



Concept to culture: A maturity model for wellbeing policy

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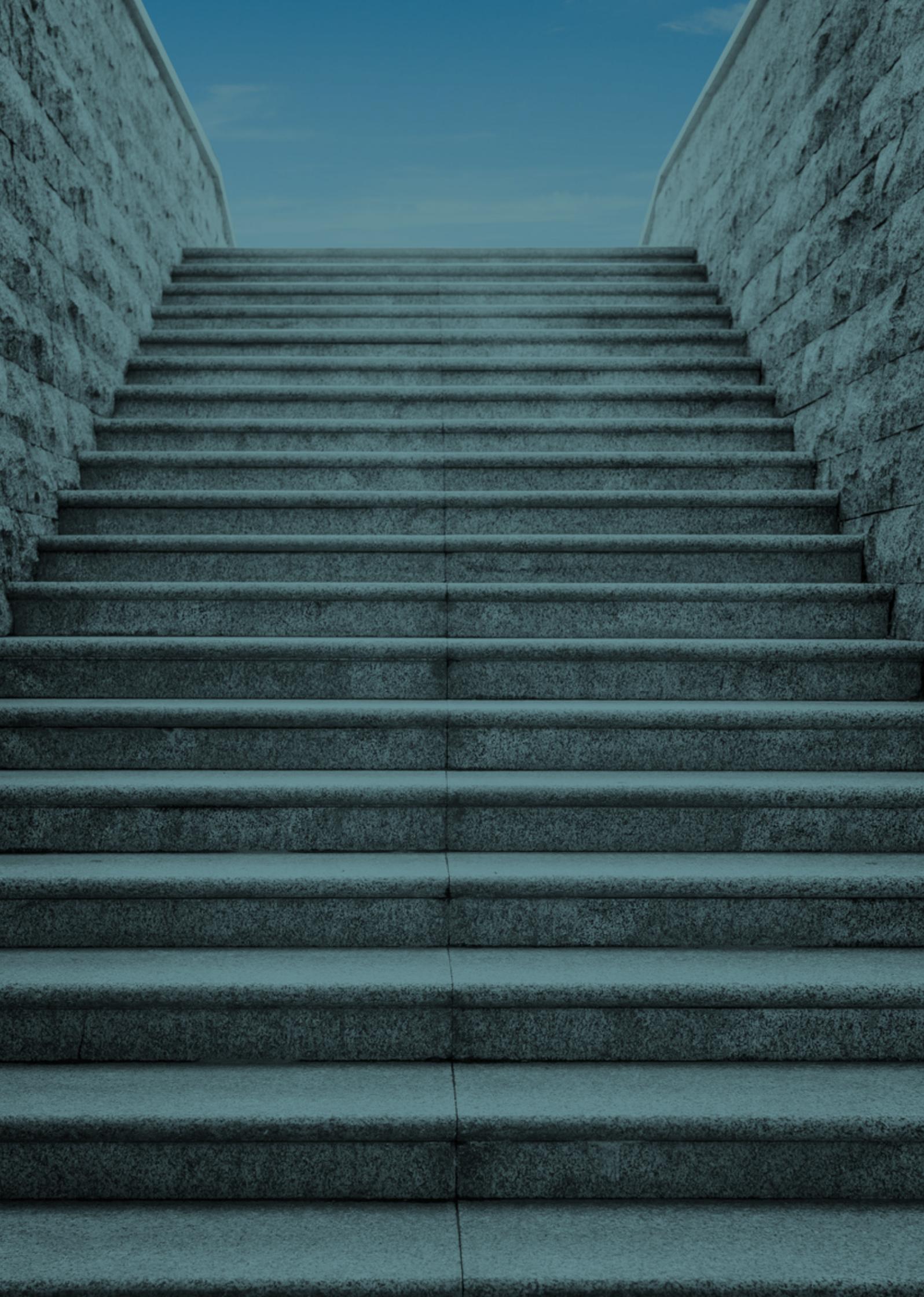
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Introduction

In recent years there has been a global shift in public policy, moving from traditional economic and output-based measures of government performance towards a more holistic focus on measures of wellbeing.

Governments are increasingly recognising that societal progress must be measured not only in material terms, but also by quality of life, mental and physical health, and other factors which determine the overall wellbeing of their citizens.

At Carnegie UK we refer to this approach as “working to improve our collective wellbeing.” We define this as everyone having what they need to live well now, and into the future.

We believe that collective wellbeing improves when social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing outcomes are seen as being equally important and are given equal consideration in policy making.

- **Social wellbeing:** We all have the support and services we need to thrive.
- **Economic wellbeing:** We all have a decent minimum living standard.
- **Environmental wellbeing:** We all live within the planet's natural resources.
- **Democratic wellbeing:** We all have a voice in decisions that affect us.

Embedding wellbeing into public policy is a complex, multi-dimensional process that requires a structured framework for change.

A maturity model provides a staged pathway for organisations and governments to assess their progress, identify gaps, and plan for next steps.

This document explores what a general maturity model for embedding wellbeing approaches in public policy might look like, outlining key stages, characteristics, and enablers at each point in the journey.



Understanding maturity models

A maturity model is a structured collection of elements that describe certain aspects of maturity in an organisation or process. It enables self-assessment, benchmarking, and guidance for deliberate improvement. In the context of wellbeing approaches in public policy, a maturity model helps governments progress from ad hoc, isolated initiatives to fully integrated, systemic, and sustainable approaches.

Embedding wellbeing approaches in public policy is a transformative journey, requiring sustained commitment, collaboration, and learning. A maturity model provides a valuable map for this journey, guiding governments from initial awareness to a culture where the promotion of collective wellbeing is central to all decision-making.

Stages of the wellbeing policy maturity model

A maturity model for embedding wellbeing in public policy can be conceptualised across five stages:

Stage 1: Awareness: stakeholders become aware of the importance of wellbeing as a public good.

Stage 2: Experimentation: government begins to pilot or trial wellbeing initiatives.

Stage 3: Integration: wellbeing is more systematically incorporated into policy design, delivery, and evaluation.

Stage 4: Alignment: wellbeing policy approaches are harmonised across all government departments, agencies, and policies, at all levels; there is alignment between political priorities, operational processes, and lived experience of citizens.

Stage 5: Systemic culture: wellbeing is fully embedded as a defining principle in the ethos, culture, and functioning of government, public bodies, and civil society.

Each stage builds upon the previous one, requiring new capabilities, shifts in mindsets, and the development of practices and processes that embed wellbeing deeper into the policy-making apparatus.

Stage 1: Awareness

At this foundational stage, the concept of wellbeing policy approaches is just entering government discourse. Decision-makers and stakeholders become aware of the importance of wellbeing as a public good, and initial conversations begin around measuring it and its potential value to policy governance.

Key features:

- Wellbeing is discussed primarily in informal settings or in response to external influences (e.g., international trends, academic research, civil society advocacy).
- There is limited or no formal recognition of wellbeing in public policy documents.
- No dedicated resources or structures exist for wellbeing initiatives.
- Existing policy is primarily evaluated by traditional economic or output-based metrics.

Enablers for progression:

- Raising awareness through education, training, and stakeholder engagement.
- Commissioning baseline research and evidence-gathering on the current state of population wellbeing.

Stage 2: Experimentation

In this stage, governments begin to pilot or trial wellbeing initiatives. The focus is on learning, testing, and exploring the integration of wellbeing concepts into selected policies or programmes.

Key features:

- Ad hoc pilot projects or initiatives are launched to test the relevance of wellbeing outcomes.
- Early adoption by “champions” within government, often in health, education, or social policy sectors.
- Some cross-sector partnerships may be established with the third sector, academia, or business.
- Emerging use of new wellbeing metrics or frameworks.
- Initial efforts to collect and report data on wellbeing indicators.

Enablers for progression:

- Evaluation and sharing of lessons learned from pilots.
- Targeted funding for experimentation.
- Building a community of practice among wellbeing champions.

Stage 3: Integration

At this level, wellbeing is more systematically incorporated into policy design, delivery, and evaluation. The focus shifts from isolated initiatives to a coordinated approach.

Key features:

- Government strategies or action plans formally reference wellbeing as a core objective.
- Development of common frameworks, indicators, and data collection systems to measure wellbeing outcomes.
- Wellbeing considerations are included in policy appraisal, budgeting, and resource allocation processes.
- Cross-departmental working groups or steering committees are established.
- Increased public consultation and partnership with civil society on wellbeing policy and on specific wellbeing outcomes and indicator sets.

Enablers for progression:

- Developing guidance for policymakers on how to incorporate wellbeing into their work.
- Investment in data infrastructure and analytical capacity.
- Leadership support at senior levels of government.

Stage 4: Alignment

Here, wellbeing policy approaches are harmonised across all government departments, agencies, and policies, at all levels. There is alignment between political priorities, operational processes, and lived experience of citizens.

Key features:

- Wellbeing objectives are fully integrated into national and subnational strategies, legislation, and statutory reporting.
- Performance management and accountability systems reflect wellbeing outcomes and there is a coherence between these systems and the overall wellbeing vision and goal(s).
- Budgeting and procurement processes are explicitly tied to wellbeing goals.
- Wellbeing outcomes are used to illuminate and explain difficult policy trade-offs.
- Robust interdepartmental and inter-agency coordination and shared accountability mechanisms are in place to govern contributions to shared outcomes.
- Ongoing dialogue with the public takes place, including marginalised or under-served communities, on what wellbeing means for them.

Enablers for progression:

- Developing robust incentives and accountability frameworks for wellbeing delivery.
- Capacity-building across all sectors and levels of government.
- Regular review and adaptation of wellbeing indicators and strategies.

Stage 5: Systemic culture

In the final stage, wellbeing is fully embedded in the ethos, culture, and functioning of government, public bodies and civil society. It is not an add-on, but a defining principle guiding all public policy.

Key features:

- Wellbeing is seen as central to the purpose of government and the social contract with citizens.
- Continuous co-design of policy with communities, stakeholders, and experts in the determinants of wellbeing.
- Resilient systems for learning, innovation, and adaptation based on wellbeing outcomes.
- Transparency and accountability to the public for wellbeing progress.
- International leadership and sharing of best practices in wellbeing policy.

Enablers for sustainability:

- Embedding wellbeing in legislation, institutional mandates and Parliamentary accountability.
- Culture of learning and improvement, driven by evidence and lived experience.
- Systematic investment in training, research, and evaluation.

Supporting elements of the maturity model

Several cross-cutting elements support progress across all stages:

- Leadership and governance: visible leadership commitment, clear governance structures, and accountable champions are essential.
- Measurement and data: reliable, timely, and meaningful data on wellbeing is fundamental for decision-making, evaluation, and accountability.
- Capacity and skills: policymakers, analysts, and implementers need training and resources to understand and apply wellbeing concepts.
- Public engagement: meaningful engagement with citizens ensures that wellbeing policy reflects real needs and aspirations.
- Partnerships: collaborations with academia, civil society, business, and international partners enrich policy development and delivery.

Benefits of a maturity model approach

Adopting a maturity model provides multiple benefits for governments and their partners:

- Clarifies the current state and future direction for embedding wellbeing approaches.
- Enables benchmarking and sharing of good practice within and across jurisdictions.
- Supports strategic planning and resource allocation.
- Facilitates continuous improvement and innovation in public policy.
- Strengthens trust and legitimacy in government by focusing on outcomes that matter to citizens.

Challenges and considerations

While the maturity model outlined in this paper offers a pathway, there are common challenges that arise across all aspects of this model:

- Shifting mindsets from traditional economic measures to broader wellbeing metrics.
- Working to build and ensure political will and continuity across electoral cycles.
- Developing the necessary professional skills, data systems, and partnerships.
- Addressing equity, diversity, and inclusion in wellbeing policy design and delivery.
- Avoiding “box-ticking” and ensuring genuine, transformative change remains at the heart of this agenda.



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