

# H4 Consulting Brief

## Wells of Authority

Publicly funded organisations once had a virtual monopoly on authoritative policy advice, drawn from unrivalled wells of information, expertise, and resources. More recently, their dominance in the market for policy ideas has been diluted, or even displaced, by other voices claiming other sources of authority. In a policy space increasingly flooded with purveyors of ideas, many traditional policy advisers fear that their wells of authority are running dry.

Publicly funded organisations and institutions have traditionally had privileged access to data, expertise, and bureaucratic technologies for organising people and information. This unequalled access to labour, information, and decision makers, combined with a reputation for impartiality, gave publicly funded organisations a comfortable advantage over limited private markets for policy advice.

The policy market is now more competitive, both in the diversity of participants and the wells of authority from which they draw to justify the value of their advice. Think tanks, lobbyists, advocates, and celebrities make claims based on lived experience, ideological alignment, business success, or professional practice as much as hard evidence or popular appeal.

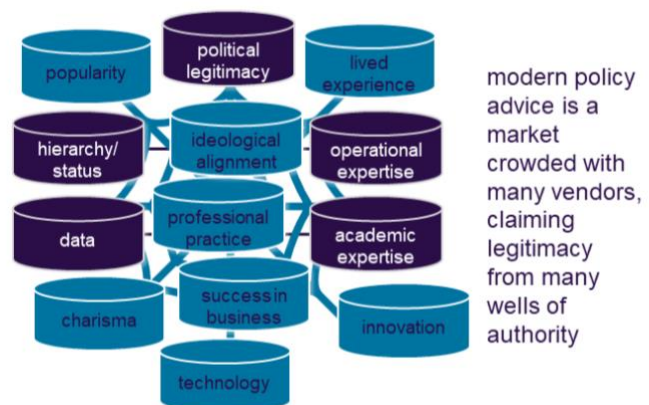


Publicly funded organisations can draw policy advice from many sources beyond their traditional wells of authority. They are uniquely placed to draw from many wells through their role in engagement, consultation, and codesign. This means publicly funded organisations can tap external sources of authority like professional practice, or the lived experience of specific population groups.

Publicly funded organisations can identify which wells of authority are most relevant to an issue and design policy processes to include participants who draw from those wells. That way, policy workers can combine many perspectives from a variety of sources to negotiate confident, cogent, and pragmatic policy advice informed by the best available evidence.

In a more crowded marketplace, robust advice from publicly funded organisations can easily be overlooked in favour of ideas that are more strongly argued, or more aligned with the ideological preferences of politicians or influential lobbyists. The duty to be impartial means publicly funded organisations avoid partisan debate, reducing their influence in the forums where decisions are made. Stripped of monopoly access, and denied the opportunity to compete openly, publicly funded organisations are increasingly sidelined as a source of policy advice.

At the same time, traditional sources of authority like institutional experience, analytic rigour, and expertise are being challenged. Without champions to replenish them, these wells of authority will continue to run dry.



By working with, and borrowing from, many different sources of advice and claims to authority, publicly funded organisations can build stronger arguments, reduce distracting noise for decision makers, and inform better decisions. Unifying and drawing from the strengths of many sources can also rebuild the legitimate authority of publicly funded organisations as impartial facilitators between interested parties, including internal parties, to synthesise positions that are authentic without being tainted.

Participating in debate by sharing rather than hoarding information and expertise will also rebuild confidence in the advice of publicly funded organisations. Sharing public resources replenishes and restores legitimacy to wells of authority that were too easy to dismiss as a mirage when they were kept just out of reach.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: [info@h4consulting.com.au](mailto:info@h4consulting.com.au)  
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