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Demonstrating public value: benefits evidence that stands up to scrutiny

Public programmes are judged on value for money long after approval. Define, baseline and evidence benefits from the start so they survive scrutiny.

THE EIGHT-PHASE METHOD

01 Discover
02 Diagnose
03 Design
04 Plan
05 Mobilise
06 Deliver
07 Embed
08 Optimise

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Changing how transformation is done
The EKSELENS360 family

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Public programmes are approved on a business case and judged, often years later, on whether they delivered. Between the two sits a familiar gap: benefits that were forecast with confidence but never baselined, owned or tracked, leaving the programme unable to show the value it was funded to create.

Closing that gap matters more than ever. Budgets are tight, scrutiny from audit bodies and committees is sustained, and every pound spent on change has to justify itself against frontline services.

Why benefits evidence breaks down

The causes are rarely technical. They are habits of the business case process:

- **Benefits are written to secure approval.** They are optimistic, broad and expressed in terms that are hard to measure.
- **Nobody owns them after approval.** Programme teams focus on delivery; the business areas that will realise benefits are not named or engaged.
- **Baselines are missing.** Without a measure of the starting point, any later claim of improvement is an estimate.
- **Cashable and non-cashable benefits are blurred.** Time saved is reported as money saved, and the numbers lose credibility.

The HM Treasury Green Book and the Public Value Framework both stress that value must be defined and evidenced, not assumed. The discipline is in applying that from the start.

Define benefits that can be measured

A good benefit is specific, measurable and owned. For each one, agree:

- the change it describes, in terms a service user or taxpayer would recognise;
- the measure that will show it, and where the data comes from;
- the baseline, measured before delivery starts;
- the named owner in the business who will realise it;
- when it is expected to appear, and how it will be tracked.

Fewer, better-defined benefits are more persuasive than a long list of loosely described ones.

Separate what is cashable from what is not

Public value includes service quality, outcomes for citizens and risk reduction as well as cost. All of these matter, but they should be reported honestly:

- **Cashable benefits** reduce budgets or release funding that can be redeployed.
- **Non-cashable efficiency** frees capacity that is used for other work.
- **Quality and outcome benefits** improve the service or the results for users.

Keeping these separate protects credibility. A finance director or audit committee will trust a smaller, clearly categorised figure over a large blended one.

Capture evidence as delivery happens

Benefits evidence assembled at closure is weak evidence. Build it into the programme rhythm:

- record baselines and data sources when benefits are agreed;
- track leading indicators during delivery, not just final outcomes;
- log changes to assumptions and the reasons for them;
- review benefits at programme boards alongside cost and schedule.

This is the core of an evidence trail that stands up to scrutiny: every reported figure can be traced to a baseline, a data source and an owner.

Keep benefits alive after go-live

Many benefits appear months or years after a programme closes. Without a plan, nobody is left to measure them. Before closure, agree who will track each remaining benefit, how often and where results will be reported. Hand the benefits register to the business owners explicitly, with the evidence collected so far.

A practical first step

Take the programme's benefits register and check each entry against four questions: is there a baseline, a measure, a named owner and a date? Most registers have significant gaps. Closing them is a matter of weeks, and it turns a forecast into a commitment the organisation can evidence — to its board, its auditors and the public it serves.

Want to talk this through?

Book a 45-minute discovery conversation. Bring one challenge, leave with three prioritised next steps — written up within 24 hours.

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