

Connecting Us is a newsletter sponsored by the COO Committee for all APS staff, sharing stories of your successes and highlighting useful resources.

Message from the DISER

Jo

Jo Evans is a Deputy Secretary at the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources and a member of the COO Committee.

Innovation Month, brought to you by the Public Sector Innovation Network (PSIN), is in full swing, reminding us how important it is for public servants to be innovative. The Public Sector Innovation Awards – the cornerstone Innovation Month event – is a chance to celebrate some of our successes and inspire one another to keep up the good work (see below).

In responding to the COVID-19 crisis, we've shown just how innovative the APS can be. The novel approaches to sourcing supplies or managing workloads across the APS have been remarkable.

An inspiring example is the work the APS has done to help a [Melbourne manufacturing company](#) repurpose existing machinery to manufacture medical mask filter material, boosting crucial supplies and keeping our community safer.

This is APS reform in action: rethinking both how we work and what we do to help Australians through the pandemic. It has showcased the APS at its best – thinking creatively, being curious and responding to needs in contemporary ways.

It's great to see more and more of us taking this approach in our daily work. I've never been more proud to be a public servant – and hope you feel the same.



THE FINALISTS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED!



AustraldeNEXT on an iPad

The presentation of the 2020 Public Sector Innovation Awards – a joint PSIN and Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) initiative – is fast approaching. Twelve finalists across three categories have been chosen, but who will win this prestigious honour?

The Connecting Us editorial team spoke to two of the finalists to find out more about their innovative endeavours:

Editorial team: "What is your project and how is it innovative?"

Kristin Boag, Austrade: Our project is 'AustradeNEXT', a fully virtual, digital-based women-in-leadership initiative designed to develop the pipeline of women to senior leadership roles. It's innovative as it provides a blueprint for delivering relationship-based programs to a dispersed workforce: it's accessible anywhere, anytime, on any device.

John O'Brien, Dept. Agriculture, Water and the Environment: We're using 3D x-ray technology to develop automatic detection algorithms for biosecurity risk. To date, we've created auto-detection algorithms for fruit, meat and seafood, enabling us to detect 2-3 times more risk material than current screening tech – a world first and a game changer!

ET: "What advice would you give other teams that need to get innovative?"

Kristin: Take a human-centred design approach with an agile mindset – this will mean you're guided by the voice of the consumer and will be able to pivot quickly with evolving contexts and situations.

John: Look outside of your area for inspiration – there may be existing solutions that can be adapted. Don't purely focus on the end-state – take a staged approach and be flexible, there will be bumps along the way!

Watch the [awards ceremony live stream](#) at 9:30am on Friday 31 July to see which of the 12 nominees win their categories.



The team from AWE with a 3D x-ray in the background

AND THE INNOVATION JUST KEEPS ON COMING

Innovation Month 2020, brought to you by [PSIN](#), is in full stride: totally online (for the first time ever), packed with absorbing events and showcasing inspiring stories. The theme this year is 'delivering differently', reflecting the public sector's outcomes-focused response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The month kicked off with a special launch edition of the Work with Purpose podcast from [IPAA](#), featuring Dr Michele Bruniges, Secretary of the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and David Fredericks, Secretary of the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources. [Watch or listen](#) as the Secretaries discuss how our current crises have amped up empathy, led to throwing away the books, and created a desire to hang on to this new spirit of collaboration and shared purpose.

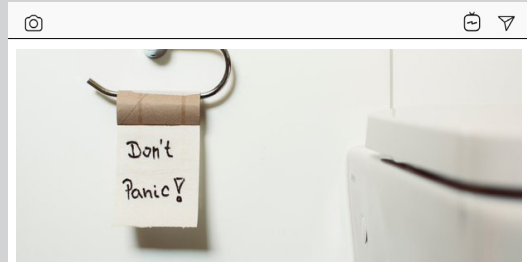
Standout events so far include the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's webinar on how [data from space](#) benefits us all, and the Australia & New Zealand School of Government's series [Reimagining Government](#), exploring topics like sharing power with the community and building trust in government.

But it's not over yet! Innovation Month is still rolling on at pace for another week AND – because it's all online – you can revisit some events from earlier in the month, and a number of pre-recorded ones too. [Check out the schedule here!](#)



APS Socials

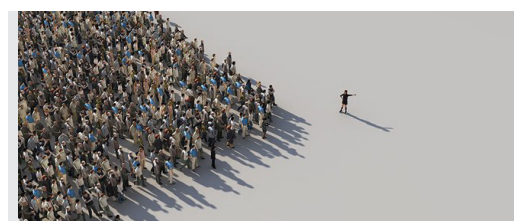
#Workwithpurpose



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The bigger the crisis, the bigger the opportunity... don't waste it! Check out this pre-recorded [#innovationmonth2020 presentation](#) that draws from the latest in neuroscience to help you build a step-by-step crisis game plan brought to you by [@bigql](#)



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More ethical, more innovative? The effects of ethical culture and ethical leadership on innovation | [ANZSOG](#) [#publicsector](#) via [@PSInnovate](#) [#Leadership](#) [#EthicalLeadership](#)

IN BRIEF: REVOLUTIONISING DEFENCE FORCE RECRUITMENT



Every year over 70,000 people apply to join the Australian Defence Force. When the pandemic hit, Defence Force Recruitment (DFR) staff couldn't travel around the country meeting candidates as they usually would.

Seizing the moment, DFR fast-tracked some ideas to modernise recruitment processes, including making aptitude testing virtual and expanding candidate career coaching phone services. This meant DFR services could not only continue throughout the pandemic but be more convenient and tailored to the candidate.

As Brigadier Duncan Hayward says:

"COVID-19 presented DFR with a range of unprecedented challenges... The willingness of staff to embrace the change will have a very positive impact on maintaining ADF capability generation."

For a taste of DFR's new recruitment processes, [check out their website!](#)

IN BRIEF: CREATING SPACE FOR INNOVATION



The pandemic has affected every part of the APS, including people supporting our leadership. Emma Fooks is a Senior Executive Assistant at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet who reflects on her time working from home in a role where, pre-COVID, this would have been unthinkable.

To make remote working possible, Emma had to employ an innovative mindset: she thought hard about the objectives of her role, then re-evaluated how she could achieve them in a whole new way.

"It was all about applying common sense and judgement," Emma said. "It was essential to be realistic, kind and mindful of others and their situation, at the same time as thinking about my role."

This is the attitude of an everyday innovator: getting clear on the non-negotiable outcomes, but treating the path to those outcomes as space for creativity and fresh approaches.

If the pandemic has shown us anything, it's that there's always another way to do things. Have a think about it: how can you create the space for innovation in your work? How can you achieve your objectives in a whole new way?

We want to hear from you!

We'd love to share your stories in upcoming editions. If you have a story about how your department or agency is adapting where and how you work, please get in touch.

Email us at: CooCommittee@pmc.gov.au

LOCKDOWN ADVANTAGE trialling online cognitive interviewing

When you're conducting a survey, how do you know the participants understand your questions?

During the COVID-19 lockdown, remote working gave researchers Cale Hubble and Kate Boucaut from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment an excuse to try cognitive interviewing: a way of testing the quality of survey questions, not just whether they make sense. Interviewers guide participants through the questions, asking them to explain the thought processes behind why they're answering in a particular way.

The team used a video-interviewing function being trialled by a Brisbane-based research company – Askable – to test their questions with people online.

The cognitive testing results led to an epiphany.

'Our assumptions were completely busted. We expect people to think like we do... but this wasn't the case – they were interpreting our questions differently,' says Cale.

Cale's and Kate's advice to others is: 'Don't be scared of new ideas or new technology – just give it a go.'

[Read the whole PSIN case study here...](#)

Useful Links and Resources

- Did you know that Australia is a signatory to the [Declaration on Public Sector Innovation](#)?
- Can't get enough innovation? Check out [PSIN's case studies](#) – real stories of innovation from the Australian public sector. Sign up to become a PSIN member [here](#) and receive the weekly newsletter!
- All important information for APS staff is available from the [APSC COVID-19 portal](#).



"For the people, in particular, of Melbourne – this is hard. This is a hard call on you. It's tough.

But we're all Melburnians now when it comes to the challenges we face.

We're all Victorians now – because we're all Australians, and that's where the challenge is right now."

-Prime Minister Scott Morrison

BE COVIDSAFE