

# Guideline

## Automated Briefing and Correspondence

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# Introduction

## In-scope

For the purposes of this standard, the scope of 'briefs' includes all forms of briefs with the exception of cabinet submissions, parliamentary questions and Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) briefs.

For the purposes of this standard, the scope of 'correspondence' includes all correspondence to a minister or secretary that requires a response from a Minister, Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Executive Director or Director, no matter the channel it comes via.

## Overview

This document provides high level guidance to Victorian Government (government) departments for implementing the Automated Briefs and Correspondence (ABC) standards including:

- ABC Governance Standard
- ABC Common Process Standard
- ABC Common Templates Standard
- ABC Monitoring and Reporting Standard

This document is a guide only. The requirements listed in the shaded boxes within each section are a copy of the requirements detailed in the associated standards.

## Rationale

Government departments are becoming more aware of the problems and restrictions they operate under with the current, disparate briefing and correspondence processes and practices.

Creating a consistent, efficient and digital end-to-end capability for managing briefs and correspondence across the Whole of Victorian Government (WOVG) will help the government improve productivity, legislative compliance and accountability. Further, costs will reduce as digital systems eliminate paper, which will further improve productivity as manual processes (including 'walking the brief around') are reduced or eliminated.

# Audience, glossary and related documents

## Audience

This guideline has been developed for government departments and Victoria Police, which are in scope for implementation of the ABC standards, however the content may be of relevance to other agencies.

This guideline is specifically targeted at officers involved in the governance, management, or operation of briefs and correspondence.

## Glossary

The glossary of terms and abbreviations used in this document are defined in the Automated Briefs and Correspondence Glossary.

## Related documents, tools and references

- Automated Briefs and Correspondence Common Process Standard
- Automated Briefs and Correspondence Common Templates Standard
- Automated Briefs and Correspondence Governance Model
- Automated Briefs and Correspondence Governance Standard
- Automated Briefs and Correspondence Monitoring and Reporting Standard
- Automated Briefs and Correspondence Policy
- [Automated Briefs and Correspondence Statement of Direction](#)
- [Crimes Act 1958; Crimes \(Document Destruction\) Act 2006;](#)
- [Electronic Transactions \(Victoria\) Act 2011](#)
- [Evidence Act 2008](#)
- [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#)
- [Information Technology Strategy for the Victorian Government, 2016–2020](#)
- [Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014](#)
- [Public Record Office of Victoria \(PROV\) Standards Framework and Policies](#)
- [Public Records Act 1973](#)
- [Victorian Protective Data Security Framework](#)

# Guidelines

## ABC Governance Standard

1. Establish and maintain the following key governance functions and roles
  - (a) An executive level officer who is accountable for the management of briefs and correspondence across the department.
  - (b) A departmental ABC group or similar that will endorse and present recommendations to the departmental executive officer (the above-mentioned role).
  - (c) A departmental management and co-ordination function for departmental briefs and correspondence that will report to the departmental executive officer (the above-mentioned role).
2. Nominate a senior officer to represent the department at the WOVG ABC Group.

The ABC Governance Model (governance model) describes governance at the WOVG level as well as within departments. The governance model acknowledges and makes use of existing structures and their current accountabilities, whilst also introducing new governance bodies specific for the ABC purpose and identifying supporting operational roles.

The purpose of the ABC Governance Standard (governance standard) is to drive the establishment of a common departmental governance structure and management function for the governance and management of briefs and correspondence.

### Accountable executive level officer

The rationale for having an executive level officer accountable for briefs and correspondence is to drive consistency in management and operation of briefing and correspondence across the department; only one person is accountable. At a minimum, this appointment should be an executive officer. This role would:

- monitor the operation of departmental briefs and correspondence and report the outcome to the department executive board/committee
- respond to and implement directives of the WOVG ABC as articulated in the governance model under the directive of the Integrity and Corporate Reform Subcommittee (ICRS) of the Victorian Secretaries Board (VSB)
- be accountable for conformance to WOVG ABC policy, standards and templates; ensure compliance with all relevant legislation (national, state and department specific), regulatory and administrative requirements; and ensure the department's audit and compliance program measures ABC compliance
- nominate a senior representative to the WOVG ABC Group (or self-nominate if they choose to).

## Department ABC group

The department ABC group is intended to be a group of people, probably subject matter experts (SMEs) in the operation of briefs and correspondence within the department. This could be a new or existing group, however, it's likely that this would be a new group due to the unique knowledge base required.

This group will essentially make recommendations to the departmental executive level officer (accountable for briefs and correspondence), for all significant matters concerning the strategy, management and operation of departmental briefs and correspondence. This includes working with the departmental coordinator (requirement 1. (c)) to manage risks and issues, dependencies and change control etc. This group would also liaise with the WOVG ABC Group regarding proposals to change WOVG ABC policy, standards, templates and guidelines and the governance model itself.

It's likely that the chair of this group would be nominated by the executive to represent the department on the WOVG ABC Group.

Specifically, the departmental ABC group (or similar) will:

- endorse and present recommendations to the departmental executive officer regarding changes to:
  - departmental briefs and correspondence
  - department proposed changes to WOVG ABC governance model, common process, policies, standards, guidelines and standard templates
  - department work practices with regards to briefs and correspondence
- advise and respond to briefs and correspondence proposals from the WOVG ABC Group.

## ABC function

The main purpose of the department's ABC function is the oversight and administration of briefs and correspondence within the department. This includes the coordination and management of the briefs and correspondence governance and process as well as forming the coordinating link between the WOVG ABC bodies and the departmental ABC bodies.

This function would also provide administrative support to the meetings of the departmental ABC group.

This function will:

- report to the departmental executive authority for briefs and correspondence
- report on departmental performance including conformance or otherwise to WOVG policy, standards, templates and compliance with relevant legislation
- supply administrative support to the departmental ABC group
- identify and manage (including escalate) risks and issues.

## Senior officer ABC representative

The executive authority of each department will nominate a senior officer to represent the department at the WOVG ABC Group.

As a guide to help in the selection of this senior officer, the WOVG ABC Group is responsible for the development, implementation and operation of the governance model and the ABC SOD. It owns the ABC Guideline (this document) and endorses and presents recommendations to the VSB and the ICRS, regarding changes to the ABC governance model, common process, policy, standards and templates.

The departmental delegate to this group would be a voting member of the WOVG ABC Group and would most likely be the chair of the department's ABC group.

## ABC Common Process Standard

1. Use the ABC common process (common process) for all briefs and correspondence.
2. Implement the roles defined in the ABC common process and nominate for each brief or correspondence item, at a minimum, an or a:
  - **Accountable Officer (AO)**
    - The **AO** is ultimately accountable for the brief or correspondence including ensuring it reaches the Recommender in a form and timeframe suitable for recommendation. This includes compliance with all relevant legislation and regulation.
    - Departments will maintain a register of appropriately trained and authorised AOs.
  - **Recommender**
    - The Recommender is the person who formally provides the advice or 'recommends' the action (i.e. Approve, Not Approve, Note or Please Discuss a course of action) to the Decision Maker.
  - **Decision Maker**
    - The Decision Maker is the person who ultimately makes the decision regarding a recommendation. The decision can only be one of:

<b>'Approve'</b>	the recommendation, in whole and unchanged, is approved
<b>'Not Approve'</b>	the recommendation in its entirety has been not been accepted
<b>'Note'</b>	no action is to be taken. This is effectively a 'for your information' to the Decision Maker
<b>'Please Discuss'</b>	the recommendation requires further discussion with the Decision Maker before a decision can be made.

3. Require the **AO** to determine the path through the department and the required timeframe for each brief or item of correspondence. This includes nominating:
  - all touchpoints (people or roles) in the common process
  - the timeframe for the brief or correspondence to reach the **Recommender** and the **Decision Maker**
4. For Ministerial briefs and correspondence, maintain the separation of duties between the government and the Victorian Public Service (VPS), by ensuring that:
  - the **Recommender** and the **Decision Maker** (i.e. Approver or Noter), are not the same person.
  - two discrete records are created (and thus ensure compliance with the [Evidence Act 2008](#)). This effectively means that two discrete records are created as part of the process; a record of Recommendation and a record of Decision.
  - the **Recommender** (and only the **Recommender**) can Withdraw or Supersede a Recommendation.

The purpose of the ABC Common Process Standard (common process standard) is to define the minimum requirements of the common process, language and roles and responsibilities for briefs and correspondence. The use of a common process, language and roles and responsibilities is an important step towards creating commonality of practice, knowledge portability (for when staff move from one department to the next), improving productivity and increase effectiveness in the end-to-end process for briefs and correspondence.

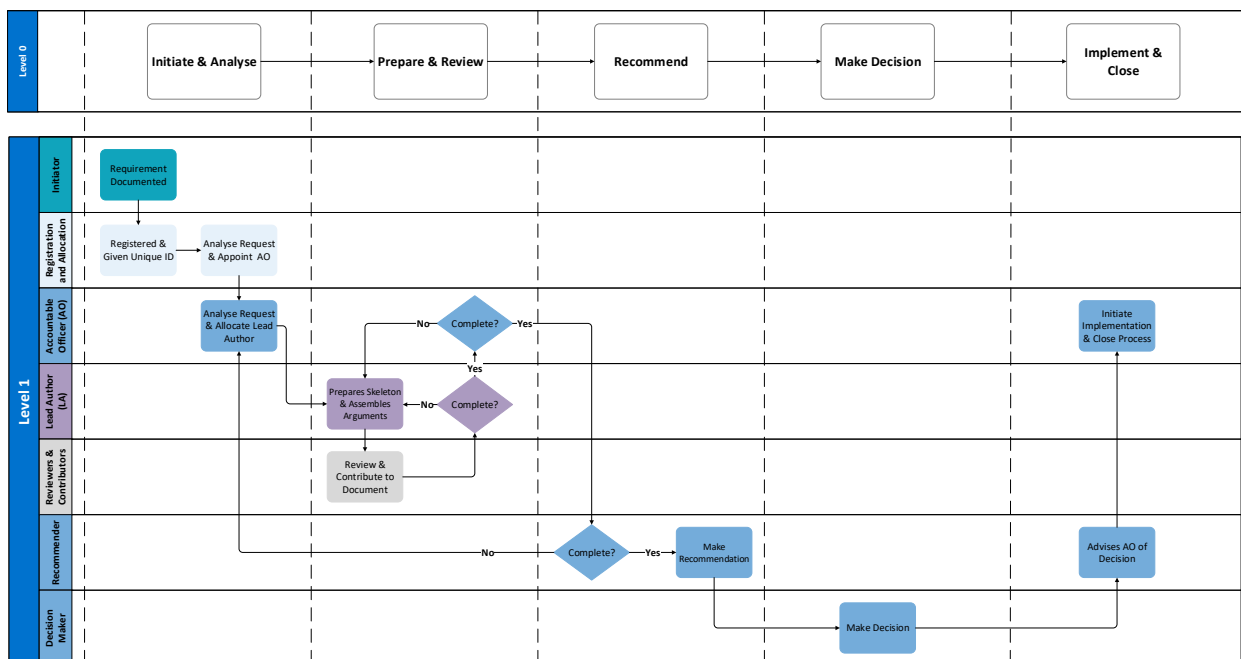


Figure 1 - Common Process Diagram



The common process diagram (see Appendix B – Common Process Diagram) describes the process flow for a brief or item of correspondence. Roles for the process flow are listed down the left side of the diagram, with the specific actions or decisions described in boxes or diamonds respectively. The scope of the common process encompasses both briefs and correspondence including:

**Table 1 - Document Types**

Document	Document Types	Description
Brief	Standard (Department or Ministerial) Event	A preparation of advice for decision - usually by at least the next level up in the department, or from the department to the Minister. That Decision Maker can be the Minister, Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Executive Officer or Director etc.
Correspondence	Hardcopy inbound Hardcopy outbound Electronic inbound Electronic outbound	A hard copy or electronic correspondence from entities external to the receiving department that requires a response. It could be addressed to the Minister, Premier or department from someone outside the department. It requires a hardcopy or electronic response.

## Roles

Progression of briefs and correspondence through the four high level stages of the common process, described below, is carried out by specifically identified roles. These roles (highlighted down the left side of the common process diagram) form ‘swim lanes’ to portray the activity that each of the roles performs through to a decision being made and the subsequent initiation of the decision response.

One of the reasons for adopting a common role language for the common process is to eliminate the need for people to learn different approve, endorse, support, acknowledge etc. hierarchies for the progression of briefs and correspondence if they move to different departments. For example, in the case of a machinery of government change or simply if staff are transferring to a different department.



Most of these roles already exist in a variety of names across the departments, however, one new role has been created, the **Accountable Officer (AO)**. As the name suggests, the **AO** has accountability for ensuring the brief is complete and correct and is delivered to the **Recommender** in the required timeframe.

**Table 2 - Roles and Responsibilities**

Role	Definition
<b>Initiator</b>	The person requesting or initiates the brief or correspondence. Note: that in the case of correspondence, once the correspondence is received by the Minister or the department, the <b>Initiator</b> is the person who subsequently initiates a responsive action.
<b>Registration and Allocation</b>	The person who ‘registers’ the document in the departmental system, and then allocates accountability for completion of the document to the

Role	Definition
	<b>Accountable Officer</b> (i.e. selects the <b>AO</b> ). This may be delegated by the <b>Initiator</b> .
<b>Accountable Officer (AO)</b>	The person who is responsible for ensuring that the document gets to the <b>Recommender</b> in the required state. This accountability includes ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation and regulations.
<b>Lead Author</b>	The person who is responsible for ensuring that the document gets completed on behalf of the <b>AO</b> and returned to the <b>AO</b> on completion. This role coordinates all the input from <b>Contributors</b> as well as ensuring all nominated <b>Reviewers</b> have performed their function.
<b>Reviewers and Contributors</b>	Anyone who contributes content, or reviews for any reason (that is, previously to Approve, Endorse, Support or Acknowledge etc.) is now simply a <b>Reviewer</b> or a <b>Contributor</b> . This includes all those consulted or with content to contribute including other team members, executives, subject matter experts, proof readers, etc. (even in the offices of Deputy Secretaries and Secretaries).
<b>Recommender</b>	The person who formally provides the advice or 'Recommends' the action (i.e. Approve, Not Approve, Note or Please Discuss a course of action) to the <b>Decision Maker</b> . Note: this role only gets the document from the <b>AO</b> once the <b>AO</b> is comfortable that the document is, in the <b>AO's</b> view, complete and suitable for Recommendation.
<b>Decision Maker</b>	The destination or target of the Recommendation. This is the person who will ultimately make the Decision on the brief or correspondence. The decision can only be one of Approve, Not Approve, Note or Please Discuss.

In a vast majority of instances (mandatory in the case of a Ministerial Brief) the **Recommender** and the **Decision Maker** will be separate people. They could, however, be the same person, for example, where a departmental secretary has approved a standard reply to correspondence on a particular matter (e.g. a 'campaign response'). In this instance, a single person might evaluate incoming correspondence and determine that a 'campaign response' is suitable. Like all responses, this will need to be registered, and thus, the single person registers the correspondence, allocated it to themselves (as the **AO**), is also the **Lead Author** (even though they've selected a 'campaign response'); they've reviewed, recommended and decided (to send that 'campaign response').



Note that these (**AO, Recommender, Decision Maker**) are roles, and the same person could fulfil all roles. The only exception to this is for recommendations from the VPS to the elected government (e.g. Ministerial Briefs). See Separation of duties (power) below.

## Accountable Officer

The **AO** is perhaps the most important role in the common process. The **AO** is responsible for ensuring that the brief or correspondence gets to the **Recommender** in the required state, with the required state being the level of quality and completion required by the **Decision Maker**.

This role nominates:

- the **Lead Author** (if they are not performing that role themselves)

- all touchpoints (people or roles) in the common process. Note: it would be good practice, once the **AO** has nominated all the touchpoints, for the **AO** to let these people know that a brief or correspondence item is on its way
- the timeframe suitable for the recommendation to reach the **Recommender** and the **Decision Maker**.

The **AO** role also ensures compliance to the department's briefing and correspondence policies and processes, the department's style guide and all relevant legislation and regulations. This includes the:

- [Public Records Act 1973](#)
- [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#)
- [Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014](#)
- [Evidence Act 2008](#)
- [Crimes Act 1958](#)
- [Crimes \(Document Destruction\) Act 2006](#)
- [Electronic Transactions \(Victoria\) Act 2011](#)
- as well as any legislation or regulations relevant to the department and its portfolios.

Key considerations:

- The **AO** can delegate the responsibility for constructing and editing the document (**Lead Author**) but cannot delegate the accountability for ensuring the completeness and accuracy of the document.
- The **AO** and **Lead Author** may be the same person.

After the Decision is made by the **Decision Maker**, the **Recommender** will advise the **AO** who then initiates any actions required to implement the decision and close the process.



Given the importance to the common process of the **AO** role, training in the process accountabilities and responsibilities should be provided. Further, a record on trained **AOs** should be maintained in order to ensure that only people who are trained can be nominated as **AOs**.

## The Recommenders

In some instances, there may be multiple **Recommenders** for a brief. This may be, for example, in the case where an approval is required for a brief where funding is from two separate funding sources within a department. In this case, the **AO** is responsible for ensuring that the brief has met all the requisite conditions for progression to the **Decision Maker**.



Multiple Recommenders should be by exception only. Every effort should be made to limit the number of touchpoints of a brief in general.

## Multiple Decision Makers

In some instances, there may be multiple **Decision Makers** for a brief. This may be for a decision that impacts multiple departments or portfolios i.e. multiple secretaries or ministers. In this case, the **AO** is responsible for ensuring that the brief has met all the requisite conditions for progression to each **Decision Maker**.

## Stages

The five stages of the common process outline the high level, end-to-end process flow for briefs and correspondence.

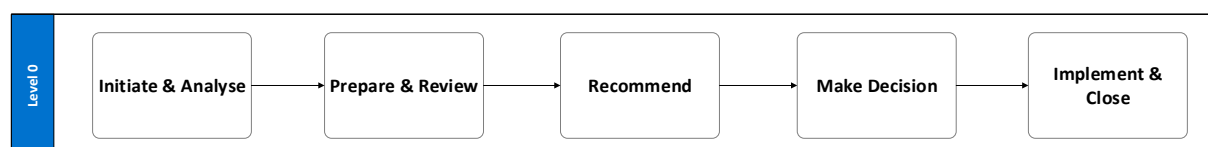


Figure 2 - Common Process Stages



The common process is intentionally high level. Each department will have more detailed granularity below the common process to suit their environment and their system. Over time as the government moves to a common platform it is expected that the common process will become more detailed.

The stages include:

Stage	Description
Initiate and Analyse	<p>This stage describes activity from the point of Initiation, to the point where the <b>Accountable Officer</b> is appointed.</p> <p>The <b>Initiator</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies the need for the development of a brief or correspondence</li> <li>Ensures the brief or correspondence is registered and is uniquely identifiable</li> <li>Analyses the request and appoints accountability for its development to an <b>AO</b>.</li> </ol> <p>The response to this stage is effectively commenced by the registration function. The person who does this also appoints accountability for the response to the <b>AO</b>.</p>
Prepare and Review	<p>This stage covers all activity from the moment the <b>AO</b> receives the brief or correspondence and nominates a <b>Lead Author</b> to when the completed brief or correspondence returns to the <b>AO</b>.</p> <p>The <b>AO</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyses the request and allocates the request to the most appropriate team member to write (the <b>Lead Author</b>). In most cases, the <b>AO</b> will nominate someone else to prepare the brief or correspondence.</li> </ol> <p>The <b>Lead Author</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepares the skeleton of the document, researches and analyses concepts and assembles arguments</li> </ol>

Stage	Description							
	<p>f) Coordinates all the input and review activities associated with ensuring the document is in a completed state. This may include input from other team members or branches, members of the executive team, legal or procurement etc.</p> <p>g) Confirms the document is complete and returns it to the <b>AO</b> for review.</p> <p>The <b>AO</b>:</p> <p>h) Reviews the document to ensure it is complete, compliant with any relevant legislation and regulation, delivers on intent and is of the quality required for Recommendation up for Decision. If the <b>AO</b> isn't happy with the document, they may send it back to the <b>Lead Author</b> for rework.</p> <p>i) Sends the completed document to the <b>Recommender</b>.</p>							
Recommend	<p>This stage focuses on the <b>Recommender</b>. That is, the person who will be recommending a course of action to the <b>Decision Maker</b>.</p> <p>The <b>Recommender</b>:</p> <p>j) Reviews the document and if satisfied that everything is complete, will send it to the <b>Decision Maker</b> with a recommended course of action.</p> <p>If the <b>Recommender</b> isn't satisfied with the quality or completeness of the document, they have the opportunity to return the document to the <b>AO</b> for further input or review before eventually sending the document to the <b>Decision Maker</b> for a decision.</p> <p>The <b>Recommender</b> can make only two recommendations: '<b>Approve</b>' something or '<b>Note</b>' something. In addition to '<b>Approve</b>' or '<b>Note</b>', the recommendation may contain additional actions for the <b>Decision Maker</b> to perform based on the decision made.</p> <p>For example:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="459 1335 1358 1379"> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 1335 979 1379">1 <b>Approve</b> ... by signing the attached correspondence (Attachment A) to Mr. M. Brown</td> <td data-bbox="979 1335 1091 1379"><input type="checkbox"/> Approved</td> <td data-bbox="1091 1335 1219 1379"><input type="checkbox"/> Not approved</td> <td data-bbox="1219 1335 1358 1379"><input type="checkbox"/> Please discuss</td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" data-bbox="459 1435 1358 1480"> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 1435 1054 1480">1 <b>Note</b> ... that DPC proposes to publish the Q2 report (Attachment A) on 29 August 2019.</td> <td data-bbox="1054 1435 1166 1480"><input type="checkbox"/> Noted</td> <td data-bbox="1166 1435 1358 1480"><input type="checkbox"/> Please discuss</td> </tr> </table> <p>It is important to note that 'Sign' as a recommendation is no longer used as signing is applied through approving the brief or correspondence, and 'Approved with Modifications' is no longer used as the <b>Decision Maker</b> cannot 'modify' the brief or correspondence but rather '<b>Not Approve</b>' and send it back to start a fresh.</p>	1 <b>Approve</b> ... by signing the attached correspondence (Attachment A) to Mr. M. Brown	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Not approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Please discuss	1 <b>Note</b> ... that DPC proposes to publish the Q2 report (Attachment A) on 29 August 2019.	<input type="checkbox"/> Noted	<input type="checkbox"/> Please discuss
1 <b>Approve</b> ... by signing the attached correspondence (Attachment A) to Mr. M. Brown	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Not approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Please discuss					
1 <b>Note</b> ... that DPC proposes to publish the Q2 report (Attachment A) on 29 August 2019.	<input type="checkbox"/> Noted	<input type="checkbox"/> Please discuss						
Make Decision	<p>The <b>Decision Maker</b>, as the name suggests, decides whether the brief or correspondence is approved or otherwise.</p> <p>The <b>Decision Maker</b>:</p> <p>k) Makes a decision and passes it back to the <b>Recommender</b>.</p> <p>There are only four decision alternatives for the <b>Decision Maker</b>:</p> <p><b>'Approve'</b> the recommendation, in whole and unchanged, is approved</p> <p><b>'Not Approve'</b> the recommendation in its entirety has been not been</p>							

Stage	Description
	accepted.
	<p><b>'Note'</b> no action is to be taken. This is effectively a 'for your information' to the <b>Decision Maker</b>.</p> <p><b>'Please Discuss'</b> the recommendation requires further discussion with the <b>Decision Maker</b> before a decision can be made.</p> <p>A decision by the <b>Decision Maker</b> to do nothing, that is, to defer making a decision (in some cases indefinitely), is not a decision – it is effectively the absence of a decision.</p>
Implement and Close	<p>After making the decision, the <b>Decision Maker</b> passes the document back to the <b>Recommender</b>, who initiates the actions required to implement the decision (if any). Ultimately the <b>Recommender</b> is accountable for the implementation of the decision and closing the process but will in most instances pass it back to the AO to initiate implementation and close the process.</p> <p>The <b>Recommender</b>:</p> <p>l) Advises the <b>AO</b> of the decision.</p> <p>The <b>AO</b>:</p> <p>m) Initiates implementation of the decision and closes the process.</p>

## Process Examples

The following are two examples highlighting the performance of the abovementioned roles for the passage of a brief from the **Initiator** to the **Decision Maker**.



The positions described in these examples (the left-hand column) may not be consistent with position naming conventions in all departments. They are provided as examples only.

### Simple, internal brief

For a simple brief, all the roles could be performed by one person. In the example below a Director, reporting to an Executive Director (ED), decides to write a brief requesting ED approval for a procurement.

In this case, before the ED will approve the brief, the Director knows that the ED will want to know that the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) has 'signed off' on it. Further, the Director may want a well-regarded colleague to check for spelling, punctuation etc. (i.e. perform a quality control function).

**Table 3 - Role profile for simple brief**

Positions	Initiator	Registration.	Accountable	Lead	Reviews &	Recommender	Decision

		& Allocation	Officer	Author	Contributors		Maker
Executive Director's Office							
ED							X
EA							
Director	X	X	X	X		X	
SME(s)r					X		
Quality Control(lers)					X		
CPO							

## Ministerial brief

For a more complex brief, such as a Ministerial brief, each role may be performed by different people – with potentially many people performing the roles of ‘**Reviewer / Contributor**’. The next example, using a Ministerial brief illustrates this greater spread of involvement.

The Minister wants a brief from the Secretary on a highly sensitive matter within their portfolio that’s starting to get traction in the media (e.g. digital government). One of the Minister’s advisors contacts the Department Liaison Office (DLO). The DLO registers the brief and allocates it directly to an ED’s executive assistant (EA). By default, the ED becomes the **AO**. As the **AO**, the ED identifies all the people who will contribute to, and/or review the brief on its way to the **Recommender** (in this case, the Secretary), as well as the timeframe that the brief has to travel to the **Recommender**.

The ED’s EA (with the ED’s agreement) assigns construction of the brief to a subject matter expert (SME) – who becomes the **Lead Author**. As **Lead Author**, the SME engages all the people identified by the **AO** as required in the workflow. Eventually, the **Lead Author** has coordinated all the input and reviews as defined and returns the brief to the ED (in their role as the **AO**). Once the **AO** has satisfied themselves that the brief is complete and compliant with all relevant legislation and regulation, the ED sends the brief to the Secretary, who **Recommends** the proposed course of action to the **Decision Maker** – the Minister.

**Table 4 - Role profile for complex Brief**

Positions	Initiator	Registration. & Allocation	Accountable Officer	Lead Author	Reviews & Contributors	Recommender	Decision Maker
Minister's Office							
Minister							X
EA							
Adviser							
DLO	X	X					
Secretary's Office							
Secretary						X	
EA					X		
Deputy Secretary's Office							
Deputy Secretary					X		
EA					X		
Executive Director's Office							
ED			X				
EA							
Director							
SME(s)r				X	X		
Quality Control(lers)					X		



See Appendix A for more examples covering different brief, parliamentary question and correspondence types.

## Separation of duties (power)

The concept of 'separation of duties' recognises the importance of separating the policy recommendation made by the VPS from the elected government's decision. That is the **Recommender** (the VPS) and the **Decision Maker** (the Premier or Minister/s) being different people and the creation of two records, 1) the recommendation and 2) the decision, safeguards the integrity of briefing and the authority of the public sector's position.

## ABC Common Templates Standard

Departments must at a minimum:

1. Create briefs using the common templates:
  - a) Common briefs
    - briefs initiated by the department to the Premier or a Minister/s that provides information, advice or seeks support on policy issues, key projects or decisions, or approval of an attached correspondence etc.
    - briefs requested by the Premier or a Minister that seeks information or advice on policy issues, key projects or decisions etc.
    - briefs internal to the department that provide information or advice or seek support on departmental business, recruitment, expenditure or procurement etc.
  - b) Event briefs
    - briefs to the Premier, Minister or Secretary that provides background and logistical information and speaking points in preparation for a meeting, event or function.
2. Create, edit and manage all briefs digitally with the electronic record as the public record (official record) as defined in the [Public Records Act 1973](#).
3. Ensure all briefs are kept to a maximum of two pages (excluding attachments) where possible.
4. Ensure all briefs are electronically approved in line with the Electronic Approval Standard.
5. Respond to correspondence in the format it was received, unless requested otherwise by the sender or the signatory.
6. Create hardcopy correspondence using the common template when:
  - a) responding to hardcopy correspondence received by the Premier, Minister/s, Secretary or Department.
  - b) sending out hardcopy correspondence on behalf of the Premier, Minister/s, Secretary or Department.
7. Create electronic correspondence using the common template when responding to correspondence received electronically (e.g. emails) addressed to the Premier, Minister/s



or Secretary.

8. Create a covering brief for correspondence when approval (signing) of the correspondence is required by the Premier, Minister/s or Secretary.
9. Create, edit and manage correspondence digitally with the digital version as the official record as defined in the *Public Records Act 1973*, including:
  - Ensure all outbound correspondence is managed entirely as a digital record internally to the department (regardless of its final form once it leaves the department).
10. Print digital briefs and correspondence only as a 'working document' when there is a need to:
  - a) print a draft for reading and mobility purposes;
  - b) physically sign the document;
  - c) send physical correspondence out to a citizen; or
  - d) provide evidence in a physical format.
11. Signed working documents of a digital brief or correspondence must be scanned back into the briefing and correspondence system (which should be Public Record Office Victoria approved electronic document management business system), disposed of according to the department's digitisation plan and protected according to its VPDSF classification.

The key points of this requirement are that the common templates must be used, the briefing and correspondence process should be digital end-to-end, and the electronic record is the public record.

The intention is that there is one end-to-end digital briefing and correspondence process across the department (and eventually across government). Automated and configurable workflow will be required. The ability to create, edit or manage briefs or correspondence outside of an electronic system will no longer be possible. This drives an end-to-end digital process and system for briefs and correspondence.

## Briefs

In the case of briefs originating as digital, they stay digital, throughout the workflow, from the point of registration to the point where the **Decision Maker** signs off on a decision. The electronic version is the public record. If at any time paper copies are printed out, they are to be regarded only as working copies – the public records remains at all times, the electronic version.

As explained in the 'Roles' table above, ultimately, it is the responsibility of the **AO** to ensure that the brief reaches the **Recommender** in a complete state. This means, effectively, that at all points within the electronic workflow, any contributor's or reviewer's input, whilst recorded in the system, will ultimately be accepted, or not, by the **AO** (ahead of the **Recommender**).

Often, especially in the case of Ministerial briefs, the Minister (i.e. the **Decision Maker**) will print out a Recommendation (i.e. a hardcopy of the Recommendation) which is approved, not

approved, noted or signed using a pen – a ‘wet’ signature. In this instance, the hardcopy of the signed decision will be scanned back into the system and this electronic version will be the official version. The paper version with the original (wet) signature must be disposed of as per PROV Standards<sup>1</sup>.

## Correspondence

For hardcopy inbound correspondence, most likely from an originator external to the department, the hardcopy correspondence will be scanned into the system, and the development of the response thereafter (as a brief), managed as an electronic record.

In most instances the response to the hardcopy correspondence (external to the department), will be in a hardcopy format, but this will be after the decision on the response has been made by the **Decision Maker**, and action on implementing that response transfers back to the Recommender – who would then print the approved response on hardcopy and send it to the originator. Note that the **Decision Maker** may choose to sign the hardcopy with a ‘wet’ signature, or an electronic signature.<sup>2</sup>

Similar to the management of hardcopy inbound correspondence, the management of hardcopy outbound correspondence is to be managed internally to the department, as an electronic record. This would apply, for instance, in the case of ‘campaign’ mail. In this case the preparation of the initial response would be managed as a brief in the system (electronically), with the **Decision Maker** approving the standard response that is to be sent to individuals external to the department. With the standard response now approved, subsequent identical responses to be generated and sent out by the department would also be managed electronically. That is, any subsequent response in this ‘campaign’ example would work through the common process, probably, with the all the roles being performed by one person, who would also approve the recommendation to send out the pre-approved ‘campaign’ response.



All briefs and correspondence are electronically signed. That is, they are not printed out for the **Decision Maker’s** signature (or any additions / modifications).

In some cases, there may be considerable delays at the point of decision making for a Ministerial brief. If circumstances change in the period of time after the Recommendation has been sent to the **Decision Maker**, there needs to be a capability for the **Recommender** to formally re-assess the Recommendation. Thus, in the circumstance where:

- The brief is to be revised / updated - the **Recommender** would need to ‘Supersede’ the original recommendation with either a revised version of the same Recommendation, or an entirely new Recommendation. Typically, the decision to supersede would be done first, and eventually a revised recommendation would replace the original. The ICT system would note

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<sup>1</sup> When a record is converted to a digital image and entered into an agency’s records management system, it becomes ‘public record’. The original hardcopy scanned record is the ‘source record’. All departments should retain the source records for a determined period of time (see PROV policies and standards).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the different forms of an electronic signature, and the difference between an electronic signature and a digital signature, refer to the Electronic Approvals Standard or the [Electronic Transactions \(Victoria\) Act 2000](#).

that the old recommendation has been replaced by the revised or completely new recommendation.

- The brief is to be withdrawn and not replaced with another brief (e.g. where some activity trigger or point in time have passed), the **Recommender** would need to 'Withdraw' the original recommendation.



The capability to withdraw or supersede a brief becomes an important function to ensure that the VPS Recommendation – particularly in the case of a Ministerial brief – is up to date and reflects the latest thinking of the **Recommender**.

## Electronic

It's clear that electronically signing (approving, not approving or noting) requires an end-to-end digital process and system as well as the capability to sign documents within that system. This signature could be an electronic signature (e.g. applying a digitised image of a handwritten signature to a scanned copy of a document or a born-digital document; or a digital signature<sup>3</sup>,

The purpose of the ABC Common Process Standard (common process standard) is to direct adherence to the minimum requirements of the common process, roles and responsibilities and common templates for use by all departments for in scope briefs and correspondence.

The use of a common language, a common process, roles and templates are an important precursor step toward improving productivity and effectiveness in the end-to-end process for briefs and correspondence.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer [Electronic Transactions \(Victoria\) Act 2000](#)

## ABC Monitoring and Reporting Standard

Departments must at a minimum:

1. Track the real-time, operational status of briefs and correspondence at the portfolio, branch or unit, division and departmental level. This includes identifying:
  - each item uniquely
  - the current location of each item by role and the time spent at that location
  - the proposed path of each item (i.e. who's next and after that etc.) up to and including the **Decision Maker**.
2. Generate reminders to the role currently in possession of the item if there has been no activity on the item for more than 5 days.
3. Generate an alert to the **Accountable Officer** if there has been no activity on the item for more than 5 days.
4. Report on the performance of all briefs and correspondence at the portfolio, branch or unit, division and departmental level. This includes:
  - the precise route of any item through the nominated roles and the length of time spent with each role
  - the length of time any and all items have taken from Initiation to Recommendation
  - the length of time any and all items have taken from Recommendation to Decision
  - by volume and type.
5. Maintain an audit trail to support monitoring and reporting on all role actions in the brief and correspondence lifecycle.

The purpose of the reporting standard is to define the minimum requirements for monitoring and reporting on all briefs and correspondence within a department, with an emphasis on monitoring in real time and reporting on documents individually and or collectively. As a result, enabling departments to analyse and optimise their performance to improve productivity and accountability.

This standard is dependent upon the briefing and correspondence process being partially or fully digital. The requirements of the standard could be used as high-level requirements in the specification of an update to an existing system or the delivery of an end-to-end digital process and system.

### Tracking

This requirement simply states that any appropriately authorised person should be able to track in real-time any brief or item of correspondence including:

- With whom and where the document is at the moment of enquiry as well as,

- To whom and where the document is going on its path to Decision. Obviously, information about where the document has been should also be available.

## Reminders

One of the key requirements in order to improve productivity and efficiency of the briefs and correspondence process is that the timeframe taken from creation to decision is reduced. This is commenced when upfront the **AO** nominates the path of the document (workflow path, roles/people etc.), and the proposed timeline, before the nominated **Lead Author** starts writing.

As part of the workflow path identified, the **AO** will also nominate the amount of time that each role/person should take to fulfil their task. This requirement is aimed at configuring the system to generate a reminder to the person currently in possession of the document, that the time allocated to them to complete their task (by the **AO** when the process commenced), has or is near to, expiring.



An audit trail from the point of registration to the Recommendation and subsequent Decision, supports the requirements of the [Evidence Act 2008](#) as well as allowing business intelligence and performance analysis and reporting.

Similar to the point above, at the same time that a reminder is issued to the person/role that the allocated time for them to perform their task is expiring, an alert will be issued to the **AO** that the reminder has been issued. This directly assists the **AO** in ensuring that the proposed timelines are adhered to.

The tracking of the timeline versus each role, as well as the generation of alerts, directly assist in the performance analysis of the system and provide the factual base for decision making to drive efficiency and effectiveness improvements.

## Performance analysis

As with most of the requirements in this standard, tracking the route and timing of briefs and correspondence through the system inputs into analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the process and the system. The clear intention over time is to improve productivity by ensuring timelines are reduced, barriers are identified and that only critical contribution and review is undertaken.

Being able to report on volumes by type of brief and correspondence will also allow for decisions to be made on resourcing requirements for administrative purposes as well as identifying patterns in demand that could contribute to configuration of standard paths through the system for certain types of documents.

## Audit trail

An audit trail is a critical requirement for the following reasons:

- supporting the requirements of the [Evidence Act 2000](#)
- supporting the separation of duties theme in the ABC SOD

- potential use within the department for business intelligence and performance analysis.

Workflow will direct the brief (or part thereof as determined by the **Lead Author**) to either a **Contributor** or a **Reviewer**. All input, editing, commentary etc. performed by each role needs to be captured and recorded for audit purposes.

This information also informs the **AO** and ultimately, the **Recommender**, thus ensuring that they understand who has seen the document and can consider the offered thoughts, comments, edits and or input. It is up to the **AO**, and ultimately the **Recommender**, to decide what gets recommended, regardless of the input and views as the document passes through the process.

The information gathered along the way, and the decisions about precisely what is recommended, will also provide input to performance reporting and other business intelligence functions and reporting that the department may develop.

## Further information

For further information regarding this standard, please contact Enterprise Solutions, Department of Premier and Cabinet, at: [enterprisesolutions@dpc.vic.gov.au](mailto:enterprisesolutions@dpc.vic.gov.au).

# Document Control

## Approval

This document is yet to be formally approved and is published as guidance only. It is expected that when delivery of the common platform commences, under the requirements of VSB approved ABC SOD, the ABC Governance Model and associated standards and templates will be formally reviewed and approved.

## Version history

Version	Date	Comments
0.1	07/05/2018	First formal draft
0.2	14/05/2018	Minor changes
0.3	30/05/2018	Second formal draft
0.4	01/08/2018	Final draft
1.0	03/09/2019	Final version

# Appendix A – Additional Role Profile Examples

## Event brief

In the lead up to the soccer World Cup, a series of international friendly soccer matches for Melbourne are proposed. This will impact upon the transport network, due to fans travelling around the network in peak hour worsening existing congestion. Extra police will need to be rostered to manage the crowd. The Minister has asked the Secretary for a brief.

Positions	Initiator	Registration. & Allocation	Accountable Officer	Lead Author	Reviews & Contributors	Recommender	Decision Maker
Minister's Office							
Minister							X
EA		X					
Adviser	X						
DLO		X					
Secretary's Office							
Secretary						X	
EA							
Deputy Secretary's Office							
Deputy Secretary							
EA					X		
Executive Director's Office							
ED							
EA							
Director			X		X		
SME(s)r				X	X		
Quality Control(lers)					X		

**Figure 3 -Role profile for Event Brief**



## Correspondence response brief

Multiple letters have been received regarding the closure of local libraries due to budget constraints. A common theme has been identified by the department and this is flagged as an emerging issue. The department has sent correspondence to the members of the public who were asking about the library closure. The Secretary's office is briefing the Minister on the issues arising from the inbound correspondence that is being sent to the department.

Positions	Initiator	Registration. & Allocation	Accountable Officer	Lead Author	Reviews & Contributors	Recommender	Decision Maker
Minister's Office							
Minister							
EA							
Adviser							
DLO							
Secretary's Office							
Secretary	x						x
EA		x			x		
Deputy Secretary's Office						x	
Deputy Secretary							
EA					x		
Executive Director's Office							
ED							
EA							
Director			x		x		
SME(s)r				x	x		
Quality Control(lers)					x		

Figure 4 -Role profile for correspondence response Brief

## Regulatory briefs

A new piece of regulation has been issued which affects the Minister's department. This relates to residential noise pollution and has been issued by the Environment Protection Authority. The Secretary is briefing the Minister on the impact this new regulation this has on the department.

Positions	Initiator	Registration. & Allocation	Accountable Officer	Lead Author	Reviews & Contributors	Recommender	Decision Maker
Minister's Office							
Minister							x
EA							
Adviser							
DLO							
Secretary's Office							
Secretary	x						
EA		x			x		
Deputy Secretary's Office							
Deputy Secretary							
EA					x		
Executive Director's Office							
ED							
EA							
Director			x		x		
SME(s)r				x	x		
Quality Control(lers)					x		

Figure 5 -Role profile for regulatory Brief

## Correspondence - hardcopy inbound

A member of the public writes in wanting to know why the department has closed one of its offices in Box Hill. The (hardcopy) letter is addressed to the Secretary of the department and the mail room therefore delivers the letter to the Secretary's office.

Positions	Initiator	Registration. & Allocation	Accountable Officer	Lead Author	Reviews & Contributors	Recommender	Decision Maker
Minister's Office							
Minister							
EA							
Adviser							
DLO							
Secretary's Office							
Secretary	x						x
EA		x			x		
Deputy Secretary's Office							
Deputy Secretary						x	
EA					x		
Executive Director's Office							
ED			x				
EA							
Director							
SME(s)r				x	x		
Quality Control(lers)					x		

**Figure 6 -Role profile for constituency questions**

# Appendix B – Common Process Diagram

