



Department of Public Service and Administration

**PUBLIC SERVICE RESEARCH STRATEGY
2015-2020**

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***GUIDE FOR THE RESEARCH AGENDA, PROTOCOLS AND TOOLS, TO IMPROVE
THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFICACY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION***

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1. Introduction

After 21 years of our Democracy a cursory assessment on progress within the South African Public Administration as highlighted within the diagnostics of the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP), indicates that we arguably are amongst the countries internationally, with the most well thought through public policies to address our obligations towards our citizens, as well as, endeavours to run an efficient administration. However, the efficacy of the implementation thereof, as well as the strategies to tackle our challenges, requires development and empirical research to provide appropriate solutions for evolving reforms in public administration.

There is therefore an urgent need for the Public Service to focus on the lessons learnt from the local and international successful practice with respect to implementation and the causality thereof of the public administration sciences. The Department of Public Service and Administration has noted that the critical success factors for the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) are largely premised on the continual availability of solid research data for evidence based decision making in planning, policy and practice within all the NDP priority areas which impact directly on improving Public Administration.

1.1. The Social Vision - The NDP and the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF 2015-20)

The **critical success** factors for the NDP are all largely premised on the policy choices made as well as the improving the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation and governance with respect to strategic state capability. The NDP points through a cogent diagnostics, targeted priority areas which we need to address from 2014 until 2030. Government has to do scenario planning and *inter alia* partner with relevant organisations both locally and internationally, including academic institutions, in order to raise the level of research and development. Public servant managers will have to include research skills in their basic repertoire, targeted towards building the research infrastructure required by a modern public administration.

The very existence of the National Planning Commission (NPC) in terms of its mandate is premised *inter alia* on the NPC putting forward defensible research, evidence and clear recommendations for the government and public administration working with the broader society to draw on the best expertise, consulting relevant stakeholders and helping shape a consensus on how to tackle the key challenges

facing our country.

The above approach of the NPC informs and guides the ideas and approach of the Research Strategy, as it seeks to foster collaborations and partnerships with selected stakeholders in the research field in the achievement of the NDP objectives especially on building a capable and developmental state. These objectives from chapters 13 and 14 of the NDP which have been prioritised are:

- A stable political-administrative interface;
- A public service that is a career of choice;
- Sufficient technical and specialist professional skills;
- Efficient and effective management and operations systems;
- Procurement systems that deliver value for money;
- Strengthened accountability to citizens;
- Improved intergovernmental coordination and institutionalisation of long term planning;
- Improved mechanisms to promote ethical behaviour in the public service.

This strategy is a joint effort between the Department for Public Services and Administration (DPSA) and the National School of Government (NSG) and sets out the **Public Service vision** for research and policy analysis for the period (2014-2019) and encompasses the following:

- Collective Institutional efforts in generating knowledge and disseminating cogent policy advice through research which impacts on national development and the realisation of our Constitutional vision
- Bringing evidence and expertise to impact on public policy challenges
- Communicating and Highlighting timely policy implications arising from public administration research
- Designing capacity building initiatives from case studies which improve the functioning of the public administration both efficiently and effectively
- Institutionalising research and policy analysis as a job role competency for all Senior Management Members

This strategy is based on a number of established **Principles** which will guide our research activities which are as follows:

- Focus on research activities on approved areas highlighted within the MTSF and NDP which respond to government's development agenda
- Encompass multi-levels of engagement and communicate our recommendations appropriately through

our principals

- Focus on evidenced based research which influences policy, planning, practice and capacity building
- Uphold values of that are ethical, honest, objective, reliable, valid, accountable and transparent
- Collaborate and support research networks and partnerships where appropriate and in the interest of government.

The key aims of this strategy are to translate credible research findings and recommendation into influential policy decisions insofar as they impact on public administration; further develop the public service as a credible source of high quality research and analytics which inform policy and implementation oversight to ensure an equitable and efficient use of resources across government and establish the Public Service as a hub for dialogue and debate on current NDP issues, as well as those pertaining to the long-term evolution of the public administration system.

The abovementioned vision as further detailed in the MTSF 2015-20, will therefore guide the following **Four Public Service Research Focus Areas** of collaboration and partnerships with the selected stakeholders who are active in the research field.

FOUR RESEARCH FOCUS AREAS FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE

- I. Implementing Strategic Public Governance Capability
- II. Ensuring an Efficient and Effective System through Operational Processes
- III. Strengthening Vertical and Horizontal Accountability through norms and standards
- IV. Professionalising the Public Service through skills and ethics

A more detailed **Annual Implementation Plan** will be published separately based on prioritised projects which are driven by capacity and resources available.

1.2 The Africa Public Service Charter (the Charter)

Article 21 of the Charter on capacity development states as follows:

- State Parties shall undertake a systematic, comprehensive and evidence-based capacity development programmes to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of Public Service and Administration.
- State Parties shall collaborate with Management Development and Research Institutions as well as leveraging knowledge networks to strengthen capacities of public service agents.

- State Parties shall provide working tools and create conducive working environment for the application of new knowledge within the limits of available resources.
- State Parties shall put in place mechanisms and processes for the exchange of expertise, knowledge, information, technology and best practices in capacity enhancement of Public Service and Administration.

In the above context the Research Strategy will go a long way in ensuring that South Africa fulfils its role in the continent, as South Africa was instrumental in the drafting of the Charter.

1.3 The Ministerial Priorities based on the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF)

The Ministerial priorities, as determined from time to time based on the focus areas of the MTSF, will also guide the nature and focus and thematic areas of the *Public Service Research Agenda*, as well as areas of collaboration and partnerships between the DPSA and other research institutions, both locally and internationally as well as sector departments. These priorities will be revised from time to time, as and when the MPSA so directs. These priorities will themselves be guided *inter alia* by the focus areas of the annual State of the Nation Address as well as the MTSF 2015-20 priority areas.

2. Problem Statement- Why Research in Public Administration Matters

The country's citizens especially the poor, have growing and changing needs which have rapidly evolved in ways that demand continuous innovation and reform in how citizens can access quality public services in a planned and predictable manner. One of the key challenges identified by the MPSA was the lack of sufficient leveraging on the available and reliable research outcomes, sources and best practices in the development and implementation of policies, practices in operations and programmes in the broader public service based on knowledge and experience available. The Public Service generally, does not make decisions based on empirical evidence through grounded research as an institutional practice. The unintended consequences of major policy choices pointed continually to lack of a sufficient embedded research culture and practice. This has led to a lack of inquiry into good practice. Hence, an identified need for the establishment of Research and Policy Analysis capacity within the public service which would, *inter alia*, through research and public administration discourse, seek to leverage on the available research outcomes and best practices with the relevant institutions in the development and implementation of policies and programmes.

Hence, the mainstay of the Public Service Research Strategy is to establish collaboration and partnerships with internal and external institutions that are active in the research field, with a view to, *inter alia*, solicit ideas on

effective co-ordination in the best interest of public service development and advancement through informed reforms.

3. Purpose of Research within Public Administration

Public Administration evolution is based on theories, principles and selected practices, which impact on the activities, systems and processes, called “*public administration*’ (in lower case), and the discipline of Public Administration as an academic science, denoted as “*Public Administration*” (in upper case). It is important that when a new strategy or social vision is adopted, the limitations and successes are measured and recorded for ongoing evidence based decision making.

Research is arguably the key tool to realising the NDP 2030’s social vision for the public service by evaluating the efficacy and efficiencies of administrative policies, systems and processes and the review thereof. The Department of Public Service and Administration, as a Centre of Government Department (COG), with its transversal mandate, is responsible for developing and co-ordinating the research strategy for Public Administration, and to encourage and sustain a culture of Evidence Based Practices, Processes and Policy-making (EBPPP) which supports cogent and empirically influenced decision making in Government, with a special focus on the NDP priorities and MTSF projects insofar as they focus on Public Administration discourse. The department has identified that there is insufficient collaboration, co-ordination and capacity within the research units within Government departments.

4. The Context for Research and Public Policy Analysis

The Department of Public Service and Administration has, with effect from January 2014, identified gaps with respect to how we inform decision making in various public administration processes and public reform processes and hence within its reconfigured organizational structure in order to repositioning itself in terms of its evolving legal and functional mandate as articulated in the Public Administration Management, Act, 2014, in order to effectively deliver on its vision which is to build a professional, productive and responsive public service, created a dedicated unit for Research and Policy Analysis. The role was to focus on policy analysis and reform trends and practices, both locally and internationally in Public Administration discourse through emergent research activities amongst others. The nexus between policy and research plays out in practice and implementation. The resultant knowledge from practice and learning is informed by research through monitoring and evaluation of the impact of policy choices and decisions. The identified main objectives of the **Public Service Research** function are therefore to, amongst other things:

- Create a platform and network for engagement around influencing the research agenda of sector departments to respond to the public administration related priorities in the National Development Plan and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework.
- Initiate and sustain a culture of ***Evidence Based Practices, Processes and Policy-making*** (EBPPP), which supports cogent and empirically influenced decision making in Government.
- Share case studies and agree on relevant and appropriate research methodology design for the SA Public Service.
- Establish research protocols for how researchers in government departments need to gain access to public documents and datasets and the data warehousing thereof.
- Develop an open space for networking and providing datasets and policy papers, policy briefs, working and occasional papers on local and International best practices that can be sourced and distributed via an e-system repository.
- Identify and assist with capacity development of the researchers by arranging colloquia, roundtable discussions and brown bag lunch discussions on emerging issues in PA discourse.
- Collaborate with local and international research institutions and encourage cross-dimensional learning.
- To influence Public Service bursary holders to focus on the research agenda of government in order to ensure that the state gets the best value for money spent.

5. Role of the Research Community

The DPSA had identified the following key actors in the research space which would form the basis for initial collaboration and conceptualization of the research agenda and strategy. They are as follows:

GROUP A: Research Entities:

- i. Statistics South Africa (STATSSA),
- ii. Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC),
- iii. National Treasury's Government Technical Assistance Centre (GTAC),
- iv. Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR),
- v. Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI),
- vi. National School of Government (NSG),
- vii. Productivity South Africa (PSA).

GROUP B: Government Departments

The following have been identified as the key government departments with a discreet research functions which are complementary to the roles and functions of the DPSA and hence we need to collaborate to ensure that we reach the NDP objectives.

- i. The Public Service Commission,
- ii. National Treasury,
- iii. Department for Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME),
- iv. Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET),
- v. Department of Science and Technology (DST),
- vi. Department for Co-operative Governance (DCoG),
- vii. Department for Basic Education (DBE), and
- viii. Office of the Premiers (OtPs)

However, it must be understood and noted that various government departments have differing roles and functions with respect to research, each discreet and yet interrelated insofar as such research can contribute to the public administration reform agenda. The following is an attempt to delineate the research roles of the various departments with a research function:

Role of Centre of Government (CoG) departments		
ENTITY	MANDATE	MODALITIES
MPSA: NATIONAL SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT (NSG)	Research Case Studies for Curriculum content for Public Administration courses Measure Efficacy of Training Program content and delivery, as well as the Impact of Training and Development International Benchmarking and joint international research projects Joint academic research projects with Schools of Government on curriculum content	Systematic Reviews Evaluation of Programmes. Monitoring of Program delivery Impact Studies of Skills enhancement and improved performance from training programmes Research on relevant oriented course content
MPSA: DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC SERVICES AND ADMINISTRATION (DPSA)	Research and Policy Generation for all Public Administration focus areas Determine Research Strategy for the PS	Public Administration Policy Design, Development, Analysis and Formulation Action Research of Workplace Practices

	including PS Reforms and Policy Strategy	to enhance Productivity Competencies Framework for SMS as Policy Formulators and Researcher Research Policies and Measurement Tools/Instruments for Public Administration Management Practices, Strategic State Governance Capability, Operations Management, Performance Management, Ethics and Integrated Reporting on High Performance Work Practices
DEPARTMENT FOR PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION (DPME)	Oversee the Management of the National Evaluation System through the Implementation of the National Evaluation Plan Systematic collection and objective analysis of evidence on macro public policies, programmes, projects, functions and organisations to assess and recommend relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency), value for money, impact and sustainability	Government's Priority Areas in 12 Outcomes identifying large or Strategic Projects of significant public interest and concern which must be evaluated every 5 years by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnosis • Design Evaluation • Implementation Evaluation • Impact Evaluation • Economic Evaluation • Evaluation Synthesis
NATIONAL TREASURY /GOVERNMENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE (GTAC)	Undertake research, analysis or feasibility projects commissioned by government departments /entities due to lack of in-house capacity which have high financial and sustainability risks and which may involve joined-up government initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility Studies • Impact Studies • Commissioned Analysis and Projects
OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS	Specific Research in terms of the Core Business mandate and functions of that department including entities reporting to such departments	Evidence based Research for Planning, Policy Formulation and improved practices related to specific public policy mandates of line and sector departments

Discussions were taken on the discrete mandates of each of the entities insofar as they contribute to the Research Agenda of Public Administration. Discussion and clarity was also provided on the relationship and collaboration between other discrete Research Forums, e.g. DPME co-ordination of Research related to MTSF Projects. It must be noted that the DPSA mandate and focus is with respect to the PSA legal mandate, as well as any evolving Public Administration discourse insofar as it supports the evolution of Public Service Reforms.

6. Rationale for the Public Service Research Strategy

Each sector department commissions research independently from universities, research institutes and/or consultants, which is an enormous cost to the State and the orientation and worldview of some

researchers is unknown. There is also duplication in silorised efforts and very little sharing or benefit is derived from disjointed research efforts. As a number of centre of government (CoG) departments are legally responsible for developing their own research agenda within public administration, hence there is no one central co-ordinating and governance structure for a collective research focus on public administration related issues within the NDP and the MTSF in particular. The DPSA has a transversal mandate with respect to public administration which will allow it to co-ordinate the above objectives, and to encourage CoG departments to work collaboratively with sector departments and to use research outcomes available from respective departments. Office of Premiers, as well as other CoG departments must play a significant collaborative role in driving the Public Service research agenda. The collaboration will focus on improving integrated planning, operations and performance management systems through research dialogue and also encourage focus on funded in-house research and more cross cutting joint research between departments will be supported. The main focus and approach of the Public Service Research Strategy is to:

- Design the common Research Protocols, Instruments and Tools to measure efficiency and capacity of Public Service institutions.
- Track the evolution of Public Administration Discourse in public administration as a policy science and lay the ground for its functioning through the development of a research agenda as part of collaboration and partnership.
- Form partnerships with selected institutions in the research field, including higher education institutions and research institutions to develop the research field through policy dialogues.
- Design policy briefs, occasional and position papers on emerging Public Administration Discourse and share same through policy dialogues and publish periodically a South African Public Administration Academic Journal jointly with the National School of Government.
- Identify Public Administration projects jointly with academia and sector departments based on the **Four Thematic Areas** and invite key speakers and institutions to dialogue, share information and experiences.

6.1 Four Research Focus Areas

As and when a need is identified for empirical research to be undertaken, such research will be either done in-house, or in collaboration with other sector entities or commissioned in partnership with

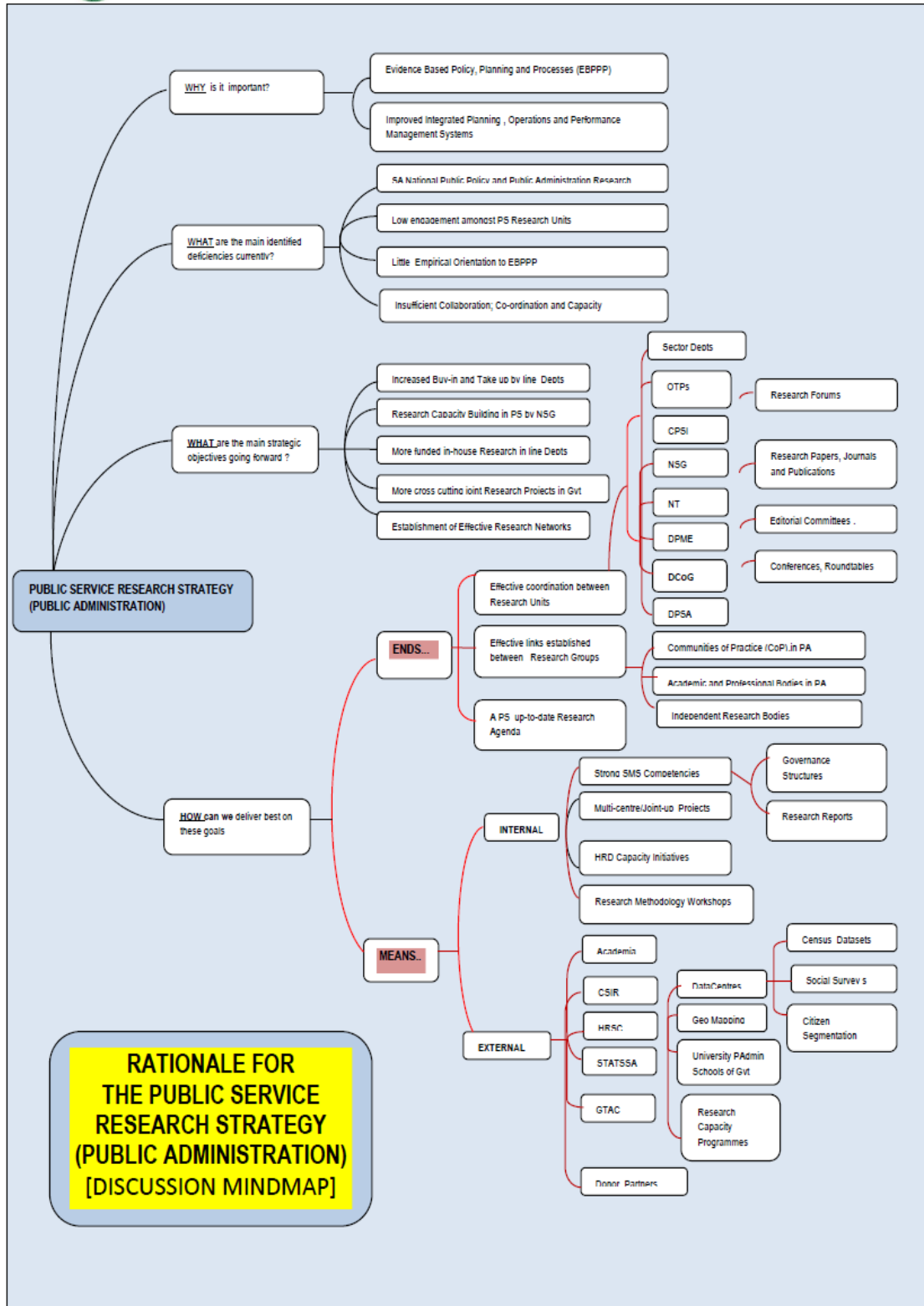
relevant institutions as guided by the following research thematic areas which will identify research topics. The **Four Research Focus Areas for the MTSF 2015-2020 period**, as part of the evolving Research Strategy, focuses on the MTSF sub-outcomes with respect to public administration, namely:

FOUR RESEARCH FOCUS AREAS	
I.	THEME 1: Implementing <i>Strategic Public Governance Capability</i> through managing the political-administrative interface to strengthen decision-making, leadership and administrative oversight;
II.	THEME 2: Ensuring <i>efficient and effective systems and processes</i> through operations, performance and productivity management;
III.	THEME 3: Strengthening <i>vertical and horizontal accountability</i> of co-ordinated and integrated government through norms and standards and through better co-ordination by centre of government departments;
IV.	THEME 4: Improving skills and competencies and <i>professionalising the public service</i> through better Human Resource Management policies and practices.

A conceptual mind-map was designed which formed the basis for the overview of the **draft Public Service Research Strategy** which was based on the following fundamental questions and which was widely consulted upon to form the basis of this strategy:

WHY is a Public Service Research Strategy important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence Based Policy, Planning, Practices and Processes (EBPPPP) • Improved Integrated Planning, Operations and Performance Measurement Systems
WHAT are the main identified deficiencies and challenges currently faced within the Public Service Research space?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South African Public Policy and Public Administration Research gaps • Little Empirical Orientation to EBPPPP • Low engagement amongst PS Research Units • Insufficient Collaboration; Co-ordination and Capacity vertically and horizontally

<p>WHAT are the main Objectives going forward?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Buy-in and Take up by line Departments to institutionalize research • Providing of Research Capacity Building in the PS by National School of Government • More funded in-house Research in line Departments • More cross cutting joint Research Projects in Government • Establishment of Effective Research Networks with strategic partners
<p>HOW can deliver best on best goals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENDS..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective coordination between Research Units ▪ Effective links established between Research Groups ▪ A PS up-to-date Research Agenda • MEANS.... INTERNAL and EXTERNAL factors and entities



Representatives unanimously welcomed the initiative to co-ordinate the Public Administration Research Agenda and delegates from Premier's Offices/ Provincial Administrations reiterated their micro role in the co-ordination of research at a provincial level with respect to Public Administration focus areas. A request was made for the functions of the forum to include the organizing of an annual research conference with various stakeholders, including public administration students from universities. A request was also made with respect to an initial focus on capacity development for public servants as researchers and the identification of research related competencies.

7. Collaboration in the Research Space

After consultation on a co-ordinating and governance structure for research and public policy analysis, sector departments, supported the establishment of the **Public Administration Research Forum** and also recommended the DPSA co-ordinate such forum. The forum would be responsible for the following:

- 7.1. Ensure that a **draft Public Service Strategy** is developed and widely consulted upon.
- 7.2. An **Annual Research Conference** is held with the key research stakeholders, where public servants can present research papers.
- 7.3. A **Central Research repository** for all Public Administration research be identified or developed in an open space and that datasets and research documents be freely available online.
- 7.4. A **Periodic Research journal** to be developed and published on Public Administration.
- 7.5. Collaboration should ensue amongst **Academia, Public Administration Professional Bodies, International Research Institutions and Institutes and Multi-national Research Agencies**

The research priority areas in each of the Research Focus Areas for the MTEF 2015-20 would be translated into defined research projects annually. Conference papers will be solicited in each of the research areas, and such papers will be further refined through conference inputs, where-after papers that meet a set criteria will be eligible for publication in a public administration research journal which is in the process of being researched with the NSG. Participation in local and international conferences will also be evaluated according to the contribution and value that they add in the knowledge production in each of the identified four research areas.

The establishment of the journal and the publication of the papers in the journal therefore will form the core of the knowledge production and dissemination in terms of the four Research Focus Areas. The following discussion on the nature and form of the journal have been suggested, namely that:

- The journal should be a bi-annual and an accredited “Public Service Journal”;
- The journal articles should be peer reviewed;
- The journal governance structure should consist of, *inter alia*, the Editorial Committee ; and
- The journal focus should be biased towards the practical application of knowledge in problem solving and the recording of SA Public Administration discourse.

The above arrangement and ideas are part of the evolving Research Strategy and will be reviewed from time to time to ensure their alignment with the objectives of the Research Strategy.

8. SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE INDEX (SAPAPGI)

As part of ongoing research, the Public Service must be able to track and measure public administration governance, performance and productivity apparatus through a Public Administration Performance and Governance Index This index must be able to measure the following dimensions:

- Public Administration Reform
- Implementation of Public Policies through the life cycle of policy generation, policy transmission, policy distribution and policy maintenance processes and systems against set norms and standards

Diagnostic tools would have to be designed to collect evidence and data at an institutional, provincial and sector level and aggregate such data into national datasets. A social feedback loop and mechanism will have to be established to include the voice of citizen’s perceptions and experiences of how public administration mechanisms are succeeded. The index would have to serve as a policy instrument which is able to gauge the efficiency and efficacy of the public administration insofar as we are responding to building a capable state as envisaged in the NDP.

9. CONCLUSION

The Research Strategy for the Public Service and Administration as articulated above is an *evolving* strategy which is premised on the importance of collaborations and partnerships to achieve the goals of eliminating

equality, poverty and reducing unemployment as articulated in the NDP. It is also based on the *Research Concept Document* previously approved as a Working Document for consultation.

The Research Strategy in essence seeks to respond to the identified deficiencies with regards to research in the Public Service and Administration through outlining the objectives that must be met in order to address the identified weaknesses. The key platforms for achieving these as outlined above are:

- The established and functioning **Public Administration Research Forum (PARF)**;
- The established and functioning **Public Administration-Academia Forum (PAAF)**; and the,
- Identified **Projects** based on the **Four Research Focus Areas** which will be further unpacked through annual plans and the outcomes will be published in a public administration journal and conference papers.
- Determining a **Public Administration Performance and Governance Index (PAPGI)** on a periodic basis in order to measure the efficacy of the public administration apparatus.