoria, South Australia doesn't seem to be in any hurry to tighten its purse strings, and remains one of only two states (alongside the tightly centralised Tasmania) yet to mandate a gateway review process.

Its plan to avoid big project failures is to avoid big projects in the first place.

"From now on, we're not going to start up any more big 'ICT' projects. We're only going to have business change initiatives," said the government's new IT strategy in November.

"We will break these down into smaller segments, with well-defined exit strategies that ensure that we're not locked into spending more time and money to continue projects that aren't working." Sounds good in theory. What IT manager wouldn't be tempted to believe in a world without expensive and risky systems replacements? But without proper periodic reviews, how will the SA

government know when its exit strategies need to be deployed?

No one in SA's new or old Weatherill cabinets seems to be putting their hand up to take on the whole-of-government IT agenda, and tech policy is being made on the fly as a result.

During the election campaign, Attorney-General John Rau announced that \$3 million had been spent to kit officers with yet another device to hang off their belt, despite facing the prospect of losing the election before enabling legislation could be passed.

The government won back power by a whisker, but still hasn't commented on explosive claims of probity breaches within the health department.

So what is going right in Adelaide? There is a huge emphasis on innovation in the state, which paid big dividends several years ago when the government rolled out its common, uniform web portal. It is now recognised as the benchmark for 'one-stop-shop' online service delivery and NSW, Queensland and Victoria are all scrambling to emulate it.

The new strategy continues this tradition through a push for rapid prototyping and scaling, although it hasn't set any formal targets. There is not very much money on the table, but there appears to be plenty of small initiatives going ahead anyway (PDF).

Griteria

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Is the progress of projects monitored beyond sign off (i.e. gateway reviews)?	No
Has it properly identified what the problems are (audit; review etc.)?	No
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Is IT funded properly, or is it only paid attention when savings need to be found?	No
Is innovation rewarded?	Yes
Do agencies buy-in to the whole-of-government vision?	Yes
Does the government have the skills to realise its vision?	No



What about the 👘

We have left the Australian Capital Territory out of this analysis because we felt we did not have enough information on its operations to fairly compare it to the other states and territories.

Do you know more? We'd love to hear from you.

Former NSW auditor-general Peter Achterstraat shared these fruits of his wisdom as a parting gift to the state.

- 1 A poor initial business case.
- 2 Unclear statements of expected outcomes.
- 3 Lack of senior management buy-in.
- 4 Inadequate gateway reviews.
- 5 Poor communication.
- 6 Inadequate stakeholder engagement.
- 7 Scope creep (or in many cases 'scope gallop').
- 8 Conflicts of interest.
- 9 Optimism bias when assessing prospective benefits.
- 10 Group think.
- 11 Lack of appreciation of the 'big picture'.
- 12 Decision-makers being too imbedded in the project so they can't see the forest for the trees



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Does yourstate:	NSW	QLD	TAS	VIC	SA	NT	W/A
Have an ICT Strategy?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Have a stance on cloud computing (including offshore) that is clear to IT executives?	Yes	Yes	1/2	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Have a minister with clear ICT authority?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is there a formal structure that allows CIO voices to be heard up the line?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is investment into projects properly governed and awarded on business merit?	Yes	Yes	Yes	1/2	No	1/2	No
Is the progress of projects monitored beyond sign off (i.e. gateway reviews)?	Yes	Yes	No	1/2	No	No	Yes
Has it properly identified what the problems are (audit; review etc.)?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Has it left ample time to address legacy IT issues before they become urgent?	1/2	No	1/2	No	No	No	No
Is IT funded properly, or is it only paid attention when savings need to be found?	1/2	No	No	1/2	No	No	No
Is innovation rewarded?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Do agencies buy-in to the whole-of-government vision?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Does the government have the skills to realise its vision?	No	No	1/2	1/2	No	No	No
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