

Statutory Review of the Digital Restart Fund Act 2020

Discussion paper

8 August 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Department of Customer Service acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this document.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

Statutory Review of the Digital Restart Fund Act 2020

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Digital Restart Fund Act 2020

The NSW Government introduced the Digital Restart Fund Act 2020 (the Act) to establish the Digital Restart Fund (DRF). The DRF funds and governs the delivery of digital infrastructure for projects that meet and support the purposes of the DRF Act. The purpose of establishing the DRF was to provide a central funding envelope to support significant, strategic and all of government projects and initiatives that may have otherwise not been funded.

The existence of the DRF has changed how digital and ICT investments are planned, implemented and managed in New South Wales. The DRF has allowed for identification of cross agency co-ordination and efficiency. It takes an iterative and incremental approach to project funding, which supports quick, low cost digital delivery, responsive to current needs and informed by user feedback. It is supported by robust governance arrangements and assurance processes to ensure value is derived from public investment.

The core objectives of the DRF are to improve service delivery, support innovation, and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations through digital means. A key aspect of the Act is to ensure that payments from the DRF are only approved if the project promotes and supports one of the stated purposes of the DRF, categorised as life journeys, state digital assets, front-line technology modernisation and uplifting digital capability, such as in the areas of cyber security and emerging technology.

Another key part of the Act is to ensure appropriate Ministerial oversight by requiring that the responsible Minister approves projects that promote the purpose of the DRF on the recommendation of the Secretary of the Department of Customer Service. The Minister is also required to obtain the advice of the Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner regarding impacts on information access and privacy under the relevant legislation. The Minister also has the discretion to obtain other relevant advice in exercising the functions under the Act.

Since its inception, the DRF has funded 295 projects, driving innovation and improving service delivery across all of government. Data collected from agencies across NSW Government estimates that the DRF has contributed to the creation of over 2900 job opportunities.

1.2 Scope and purpose of the Statutory Review

Section 17 of the Act requires the Minister to review the Act to determine whether the policy objectives of the Act remain valid and whether the terms of the Act remain appropriate for securing those objectives. The review must commence 5 years after commencement of the Act (i.e. 3 August 2025), and a report on the outcome of the review must be tabled in each House of Parliament within six months, that is by 2 February 2026.

The Department of Customer Service (DCS) is undertaking this review on behalf of the Minister. This Discussion Paper forms a part of this review. It seeks to engage stakeholders from across government, industry, academia, and the broader community to help evaluate whether the Act continues to support digital delivery in government in a way that is effective, impactful and fit-for-purpose.

The issues and questions identified in this Discussion Paper are not exhaustive, as they intend to facilitate discussion, and do not indicate endorsed policy positions of Government. DCS welcomes further comments on any other general matters that are relevant to improving the operation and effectiveness of the DRF, including in identifying any legislative or administrative barriers, gaps or improvements that could enhance the effectiveness, equity or accountability of the DRF.

1.3 Conduct of the review

This review is being conducted in three stages:

- Stage 1: This Discussion Paper constitutes the first stage. We welcome written submissions from stakeholders in response to the issues raised in the Discussion Paper and about any other general matters relevant to improving the current DRF framework.
- Stage 2: Targeted consultations with stakeholders will be undertaken after the completion of the public consultation period.
- Stage 3: The final report will make findings and recommendations for change based on the consultations and submissions. The final report will be tabled in Parliament by 2 February 2026, as required by section 17 of the Act. Any proposed legislative changes arising from the recommendations will then be submitted to Government.

1.4 How to make a submission

This Discussion Paper was released at 9.00AM AEST on 8 August 2025.

The submission period for this consultation will close at 11.59PM AEST on 5 September 2025.

To make a submission before the closing date, email a PDF of your submission to drfsr@customerservice.nsw.gov.au.

1.5 Publishing submissions

DCS is committed to an open and transparent process. All consultation responses and submissions may be made available on the Digital NSW website.

If you wish for your written submission to remain confidential, please clearly state this in your submission. Only your organisation's name will be published.

Submissions made by individuals will have personal details removed.

Please be aware that even if you state that you do not wish certain information to be published, there may be legal circumstances that require the Department to release that information (for example, under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*).

2. Objectives of the Act

The Act was enacted to support the delivery of digital government services and operations across New South Wales. The objectives of the Act, as set out in section 4, are to:

- improve the delivery of services by government agencies, including improving interactions between members of the public and government agencies involving digital and information and communications technology; and
- facilitate whole of government digital transformation, including upgrading and standardising systems and processes used by government agencies; and
- improve operational and cost efficiencies across the government sector.

The original purpose of these objectives was that they collectively reflected a strategic approach to digital delivery focused not only on individual projects but on building the structures and capabilities needed for long-term reform. The emphasis on collaboration, innovation, and infrastructure ensures that the Act can support enduring improvements in public service delivery and value for money for the people of New South Wales.

This statutory review provides the opportunity to consider whether updated or additional objectives would better reflect contemporary government priorities, technological advancements and public expectations.

2.1 Improving delivery of services

Since the establishment of the DRF, significant investment has been made in initiatives that aim to simplify, streamline, and enhance the experience of individuals and businesses when interacting with government.

Key areas of activity under this objective have included:

- developing user-friendly digital platforms that enable 24/7 access to government services;
- consolidating and digitising high-volume transactions across government (e.g., licensing, registrations, applications);
- embedding user feedback and co-design practices into service delivery models; and
- reducing administrative burden through automation and data integration.

CASE STUDY – School Check-in

The School Check-In program is a digital visitor management system implemented across NSW public schools to streamline the sign-in process for visitors, contractors, and staff. Utilising the Service NSW app or a web form, individuals can check in quickly by scanning a QR code displayed at school entrances. This system enhances security, ensures compliance with regulations, and supports contact tracing efforts. Visitor information is securely logged and accessible to school staff through a digital logbook, facilitating efficient record-keeping and reporting.

2.2 Facilitating whole of government digital transformation

The aim of this objective is to lift digital maturity across agencies, reduce agency fragmentation and create a more integrated, efficient and scalable digital ecosystem for government service delivery.

Investments under this objective have supported initiatives that:

- modernise outdated legacy systems to reduce risk and improve performance;
- establish shared platforms and reusable technology components and encourage adherence to common standards, design principles, and digital policies (e.g. identity verification, licensing);
- improve interoperability and data sharing across agencies; and
- lift cybersecurity capability across government.

CASE STUDY - OneCX

The OneCX Program has significantly enhanced the digital experience for NSW residents by consolidating 122 government websites into a single, user-friendly portal at nsw.gov.au. This centralisation simplifies access to information and services, making it easier for users to find what they need without navigating multiple sites. The migration removed over 1,700 outdated and redundant pages, ensuring that content is current and trustworthy. Additionally, the program has improved website accessibility by 20%, accommodating a wider range of users, including those with disabilities. These efforts have led to increased public engagement, with over 2.6 million visits to nsw.gov.au each month in 2022–23. By focusing on customer needs and streamlining digital interactions, the OneCX Program has made government services more accessible and efficient for all NSW residents.

2.3 Improving operational and cost efficiencies

This objective acknowledges the role of digital in delivering better value for public money by streamlining operations, reducing duplication, and lowering the cost of service delivery.

Through strategic investment in digital solutions, the DRF has supported initiatives aimed at:

- automating routine administrative tasks to free up staff capacity;
- consolidating and modernising ICT systems to reduce maintenance and support costs;
- reducing duplication of effort by funding shared platforms and reusable components;
- leveraging data and analytics to improve resource allocation and decision-making; and
- enabling scalable service delivery models that can adapt to changing demand.

The focus on operational and financial efficiency is particularly important in the context of fiscal constraint, increased service expectations, and the need to ensure long-term sustainability of government operations.

CASE STUDY – Customer Payments Platform (CPP)

The CPP program is a digital solution that provides the customer with a consistent payment experience across NSW Government. It consolidates payment processes across 30 agencies and provides a consistent experience across multiple payment options. This centralised system reduces the need for agencies to connect to multiple payment providers, leading to cost savings and improved efficiency. Additionally, the CPP ensures compliance with security standards, safeguarding customer data and enhancing trust in government services.

QUESTIONS

To what extent have the Act's objectives been achieved?

Do the existing objectives remain valid and relevant and should any new objectives be added?

Should any existing objectives be updated or removed, and if so, how and why?

2.4 Consideration of other objectives

In addition to considering the relevance and validity of the current objectives under the Act, the statutory review provides the opportunity to consider whether any new objectives should be added to the Act to reflect current government priorities and the changing technological landscape. Any new objectives should focus on strategic and future-facing goals that guide the *why* and *what outcomes* the Act seeks to achieve at an all-of-government level.

QUESTIONS

Are there any additional objectives that should be considered for inclusion in the Act, and if so, what and why?

3. Terms of the Act

When the Digital Restart Fund Bill was introduced into Parliament in October 2019, its aim was to provide a flexible and enabling framework suited to fast-moving digital contexts and modern digital service delivery techniques. The terms of the Act are therefore reserved and limited, and do not mandate the full extent of the administrative processes associated with funding allocations. This is explained further below.

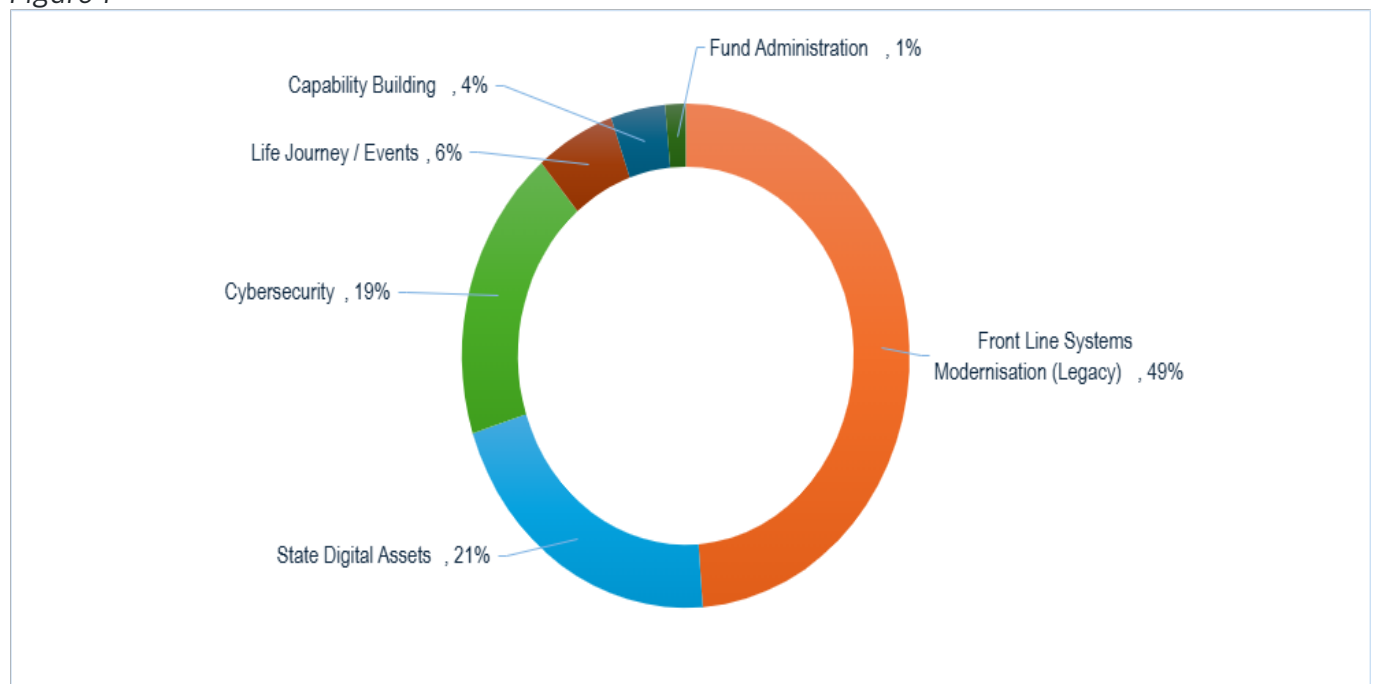
3.1 Purpose of the DRF

Section 6 of the Act defines the DRF's purpose as supporting digital and ICT initiatives across the government sector. It provides a broad and flexible framework that has enabled diverse investments. It outlines four categories of eligible projects:

- whole-of-government citizen journeys and life events;
- developing reusable digital solutions for multiple agencies (i.e. State Digital Assets);
- modernisation of front-line aging systems to reduce the risk of failure and overhead costs to maintain them (i.e. legacy modernisation); and
- initiatives that grow the digital capabilities of the New South Wales Government (i.e. cyber security and emerging technology).

Figure 1 below shows the percentage of DRF funds allocated to projects in each category, with cybersecurity included as a further subcategory. It shows that 19% of projects funded through the DRF were categorised as cybersecurity projects that had the purpose of uplifting capability across the NSW Government sector. This equates to \$390 million.

Figure 1



CASE STUDY – Citizen journeys and life events – Online School Enrolment

Online School Enrolment is a key DRF-funded initiative for the Department of Education which aimed to simplify the enrolment process for parents and reduce administrative burdens for schools by transitioning from 16-page paper-based enrolments to digital enrolments. The new online system allows parents to complete enrolments more quickly and conveniently, contributing to a more streamlined experience for families and school staff.

CASE STUDY – State Digital Assets – Hazards Near Me

The HazardWatch ecosystem funded by the DRF provides real-time, authoritative hazard warnings across NSW, leveraging data from emergency agencies for flood, bushfire, tsunami and severe weather alerts. The platform offers a scalable, responsive map and list view of fires, flood and tsunami warnings, serving as a central and trusted source. The *Hazards Near Me NSW* app allows users to set personalised watch zones and receive push notifications about hazards in their vicinity. This ecosystem enables faster, more coordinated emergency communication, reducing notification times from 30 minutes to 3 minutes and considerably improving public safety during crisis events.

The DRF was not intended to provide funding for projects in the following categories:

- physical infrastructure;
- local government initiatives;
- business as usual technology run costs;
- projects fully funded by other funding sources (e.g. Commonwealth); and
- operating technology (e.g. card scanners).

This statutory review welcomes comments about the intended and potential scope of the DRF and its uses to date.

QUESTIONS

To what extent has the DRF supported the legislated purposes?

Should any purposes be removed, amended or expanded?

3.2 Payments into the DRF

Section 8 of the Act outlines the sources of funding for the DRF, including parliamentary appropriations, Treasurer advances, investment proceeds, and voluntary contributions. The DRF has been allocated a total of \$2.1 billion to fund digital and ICT initiatives across government.

The current construct of the DRF relies on budget appropriations rather than an ongoing funding source. Many of the projects funded by the DRF have been for cross-government digital projects that do not fit within a single agency's remit, or for smaller agencies to advance digital projects.

The mechanisms embedded in the DRF also provide opportunity for seed funding to enable new ideas to be tested and validated without the risk of large-scale failures, which is a particular issue in the context of rapidly changing technology.

Funding is also appropriated directly to the delivery agency through the traditional government budget processes and cycles to achieve the objectives under the Act. Under Section 8(e) of the Act, money is payable into the fund via 'voluntary contributions' made by a government agency or other person. During the administration of the DRF, there have been instances where project teams did not utilise all the funds received from the DRF. To date, 21% of DRF projects have reported an underspend. In these cases, project teams are requested to return any unspent funds. This is currently captured in and actioned through administrative processes, where agencies are sent notices requesting funds to be returned into the DRF. Where unspent funds are returned into the DRF, those funds can then be allocated for delivery of other digital projects. However, there is currently no legislative requirement for an agency to return any unspent funds.

QUESTIONS

Is there a continued need for a centralised, legislated fund? Are there more effective mechanisms for funding to achieve the objectives of the Act?

Should the Act be amended to require any unspent funds to be returned to the DRF? Why/Why not?

3.3 Payments out of the DRF

Section 9 of the Act specifies the permissible uses of the DRF, including funding approved projects and administrative expenses.

Projects may be funded through one of three streams: scale, seed or tranche funding.

- Scale funding supports the delivery of larger programs over \$5 million.
- Seed funding supports programs under \$5 million.
- Tranche funding is a mechanism within the scale stream, where funds are released in stages to manage risk and ensure progressive delivery of outcomes throughout the project lifecycle.

Since inception to 30 June 2025, 255 projects have received seed funding and 40 projects have received scale funding, with 14 of these given tranche funding to support staged delivery.

To access funding, projects are required to develop a business case that undergoes an assurance and approval process through administrative governance processes and forums. Scale projects require initial approval from the Government before proceeding to the Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, who determines final approval on the advice of the Secretary. Digital NSW provides advice to the Secretary and Minister in relation to the projects submitted for approval, including advice from the Digital Transformation Board and other relevant committees.

A summary of the role of the DTB and other relevant committees is provided below.

- **ICT Digital Leadership Group:** comprised of Chief Information Officers providing senior expertise for decision making on ICT and digital projects across government, including in relation to State Digital Assets.
- **Digital Transformation Board (DTB):** comprised of senior government officials responsible for overseeing the prioritisation of the NSW Government digital and ICT portfolio, digital investment strategies and policies (including the Digital Assurance Framework), and investment management (including the DRF). In relation to the DRF, its key responsibilities include recommending or approving funding decisions for seed, scale, and tranche releases, monitoring overall project performance, and recommending corrective actions for high-risk or high-profile projects.
- **DRF Working Group:** responsible for reviewing funding requests and project changes to ensure alignment with government priorities, DRF objectives, and governance requirements. It provides advice and makes recommendations to the DTB on matters including business cases, project change requests and any risks.
- **AI Review Committee:** a panel of experts that oversees the safe, ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence in government projects, including those under the DRF. It reviews the AI Assurance Framework assessments to ensure alignment with the NSW AI Ethics Policy and advises on transparency, accountability, privacy, and risk mitigation.
- **Digital Assurance Risk Advisory Group:** comprises senior management from agencies across the government sector. It provides advice to the Government Chief Information and Digital Officer and ICT Digital Leadership Group on the operation of the Digital Assurance Framework and monitors projects through an all of government perspective.
- **Technical Design Advisory Group:** a cross-government group in NSW made up of representatives that provides expert advice on digital investments, focusing on the reuse and value of State Digital Assets (SDAs). It also makes recommendations to DTB and other senior governance bodies on investment priorities, compliance, and strategic digital decisions.

The flexible nature of the Act has enabled the NSW Government to implement an assurance process that allows for the application of appropriate risk assessments and governance oversight for projects funded through the DRF. All DRF projects undergo assurance reviews aligned with the NSW Treasury's Gateway Policy and the Digital Assurance Framework to confirm eligibility and delivery readiness. These reviews emphasise early risk identification and mitigation, measurable outcomes and staged delivery approaches to support adaptability and responsiveness. Assurance processes are embedded throughout the project lifecycle to enable oversight and continuous improvement.

The Evaluation of the Digital Restart Fund conducted by Urbis in March 2022 concluded that assurance processes were robust for the size of the DRF.

QUESTIONS

Should the Act include different or more explicit criteria and/or processes for DRF funding approval to ensure alignment with the DRF's objectives?

Should the administrative processes relating to project and funding approval (i.e. assurance, governance) be further strengthened, and if so, how?

3.4 Information and Privacy Commission advice

Before approving payments, section 10 requires that the Minister consider advice from the Information Commissioner and the Privacy Commissioner on the effect of any project on access to government information under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2010* and the protection of personal and health information under the relevant legislation. This mandatory requirement ensures that privacy and information access considerations are afforded independent scrutiny in areas that carry legal, ethical and reputational risks and that these considerations are integrated into funding decisions.

Advice provided by the Information Commissioner and the Privacy Commissioner is provided to all project teams who are responsible for addressing any issues raised. For scale projects, IPC advice will be in scope as part of the project's subsequent assurance review.

QUESTIONS

Does the requirement to obtain advice from the Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner remain appropriate, and if so, should it be further strengthened?

3.5 Other advice

Section 12 of the Act allows the Minister to seek advice from any relevant person or body when exercising functions under the Act. This provision offers broad discretion and flexibility to the Minister in seeking input to inform funding and governance decisions related to the DRF.

The purpose of this provision was to recognise the importance of expert, specialist and strategic input in decisions involving digital transformation, technology risk, and complex systems reform. It gives the Minister the ability to seek tailored advice on matters such as:

- technical feasibility and scalability of digital proposals;
- cyber security, data governance, or procurement risks;
- emerging technologies and innovation opportunities;
- customer experience and accessibility; and
- artificial intelligence use, risks and mitigation strategies.

By allowing for advice to be obtained at the Minister's discretion, this section supports informed decision-making and adaptive management of the DRF in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. The Evaluation of the Digital Restart Fund conducted by Urbis in March 2022 concluded that the DRF is well-managed with strong governance processes.

In practice, the Minister receives advice from the various governance committees which have been organised to support robust management of ICT and digital projects and programs, including projects funded through the DRF. The forums and their remit are outlined under section 3.3 above. The roles of these various boards and committees are not specifically included in the Act, but have instead been developed as administrative processes to support governance of DRF funding decisions.

This statutory review provides an opportunity to consider the governance arrangements and whether they can be strengthened through the Act.

QUESTIONS

Should the Act cover the role of the Digital Transformation Board, or cover particular advisory bodies or committees? Is there a need to consider establishing new or different governance for the DRF?

3.6 Reporting

Section 14 requires the Minister to prepare annual reports on the DRF's operations, which promotes transparency and accountability. These reports provide statements of the DRF's activities and position and list projects that received funding during the financial year. These reports are published on the [Digital NSW website](#). In addition, the DRF is audited annually by the Auditor General.

QUESTIONS

Are the current reporting requirements sufficient to inform stakeholders about the DRF's use and performance? Should the Act mandate specific metrics or content for the annual reports?

Appendix A Discussion Questions

1. To what extent have the Act's objectives been achieved?
2. Do the existing objectives remain valid and relevant and should any new objectives be added? Should any existing objectives be updated or removed, and if so, how and why?
3. Are there any additional objectives that should be considered for inclusion in the Act, and if so, what and why?
4. To what extent has the DRF supported the legislated purposes?
5. Should any purposes be removed, amended or expanded?
6. Is there a continued need for a centralised, legislated fund? Are there more effective mechanisms for funding to achieve the objectives of the Act?
7. Should the Act be amended to require any unspent funds to be returned to the DRF? Why/Why not?
8. Should the Act include different or more explicit criteria and/or processes for DRF funding approval to ensure alignment with the DRF's objectives?
9. Should the administrative processes relating to project and funding approval (i.e. assurance, governance) be further strengthened, and if so, how?
10. Does the requirement to obtain advice from the Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner remain appropriate, and if so, should it be further strengthened?
11. Should the Act cover the role of the Digital Transformation Board, or cover particular advisory bodies or committees? Is there a need to consider establishing new or different governance for the DRF?
12. Are the current reporting requirements sufficient to inform stakeholders about the DRF's use and performance? Should the Act mandate specific metrics or content for the annual reports?

Resources

- [The Digital Restart Fund Act 2020 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Digital NSW website](#)
- [Evaluation of the Digital Restart Fund – Final Report \(Urbis 2022\)](#)
- [2020-2021 DRF Annual Report](#)
- [2021-2022 DRF Annual Report](#)
- [2022-2023 DRF Annual Report](#)
- [2023-2024 DRF Annual Report](#)

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