LEADERSHIP ICMA

2025-2026 COHORT | CAPSTONE PROJECT REPORT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CIP COMMITTEES

STRENGTHENING CAPITAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC TRUST

Leadership ICMA | 2025-2026 Cohort
Capstone Project Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local governments face similar challenges to modernize aging infrastructure, respond to evolving community needs, and deliver capital projects amid limited fiscal capacity. At the same time, expectations for transparency, equity, and defensibility in public investment decisions have increased. These conditions create a persistent governance challenge: how to prioritize capital investments in a way that is repeatable, aligned with elected officials' priorities, and grounded in professional judgment.

This Leadership ICMA capstone documents and evaluates Adams County, Colorado's approach to standing up and maturing an internal Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee. The Committee was created to replace decentralized and informal project selection practices with a structured, cross-departmental process for evaluating capital proposals and recommending a tiered program of investments. Importantly, the Committee was intentionally designed as an advisory and evaluative body, not a decision-making authority. Final decisions regarding project funding and adoption remain with executive leadership and the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC).

The guide is written for local government executives, department directors, budget and finance leaders, and capital program managers seeking to strengthen capital governance and public trust. It provides a practical model for forming a CIP Committee, designing an aligned scoring framework, applying scoring consistently, translating results into decision-ready recommendations, and evaluating program effectiveness over time.

Adams County's Model: What Was Built

Adams County's CIP Committee model integrates governance discipline with an applied, criteria-based scoring framework. The Committee established clear operating norms, cross-departmental membership, and a standardized workflow that emphasized independent scoring, structured calibration, and clear documentation of rationale. The process begins with a standardized project intake template that requires sponsors to provide a clear problem statement, scope, cost assumptions (including operating and replacement cost implications), schedule expectations, dependencies, statutory or safety drivers, and alignment with adopted priorities.

A defining feature of the framework is its explicit alignment with the BoCC's adopted goals and priority initiatives. The scoring model evaluates each project across six criteria:

- BoCC Goals and Priorities (cumulative alignment with goals and priority initiatives)

- Fiscal Impact (operational impacts, leverage of outside funding, and coordination value)
- Neighborhood and Economic Development (place-based outcomes, sustainability, and community need)
- County Services and Infrastructure (service levels, asset protection, sustainability)
- Public Health, Public Safety, IT Security, or Regulatory Risk (hazard mitigation and compliance)
- Implementation Risk (readiness to initiate work within the budget year)

Committee members score projects independently, then participate in calibration discussions focused on clarifying assumptions, interpreting criteria consistently, and documenting differences without forcing consensus. Scores are then translated into tiered recommendations (near-term capital program, strategic candidates, and future or concept-stage projects), paired with concise narrative summaries that highlight BoCC alignment, fiscal considerations, key risks, and constraints.

Outcomes and Key Lessons

The assessment presented in this capstone finds that the CIP Committee materially improved Adams County's capital planning governance over successive cycles. The strongest evidence of effectiveness is improved transparency and defensibility of recommendations, stronger alignment to BoCC goals, and improved project submission quality over time. The process also supported stronger cross-departmental coordination and increased trust among project sponsors, executive leadership, and decision-makers by shifting conversations from advocacy to tradeoffs.

Several lessons emerged as central to implementation success:

- Governance clarity matters early. Committees perform best when their advisory role is explicit and protected from political or outcome-driven pressure.
- Intake quality drives scoring quality. Standardized templates and clear minimum requirements reduce assumptions and improve fairness.
- Independent scoring before discussion protects integrity. Calibration should clarify reasoning and surface missing information, not manufacture agreement.
- Importance and readiness must be distinguished. Tiering allows strategically important but less-ready projects to remain visible without distorting near-term recommendations.
- Process maturity is iterative. Early friction and disagreements are predictable and can be leveraged as feedback to refine criteria, templates, and norms.

How Peer Jurisdictions Can Use This Guide

This document is designed as both a case study and a replicable playbook. Jurisdictions can use it to:

- Establish a CIP Committee charter, roles, and decision boundaries
- Build a scoring framework tied directly to elected officials' adopted goals and priorities
- Implement a disciplined intake, scoring, calibration, and tiering process
- Avoid common pitfalls such as over-engineering, advocacy-driven scoring, and readiness bias
- Evaluate the program's effectiveness over time using an external assessment lens focused on transparency, alignment, equity considerations, process maturity, and adaptability

The guide also outlines future refinement opportunities for Adams County, including deeper integration with asset management, earlier project shaping, targeted transparency enhancements, and institutionalization strategies that protect continuity across leadership transitions.

This capstone asserts that responsible capital planning is an expression of public trust. A well-structured CIP Committee does not eliminate discretion or politics, but it creates a disciplined governance framework in which professional judgment and elected priorities can be integrated more transparently, equitably, and sustainably over time.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

Local governments across the United States face increasing pressure to manage aging infrastructure, respond to community needs, and deliver capital projects within constrained fiscal environments. At the same time, expectations for transparency, equity, and accountability in public investment decisions have grown significantly. These pressures expose a persistent governance challenge: how to prioritize capital investments in a way that is disciplined, defensible, and aligned with elected officials' policy direction, while still respecting professional expertise and operational realities.

Historically, Adams County, Colorado relied on decentralized and largely informal approaches to capital project selection. While this flexibility allowed departments to respond to emerging needs, it also created inconsistencies in how projects were justified, compared, and advanced. Over time, this approach made it difficult to clearly demonstrate alignment between capital funding decisions and Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) goals, and it limited the County's ability to explain tradeoffs in a transparent and repeatable manner.

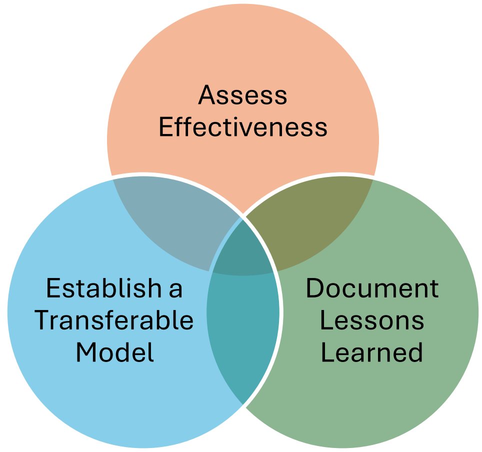
As the County grew in size, complexity, and regional influence, these limitations became more pronounced. Capital needs expanded across transportation, public facilities, parks, technology, and public safety, while available resources remained finite. In this context, reliance on informal prioritization methods posed risks to fiscal stewardship, organizational credibility, and public trust.

Recognizing these challenges, Adams County's Executive Leadership Team directed the creation of a formal internal Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee. The intent was not to centralize decision-making authority, but to institutionalize a structured, cross-departmental process for evaluating and prioritizing capital projects in alignment with adopted BoCC goals and priorities.

1.2 Project Purpose and Audience

This capstone project documents and evaluates the formation, implementation, and maturation of Adams County's internal CIP Committee. It examines how the Committee was structured, how its scoring framework was designed and refined, and how its work influenced capital budgeting practices over time.

The project serves three primary purposes:



1. To assess the effectiveness of the CIP Committee as a governance tool for capital planning, rather than as a technical scoring exercise alone.
2. To document lessons learned, course corrections, and indicators of organizational maturity that emerged through implementation.
3. To provide a transferable model that other jurisdictions can adapt when standing up or refining their own CIP committees.

Rather than focusing on individual project outcomes or financial performance, this capstone evaluates the Committee as an institutional system. The emphasis is on transparency, alignment with elected priorities, equity considerations, and the creation of a repeatable and resilient capital prioritization process.

1.3 Adams County as a Case Study

Adams County provides a practical and representative case study for examining internal CIP committee governance. As a large and growing county within the Denver metropolitan region, Adams County faces complex infrastructure demands, diverse community needs, and heightened competition for limited funding. At the same time, the County operates within governance and resource constraints typical of many local governments.

The County's experience is particularly instructive because the CIP Committee was implemented incrementally, refined over multiple cycles, and embedded within existing budget and leadership structures. This makes the case study less about idealized design and more about applied governance in a real-world environment.

While specific criteria and organizational details reflect local context, the underlying principles and lessons documented in this capstone are broadly applicable to cities and counties seeking to strengthen capital planning discipline and public trust.

SECTION II: GOALS, PRINCIPLES, AND DESIGN INTENT

2.1 Overall Goal of the CIP Committee Model

The overarching goal of Adams County's internal CIP Committee was to establish a structured, transparent, and policy-aligned process for capital investment prioritization. The Committee was designed to improve how capital projects are evaluated and recommended, not to replace executive or elected decision-making authority.

From a governance perspective, the goal was to mature the County's approach to capital planning by:

- Linking project evaluation directly to BoCC goals and priorities
- Improving consistency and clarity in project justification
- Strengthening fiscal stewardship and long-term planning discipline
- Enhancing organizational trust in the capital budgeting process

This capstone evaluates the extent to which those goals were achieved and sustained over time.

2.2 Specific Objectives of the Capstone

The objectives of this capstone project are analytical and practical in nature. They are intended to support both internal learning and external applicability. Specifically, the project seeks to:

Document the structure and governance of the CIP Committee	Describe how the Committee was formed, how roles and authority were defined, and how governance norms were established.
Assess the effectiveness of the scoring framework and intake process	Evaluate how well the criteria aligned with BoCC goals, fiscal considerations, community outcomes, risk, and implementation readiness.
Evaluate implementation experience and organizational learning	Identify challenges encountered during early cycles and assess how course corrections improved process performance.

Assess maturity and effectiveness over time	Examine whether the CIP Committee evolved into a repeatable, disciplined governance mechanism rather than a one-time initiative.
Develop a transferable model for peer jurisdictions	Examine whether the CIP Committee evolved into a repeatable, disciplined governance mechanism rather than a one-time initiative.

2.3 Design Intent and Guiding Principles

The CIP Committee and the evaluation documented in this capstone were guided by several core design principles:

- Technical evaluation and prioritization were intentionally separated from political decision-making.
- Processes and recommendations were designed to be explainable and repeatable, even when professional judgment was applied.
- Community outcomes and equity considerations were integrated into evaluation rather than treated as secondary factors.
- The framework was expected to evolve based on experience, feedback, and changing conditions.

These principles shaped both the Committee's work and the analytical lens applied throughout this capstone project.

SECTION III: COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE MODEL

3.1 Committee Purpose and Authority

At its core, an internal Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee exists to solve a very specific governance problem: how to translate strategic priorities, technical realities, and fiscal constraints into a coherent, defensible set of capital investment recommendations. In Adams County, the Committee was deliberately designed as an advisory and evaluative body, not a decision-making authority. That distinction proved essential.

The Committee's purpose was to evaluate proposed capital projects using standardized criteria and professional judgment, then present ranked and tiered recommendations to executive leadership. Final decisions regarding funding levels, timing, and inclusion in the adopted CIP remained the responsibility of the Executive Leadership Team and, ultimately, the Board of County Commissioners. This separation reinforced the legitimacy of the process and protected the Committee from being perceived as either political or outcome-driven.

Giving the Committee clarity of purpose early mattered. Without it, members can feel pressure to "solve" budget gaps, advocate for individual projects, or anticipate political preferences. Adams County avoided this by explicitly framing the Committee's role as follows:

- Evaluate projects consistently and transparently
- Apply adopted criteria faithfully
- Document rationale clearly
- Avoid advocacy for individual outcomes

For other jurisdictions, this is a critical early decision point. A CIP Committee that is perceived as making final funding decisions will struggle to maintain objectivity and trust. One that is clearly advisory, but professionally rigorous, creates value for both staff and elected officials.

3.2 Membership and Roles

Committee composition was intentionally cross-departmental. Adams County prioritized representation from departments with direct responsibility for planning, delivering, or maintaining capital assets, while also ensuring that no single department could dominate outcomes.

Membership generally included:

- Senior or mid-level managers with capital program responsibility
- Subject matter experts with technical or asset management knowledge
- Representatives with strong understanding of budgeting and fiscal constraints

Equally important was what membership was not. The Committee was not populated exclusively by executive leadership, nor was it limited to project sponsors. This balance helped ground discussions in both operational reality and countywide perspective.

Roles within the Committee were kept simple but explicit:

Committee Members	Committee Members were responsible for reviewing project materials, scoring independently, participating in calibration discussions, and documenting rationale.
Committee Chair or Facilitator	Committee Chair or Facilitator served as a neutral process steward, keeping discussions focused on criteria, managing time, and reinforcing norms.
Administrative or Budget Support	Administrative or Budget Support ensured scoring tools, schedules, and documentation were consistent and accessible.

In practice, a lesson from Adams County was the importance of selecting members who were comfortable with professional disagreement. Healthy friction improved outcomes. Overly deferential groups produced weaker calibration and less confidence in final scores.

Guide for other organizations:

> Choose members based on judgment, credibility, and willingness to engage constructively, not just title or tenure.

3.3 Governance Framework

A clear governance framework was essential to sustaining the Committee beyond its first cycle. Adams County established this framework through a combination of written guidance and consistently reinforced norms.

Key governance elements included:

Defined Operating Rules	Scoring criteria, scoring ranges, and definitions were documented and shared in advance. This reduced ambiguity and minimized mid-cycle reinterpretation.
Standardized Workflow	Project intake, review periods, scoring deadlines, and calibration sessions followed a predictable sequence. Predictability reduced staff anxiety and improved submission quality over time.
Decision Rules	Individual scores were recorded before group discussion. Calibration sessions focused on understanding variance, not forcing consensus.
Escalation and Clarification Paths	When project information was insufficient or disputed, the Committee paused scoring and requested clarification rather than guessing.

Just as important were the informal governance norms:

- Focus criticism on projects, not people
- Avoid advocacy language during scoring
- Document disagreements rather than smoothing them over

These norms were modeled consistently by leadership and the Committee chair. Over time, they became embedded expectations rather than rules that needed to be enforced.

For jurisdictions seeking to replicate this model, the takeaway is simple: governance is not just structure. It is behavior, repetition, and reinforcement. A CIP Committee that functions well in year one but lacks governance discipline will struggle to mature.

Section 3 Key Takeaways for Practitioners

- Clearly separate technical evaluation from political decision-making
- Design the Committee as advisory, not outcome-driven
- Prioritize cross-departmental credibility over hierarchy
- Invest early in governance clarity and behavioral norms

SECTION IV: PROJECT INTAKE AND SCORING FRAMEWORK

4.1 Project Intake Process

A disciplined scoring process begins well before any numbers are assigned. One of the earliest lessons from Adams County's experience was that project quality at intake largely determines scoring quality downstream. Vague, inconsistent, or incomplete submissions force committees to fill gaps with assumptions, which undermines both fairness and confidence in results.

To address this, Adams County implemented a standardized project intake process anchored by a required submission template. This template served two purposes. First, it created a consistent baseline of information for evaluators. Second, it pushed project sponsors to clarify scope, purpose, and readiness before entering the scoring cycle.

At a minimum, each project submission was required to include:

- Clear project purpose and problem statement
- Location and asset context
- Order-of-magnitude cost estimate with assumptions (including ongoing operating or replacement cost expenses)
- Schedule expectations and delivery risks
- Known dependencies or constraints
- Annotation of any statutory or safety requirements driving the need for the work
- Alignment with adopted priorities or plans

Early iterations of the template were intentionally simple. Over time, refinements were added as recurring gaps emerged, particularly around cost assumptions, right-of-way needs, and external coordination.

A critical design choice was resisting the urge to make the intake process overly complex. The Committee learned quickly that excessive upfront requirements discouraged participation and delayed submissions. The goal was not perfection, but sufficient clarity to support defensible scoring.

Guide for other organizations:

> Start with a lean intake template, then iterate annually based on what reviewers repeatedly ask for.

4.2 Scoring Criteria Design

One of the most consequential design decisions in Adams County's CIP scoring framework was the deliberate and explicit alignment of project evaluation criteria with the Board of County Commissioners' (BoCC) adopted goals and priorities. Rather than relying on generalized strategic language or implied values, the Committee anchored its highest-weighted criterion directly to the policy direction set by elected officials.

This approach served two purposes. First, it reinforced the legitimacy of the Committee's work by grounding technical evaluation in democratically established priorities. Second, it provided a clear and defensible answer to a question that frequently arises during budget deliberations: why one project advanced over another.

Criteria #1: Board of County Commissioners Goals and Priorities

The first and most foundational scoring criterion asked a simple but powerful question: How does the project help meet the goals or priorities of the Board of County Commissioners?

Projects were evaluated against the County's formally adopted BoCC goals and stated priority initiatives. Scoring was intentionally cumulative, allowing projects to demonstrate alignment across multiple goals rather than forcing artificial tradeoffs.

Scoring Guidelines

- 5 – The project meets five BoCC goals or priorities
- 3 – The project meets three BoCC goals or priorities
- 0 – The project does not meet any BoCC goals or priorities

BoCC Goals

Education and Economic Prosperity	Supporting educational outcomes, workforce readiness, and economic growth for residents and businesses.
High Performing, Fiscally Sustainable Government	Demonstrating responsible stewardship of public resources, transparency, innovation, and service excellence.
Quality of Life	Advancing inclusivity, health, safety, vibrancy, and overall wellbeing for County residents.
Safe, Reliable Infrastructure	Ensuring people and goods can move efficiently, affordably, and safely throughout the County.
Community Enrichment	Providing integrated services that protect vulnerable populations and strengthen community resilience.

BoCC Priority Initiatives

- Riverdale Regional Park
- Colorado Air and Space Port Master Plan
- Long-Term Recovery
- Baldrige Performance Excellence
- Adams County as an Employer of Choice
- Advancing Adams (Comprehensive Plan)

Committee members were expected to explicitly identify which goals or priorities a project advanced and document that alignment in scoring notes. This requirement significantly improved project narratives and reduced ambiguity during calibration discussions.

Practice insight:

> Projects that could clearly articulate alignment with multiple BoCC goals consistently scored higher and were easier to defend during executive and elected-level review.

Criteria #2: Fiscal Impact

This criterion evaluated how a project would affect the County's ongoing operational finances, not just its upfront capital cost. The Committee intentionally distinguished between capital affordability and long-term fiscal sustainability.

Scoring Guidelines

- 5 – The project results in a positive net fiscal impact through revenue generation, cost savings, leveraged outside funding, or coordinated delivery with other projects that creates measurable value.
- 3 – The project has a neutral operational impact. Operating costs neither increase nor decrease, and coordination with other projects does not create additional financial benefit.
- 0 – The project increases ongoing operational costs and does not leverage outside funding or coordinate with other efforts.

This criterion encouraged project sponsors to think beyond capital delivery and consider lifecycle costs, partnerships, and sequencing opportunities.

Criteria #3: Neighborhood and Economic Development

This criterion assessed how projects contributed to place-based outcomes, including economic vitality, neighborhood revitalization, sustainability, and direct community needs.

Scoring Guidelines

- 5 – The project clearly stimulates development or redevelopment, supports economic corridors, revitalizes neighborhoods, advances sustainability goals, or responds directly to a documented community need.
- 3 – The project may contribute to these outcomes, but impacts are uncertain or indirect.
- 0 – The project is unlikely to influence development, economic activity, sustainability, or community priorities.

Importantly, this criterion allowed non-economic projects to score well if they addressed clearly articulated community needs or sustainability goals.

Criteria #4: County Services and Infrastructure

This criterion focused on the County's core responsibility as a service provider and asset steward.

Scoring Guidelines

- 5 – The project improves or protects infrastructure, increases service levels, or directly meets sustainability goals.
- 3 – The project maintains existing infrastructure or service levels, or contributes incrementally to sustainability objectives.

- 0 – The project does not meaningfully affect infrastructure condition, service levels, or sustainability goals.

This distinction helped separate transformative investments from those intended primarily to preserve baseline functionality, without devaluing either.

Criteria #5: Public Health, Public Safety, IT Security, or Regulatory Risk

This criterion elevated projects that addressed known risks, rather than future aspirations.

Scoring Guidelines

- 5 – The project eliminates or prevents an existing public health, environmental, public safety, IT security, or regulatory hazard.
- 3 – The project partially mitigates an identified risk.
- 0 – The project does not address an existing hazard or compliance concern.

This criterion proved especially useful in ensuring that less visible but high-risk projects remained competitive within the program.

Criteria #6: Implementation Risk

The final criterion assessed readiness and feasibility, answering a critical execution question: What is the likelihood that this project can move forward within the next budget year if funded?

Scoring Guidelines

- 5 – Work could begin immediately. Procurement is complete or underway, and staffing capacity is available.
- 3 – Minor steps remain, such as procurement or staff availability later in the year.
- 0 – Significant barriers prevent work from starting within the next budget year.

This criterion allowed the Committee to distinguish between near-term deliverable projects and those that were strategically important but not yet executable.

Design Reflection

Together, these criteria created a balanced scoring framework that integrated policy alignment, fiscal stewardship, community outcomes, asset management, risk mitigation, and readiness. The Committee found that explicitly naming and defining each criterion reduced debate about *what mattered* and allowed discussions to focus on *how well projects delivered on those priorities*.

For other jurisdictions, the key lesson is not to replicate these exact criteria, but to ensure that whatever framework is used clearly and transparently reflects elected officials' goals and organizational values.

4.3 Scoring Mechanics

With scoring criteria clearly defined and aligned to BoCC goals and priorities, the Committee's next challenge was ensuring that scores were applied consistently, independently, and transparently. Adams County addressed this through a scoring process that deliberately balanced individual professional judgment with structured group calibration.

Each Committee member scored projects independently across all six criteria prior to any group discussion. This step was critical. Independent scoring preserved the integrity of individual judgment, reduced groupthink, and ensured that early voices did not disproportionately influence outcomes.

Once individual scores were submitted, results were compiled and reviewed to identify variance by criterion. Calibration sessions then focused on understanding *why* scores differed, rather than forcing convergence.

During calibration discussions, Committee members were expected to:

- Reference the adopted scoring definitions directly
- Identify assumptions or missing information
- Clarify how BoCC goals or priorities were being interpreted
- Distinguish between project importance and implementation readiness

Calibration was particularly important for Criteria #1 (BoCC Goals and Priorities), where projects often aligned with multiple goals in different ways. The Committee found that requiring scorers to explicitly name which goals or priorities were being met improved both consistency and documentation quality.

Notably, calibration did not require consensus. Persistent score differences were documented and carried forward. This approach reinforced credibility by acknowledging professional disagreement rather than obscuring it.

Over time, patterns in scoring variance revealed opportunities for improvement upstream. For example:

- Repeated disagreement on fiscal impact often pointed to weak cost assumptions
- Variance on implementation risk highlighted capacity or procurement blind spots

- Ambiguity around neighborhood and economic development signaled a need for clearer project narratives

These insights fed directly into refinements to the intake template and scoring guidance in subsequent cycles.

Practice insight:

> When calibration sessions run long, the issue is rarely the scorers. It is usually unclear criteria, incomplete project information, or both.

4.4 Translating Scores into Recommendations

While numeric scores provided analytical structure, Adams County was careful not to treat scoring outputs as a mechanical ranking exercise. Instead, the Committee translated scores into clear, tiered recommendations that reflected both fiscal reality and strategic intent.

Projects were grouped into tiers based on total score, performance across key criteria, and implementation readiness. Typical tiers included:

Near-Term Capital Program	Projects that scored strongly across BoCC alignment, fiscal impact, public safety or regulatory risk, and implementation readiness.
Strategic Candidates	Projects with strong alignment to BoCC goals and community outcomes, but with fiscal, readiness, or coordination constraints that required additional work.
Future or Concept-Stage Projects	Projects that addressed legitimate needs but lacked sufficient definition or feasibility to advance in the near term.

Tier placement was informed by scoring but not dictated by it. For example, a project with high alignment to BoCC goals but low implementation readiness was not discarded. Instead, it was placed in a strategic tier with clear documentation of what conditions needed to change for advancement.

Each recommended project grouping was accompanied by concise narrative summaries that included:

- Primary BoCC goals and priorities advanced

- Notable fiscal impacts or funding leverage
- Public safety, regulatory, or risk considerations
- Key implementation constraints or dependencies

This documentation proved invaluable during executive review and Board discussions. Rather than debating raw scores, leadership conversations focused on tradeoffs, sequencing, and fiscal capacity.

Importantly, the Committee explicitly acknowledged where professional judgment was applied beyond numeric scoring. This transparency reinforced trust and avoided the false impression that the CIP was driven solely by formulas.

Practice insight:

> Decision-makers do not need perfect precision. They need clarity, defensibility, and an honest presentation of tradeoffs.

Section 4 Key Takeaways for Practitioners

- Anchor scoring explicitly to adopted elected-official goals and priorities
- Require independent scoring before group discussion
- Use calibration to surface assumptions, not force agreement
- Treat fiscal impact and implementation risk as distinct from project importance
- Translate scores into tiers and narratives, not just rankings
- Document professional judgment rather than hiding it

SECTION V: IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE AT ADAMS COUNTY

5.1 First-Cycle Implementation

The first full CIP scoring cycle conducted under the new Committee structure marked a significant cultural shift for Adams County. For the first time, capital projects across departments were evaluated through a standardized, criteria-based process tied directly to Board priorities, fiscal impacts, and implementation risk. While the framework itself was sound, implementation revealed several predictable challenges.

One immediate challenge was uneven project readiness. Some departments were accustomed to developing capital projects over multiple years and entered the process with well-defined scopes, cost estimates, and delivery plans. Others were newer to formal capital programming and struggled to articulate projects at the level of detail required for consistent scoring.

A second challenge involved adjusting expectations around advocacy. Project sponsors were accustomed to defending projects through informal conversations or leadership relationships. The Committee process required a shift toward written justification and alignment with scoring criteria. This adjustment was uncomfortable for some but ultimately improved project clarity and fairness.

Time management emerged as a constraint. Early scoring and calibration sessions ran longer than anticipated as Committee members worked to align interpretations of criteria, particularly around BoCC goal alignment and fiscal impact. While this slowed the first cycle, it proved valuable in building shared understanding and long-term efficiency.

5.2 Lessons Learned and Course Corrections

Several important lessons emerged during and immediately after the first scoring cycle. Rather than treating these as failures, the Committee viewed them as signals for refinement.

Clarifying BoCC Alignment Early	Projects that clearly identified which BoCC goals and priorities they advanced scored more consistently and generated less debate. In response, later cycles required project sponsors to explicitly map their projects to specific goals and priorities as part of intake.

Separating Importance from Readiness	Early discussions occasionally conflated how important a project was with how ready it was to proceed. The introduction of a distinct implementation risk criterion helped correct this, allowing high-value but less-ready projects to remain visible without distorting near-term recommendations.
Strengthening Fiscal Narratives	Fiscal impact scoring exposed gaps in how projects described operating costs, cost avoidance, and funding leverage. This led to clearer guidance for sponsors on lifecycle considerations and coordination opportunities with other projects.
Normalizing Professional Disagreement	The Committee learned that disagreement was not a weakness of the process but a feature. Documenting unresolved scoring differences increased transparency and reduced pressure to manufacture consensus.

5.3 Organizational Impacts

Over time, the CIP Committee produced effects beyond the capital program itself. Project submissions improved. Sponsors became more disciplined in defining scope, articulating outcomes, and identifying risks. Cross-departmental coordination increased as staff recognized the scoring value of aligned timing and shared delivery.

Trust also improved. Executive leadership gained confidence that capital recommendations were defensible, repeatable, and aligned with Board direction. Departments, even when disappointed with outcomes, generally viewed the process as fair.

Perhaps most importantly, the Committee contributed to organizational maturity. Capital planning shifted from a reactive, negotiation-driven exercise to a structured conversation about priorities, tradeoffs, and long-term stewardship.

Section 5 Key Takeaways for Practitioners

- Expect uneven readiness in the first cycle and plan for iteration
- Require explicit mapping to elected priorities to reduce ambiguity
- Distinguish project importance from delivery feasibility
- Treat disagreement as diagnostic, not disruptive
- Use early friction to improve intake and criteria clarity

SECTION VI: EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

6.1 Purpose of Evaluation

This section presents an external, retrospective assessment of Adams County's internal Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee. The evaluation is examining the Committee's structure, processes, and outcomes over multiple budget cycles.

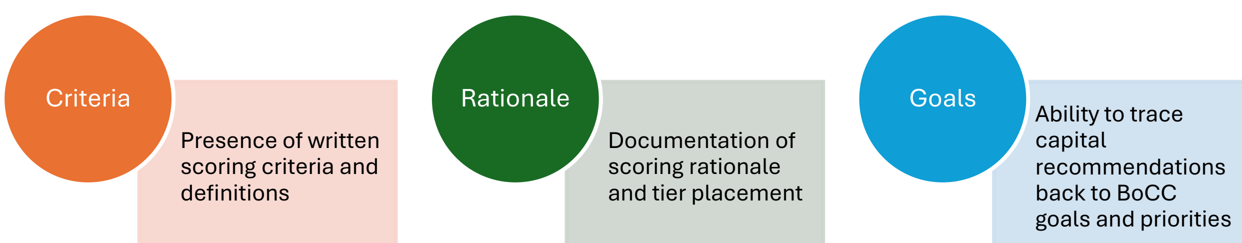
The purpose of this evaluation is to assess whether the CIP Committee has effectively improved the County's capital planning process by increasing transparency, strengthening alignment with Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) goals and priorities, supporting equitable and strategic investment decisions, and contributing to greater organizational maturity in capital budgeting. The evaluation focuses on process effectiveness and institutional outcomes, not on the technical merit or delivery success of individual capital projects.

6.2 Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework applied in this capstone draws from best practices in public-sector program assessment and capital planning literature. Five evaluation dimensions were used to assess the CIP Committee's effectiveness over time. These dimensions provide a structured lens for evaluating whether the Committee has functioned as intended and matured beyond its initial implementation.

Transparency and Defensibility

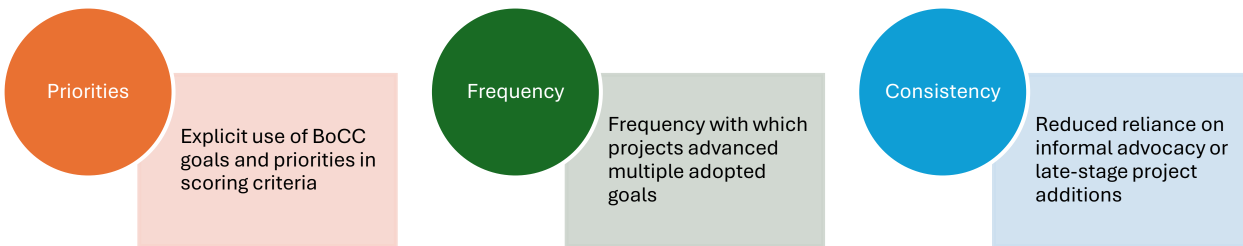
This dimension evaluates whether the Committee's processes and outputs are sufficiently clear, documented, and repeatable to be understood and defended by executive leadership and elected officials. Evidence considered includes:



Findings indicate that the Committee has materially improved the transparency and defensibility of capital recommendations compared to prior ad hoc approaches. While scoring discussions themselves are not public-facing, the rationale for recommendations is now clearer and more consistent.

Strategic Alignment with BoCC Goals and Priorities

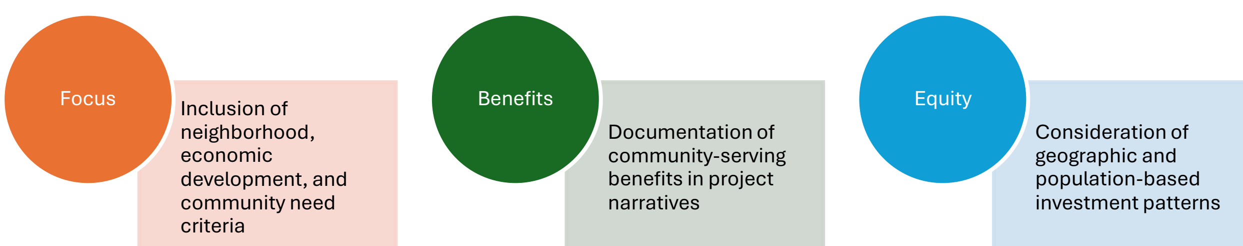
This dimension assesses whether the Committee's work consistently reflects the policy direction established by the Board of County Commissioners. Evaluation focused on:



The evaluation found strong alignment between scoring outcomes and BoCC priorities, particularly after early refinements that required project sponsors to explicitly map projects to adopted goals. This alignment strengthened leadership confidence in the Committee's recommendations.

Equity and Community Considerations

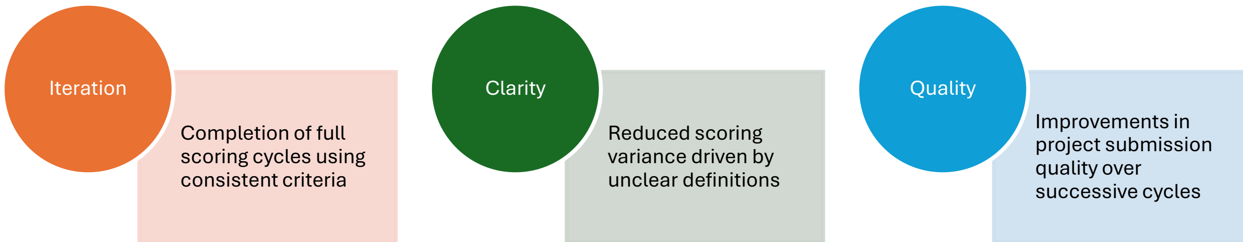
Rather than assessing equity through a single metric, this evaluation examined how equity and community outcomes were incorporated into project evaluation and decision-making. Evidence included:



The Committee's approach reflects a qualitative, values-based integration of equity considerations. While not fully quantified, equity functioned as an intentional evaluative lens rather than an afterthought.

Process Maturity and Consistency Over Time

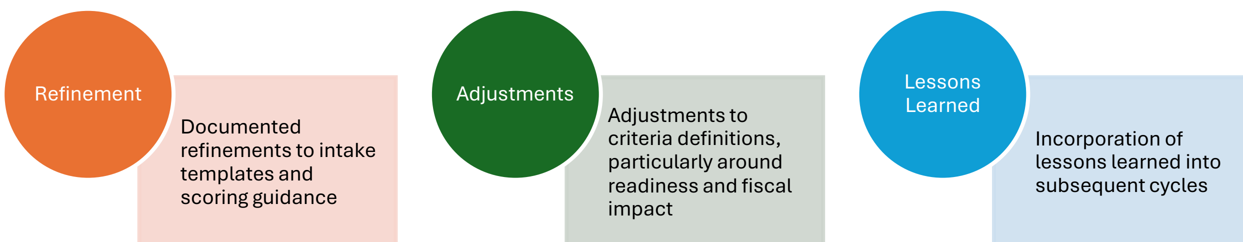
This dimension evaluates whether the CIP Committee evolved from a one-time initiative into a repeatable, disciplined governance process. Indicators reviewed include:



The evaluation indicates increasing process maturity. Early-cycle friction and extended calibration discussions declined as expectations, templates, and criteria were refined. This progression suggests institutional learning rather than static compliance.

Organizational Responsiveness and Adaptability

This dimension assesses the Committee's ability to respond to implementation challenges, feedback, and changing conditions. Evidence includes:



The Committee demonstrated meaningful adaptability, reinforcing its role as a learning system rather than a rigid control mechanism.

6.3 Evaluation Methods and Evidence Sources

This assessment relied on multiple qualitative evidence sources to triangulate findings:

- Review of CIP scoring rubrics, project submissions, and tiering summaries
- Comparison of capital programming practices before and after Committee formation
- Analysis of meeting materials, guidance documents, and post-cycle adjustments
- Practitioner observation of Committee workflows and calibration dynamics

These sources were evaluated collectively to identify patterns and trends rather than to draw conclusions from any single data point.

6.4 Limitations of the Evaluation

As with any practitioner-led case study, this evaluation has limitations. The analysis focuses on process and governance outcomes rather than quantitative performance measures such as cost overruns, delivery timelines, or post-construction benefits. Because the evaluation is context-specific, findings should be adapted thoughtfully rather than replicated wholesale by other jurisdictions.

These limitations are consistent with the project's intent: to assess institutional effectiveness and governance maturity, not to conduct a financial audit or performance evaluation of individual projects.

6.5 Evaluation Findings and Implications

Overall, the evaluation finds that Adams County's internal CIP Committee has materially improved the County's capital planning and prioritization process. The Committee has increased transparency, strengthened alignment with elected priorities, improved project quality, and contributed to greater organizational discipline in capital budgeting.

The most significant indicator of effectiveness is not any single metric, but the increased confidence expressed by leadership and staff in the fairness, clarity, and repeatability of the process. While opportunities for refinement remain, the Committee represents a meaningful advancement in the County's approach to responsible capital stewardship.

Section 6 Key Takeaways for Practitioners

- Evaluate CIP committees as governance systems, not scoring exercises
- Focus on transparency, alignment, and repeatability over numeric precision
- Use multiple qualitative evidence sources to assess effectiveness
- Expect maturity to develop over successive cycles
- Treat adaptability as a strength, not a deficiency

SECTION VII: TRANSFERABLE MODEL FOR OTHER JURISDICTIONS

7.1 Standing Up a CIP Committee: Step-by-Step

While the specific structure and criteria used by Adams County reflect local context, the underlying model is highly transferable. This section outlines a phased approach that other jurisdictions can adapt to their size, governance structure, and fiscal environment.

Step 1: Secure Executive and Elected Sponsorship

A CIP Committee must be anchored in clear leadership direction. Executive leadership should articulate the purpose of the Committee, confirm its advisory role, and explicitly tie it to the elected body's adopted goals and priorities. Without this sponsorship, scoring frameworks risk being viewed as technical exercises rather than governance tools.

Step 2: Define the Committee's Role and Authority

Before selecting members, organizations should define what the Committee will and will not do. Clear boundaries between technical evaluation and political decision-making are essential. Written guidance, even if brief, helps prevent mission creep and protects the Committee's credibility.

Step 3: Establish Membership and Operating Norms

Membership should be cross-departmental and include individuals with capital program experience, fiscal awareness, and credibility within the organization. Early agreement on norms, including independent scoring, documentation of rationale, and respectful disagreement, sets the tone for long-term success.

Step 4: Pilot the Process and Expect Friction

The first cycle should be treated as a pilot. Time pressure, uneven project readiness, and calibration challenges are normal. Organizations should plan for post-cycle adjustments rather than aiming for immediate perfection.

7.2 Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

The evaluation of Adams County's experience surfaced several common failure modes that are not unique to this case.

Over-Engineering the Framework

Complex scoring systems can create false precision and discourage participation. Start with a manageable number of criteria and expand only when necessary.

Allowing Advocacy to Creep into Scoring

Committees lose credibility when members advocate for specific projects during scoring. Reinforcing the distinction between evaluation and decision-making is critical.

Conflating Readiness with Importance

Highly important projects that are not yet ready should remain visible through tiering or pipeline tracking, rather than being excluded.

Under-Investing in Project Intake

Weak intake materials lead to scoring disputes and frustration. Clear templates and expectations improve outcomes more than additional scoring categories.

Failing to Close the Feedback Loop

Committees that do not document lessons learned or refine their process risk stagnation.

7.3 Scaling the Model

The core elements of the CIP Committee model can be adapted across jurisdictions of different sizes and capacities.

Smaller Jurisdictions

Smaller cities or counties may rely on fewer committee members and simpler scoring tools. The key is maintaining separation between evaluation and decision-making, even if individuals wear multiple hats.

Larger or Fast-Growing Jurisdictions

Larger organizations may require subcommittees, pre-screening phases, or category-specific scoring. Consistency and calibration become more important as scale increases.

Regional or Multi-Agency Contexts

For regional collaborations, shared criteria tied to mutually adopted goals can support joint prioritization while respecting local autonomy.

7.4 Signals of a Mature CIP Committee

Across jurisdictions, certain indicators suggest that a CIP Committee has moved beyond early-stage implementation:

- Project submissions consistently meet intake expectations
- Calibration discussions are focused and efficient
- Leadership relies on the process rather than bypassing it
- Projects are discussed in terms of tradeoffs, not entitlement
- The process survives leadership transitions with minimal disruption

These signals matter more than the sophistication of scoring tools.

Section 7 Key Takeaways for Practitioners

- Start with leadership clarity, not scoring mechanics
- Align criteria directly to adopted policy priorities
- Treat the first cycle as a learning exercise
- Keep the framework as simple as possible, but no simpler
- Use tiering to preserve strategic flexibility

SECTION VIII: NEXT STEPS FOR ADAMS COUNTY

8.1 Advancing Committee Maturity

While the internal CIP Committee has materially improved Adams County's capital planning process, continued refinement will be necessary to sustain and deepen its value over time. As the process matures, the focus should shift from establishing structure to strengthening integration, foresight, and resilience.

One near-term opportunity is deeper integration with asset management practices. As condition data, lifecycle models, and maintenance histories become more robust, the Committee can further ground scoring in objective asset performance. This would strengthen Criteria related to infrastructure condition, fiscal impact, and public safety without adding unnecessary complexity.

Another area for advancement is early project shaping. Currently, many projects enter the scoring cycle once a need has already been defined. Introducing light-touch pre-screening or concept-stage review could help departments refine scope, clarify alignment with BoCC goals, and identify delivery constraints earlier in the process. This would reduce downstream scoring friction and improve overall program coherence.

The Committee may benefit from periodic calibration refreshes. As membership evolves, short annual refresh sessions on scoring definitions and expectations can preserve consistency and institutional memory.

8.2 Governance and Transparency Enhancements

As confidence in the CIP Committee grows, Adams County has an opportunity to further strengthen transparency without compromising professional judgment.

One potential enhancement is the development of a public-facing CIP summary that explains how projects are prioritized, what criteria are used, and how BoCC goals shape recommendations. This need not disclose detailed scoring discussions, but it can reinforce public trust and understanding of tradeoffs.

The County could formalize an annual after-action review of the CIP process. A short, structured review documenting what worked, what changed, and what is planned for the next cycle would reinforce learning and accountability while minimizing administrative burden.

Board education is another opportunity area. Periodic briefings that explain how scoring criteria align with adopted goals and how tiering reflects fiscal capacity can reduce pressure for ad hoc adjustments late in the budget process.

8.3 Strengthening Equity and Community Outcomes

While equity considerations are embedded in the current scoring framework, Adams County may wish to continue refining how community impacts are assessed and communicated. Potential next steps include:

- More explicit documentation of how projects address historically underserved areas
- Clearer articulation of community-serving benefits in project narratives
- Use of simple, high-level indicators to track geographic or demographic investment patterns over time

These refinements should emphasize clarity and intent rather than additional scoring complexity. Equity is best advanced through thoughtful framing and accountability, not by adding opaque metrics.

8.4 Institutionalization and Continuity

Perhaps the most critical next step is ensuring that the CIP Committee remains effective through leadership transitions, budget cycles, and changing organizational priorities.

Institutionalization strategies may include:

- Maintaining a clear, written Committee charter and scoring guidance
- Developing onboarding materials for new Committee members
- Embedding the Committee's role into the annual budget calendar
- Ensuring succession planning for facilitation and coordination roles

The ultimate test of success will be whether the process continues to function well without reliance on specific individuals. A CIP Committee that endures leadership change is one that has truly become part of the organization's governance fabric.

Section 8 Key Takeaways for Practitioners

- Shift from process establishment to process integration
- Strengthen links between asset management, capital planning, and fiscal strategy
- Improve transparency through explanation, not oversharing
- Continue advancing equity through clarity and accountability
- Focus on continuity to protect long-term value

SECTION IX: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLECTION

9.1 Ethical Framework and Research Context

This capstone project examines the formation and operation of an internal Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee within Adams County. While the project does not involve experimental research or human subjects in a traditional academic sense, it does engage with internal governance processes, organizational decision-making, and professional judgment. As such, ethical considerations remain central to the integrity of the work.

The ethical framework for this project is grounded in principles commonly applied to practitioner-led program evaluation, including transparency of purpose, responsible use of internal information, protection of individual participants, and clear differentiation between analysis and advocacy. The intent is not to critique individuals or second-guess political decisions, but to assess institutional design and effectiveness in a manner that supports learning and improvement.

9.2 Role of the Practitioner-Researcher

The author occupied a dual role as both a County employee involved in the CIP process and a practitioner-researcher evaluating that process through this capstone. This dual role provides valuable access and contextual understanding, while also introducing the potential for bias.

To mitigate this risk, the project relies on documented artifacts, observed patterns over time, and alignment with established best practices in public administration and capital planning. Findings are grounded in process outcomes and governance structures rather than personal perspectives or individual performance. Where professional judgment is applied, it is explicitly acknowledged rather than implied.

This reflexive approach is intended to ensure that the analysis remains balanced, credible, and useful to both Adams County and peer jurisdictions.

9.3 Informed Participation and Use of Internal Materials

The project draws on internal documents such as scoring rubrics, intake templates, and process guidance that are part of Adams County's routine capital planning activities. These materials are used solely for the purpose of evaluating institutional processes and are not disclosed in a manner that reveals sensitive, proprietary, or personnel-related information.

Where practitioner observations or informal discussions informed the analysis, they are presented in aggregated or generalized form. No individual statements are attributed by name, and no participant was required to contribute beyond their normal professional role.

9.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Protecting the confidentiality of individuals involved in the CIP process was a guiding principle throughout the project. The capstone does not identify specific staff members, departments, or project sponsors in a way that could reasonably be interpreted as evaluative of individual performance.

Descriptions of challenges, disagreements, or course corrections are framed at the system level rather than the personal level. This ensures that the focus remains on governance design and process effectiveness rather than on assigning responsibility or blame.

9.5 Ethical Boundaries and Limitations

The project intentionally avoids several areas that would raise ethical or professional concerns, including:

- Evaluation of individual project delivery outcomes
- Assessment of elected officials' budgetary decisions
- Attribution of success or failure to specific individuals

These boundaries reinforce the project's purpose as an institutional case study rather than an audit, performance review, or political analysis.

The project acknowledges the inherent limitation of practitioner-led evaluation. While proximity to the subject matter enables depth and nuance, it also necessitates caution in interpretation and claims of generalizability. Readers are encouraged to adapt lessons thoughtfully rather than apply them wholesale.

9.6 Professional Reflection

From a professional leadership perspective, this capstone reinforces several broader lessons about governance and stewardship in local government. Structured processes matter not because they eliminate discretion, but because they clarify where discretion should be exercised. Transparency builds trust not through exposure of every detail, but through consistency and defensibility. Equity is advanced not through slogans or formulas, but through intentional framing and accountability.

Perhaps most importantly, the work of standing up and sustaining a CIP Committee is an exercise in humility. No framework is perfect. No scoring system captures every nuance. The value lies in creating a process that can learn, adapt, and endure.

Section 9 Key Takeaways for Practitioners

- Practitioner-led evaluation requires explicit ethical boundaries
- System-level analysis protects individuals while strengthening institutions
- Transparency and humility are complementary, not competing, leadership values
- The credibility of a CIP process rests as much on how it is evaluated as how it is designed

SECTION X: CONCLUSION

The formation and maturation of Adams County's internal Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee represents a meaningful shift in how the County approaches capital investment decision-making. By moving from informal, decentralized prioritization toward a structured, transparent, and policy-aligned process, the County strengthened its ability to steward public resources responsibly in an increasingly complex fiscal and political environment.

This capstone demonstrates that the value of a CIP Committee lies not in the precision of its scoring formulas, but in the clarity of its purpose and the discipline of its governance. When capital projects are evaluated against adopted Board goals, fiscal impacts, community outcomes, risk, and readiness, conversations shift from advocacy to tradeoffs. That shift is essential for maintaining trust between staff, executive leadership, elected officials, and the public.

> The value of a CIP Committee lies not in the precision of its scoring formulas, but in the clarity of its purpose and the discipline of its governance.

Equally important, the Adams County experience shows that effective capital governance is iterative. Early friction, disagreement, and course correction were not signs of failure, but indicators of organizational learning. Over time, improvements in project intake, scoring consistency, and documentation contributed to greater confidence in the process and higher-quality capital recommendations.

While this capstone is grounded in a specific county context, the lessons it offers are broadly applicable. Jurisdictions of varying size and capacity can adapt the core principles documented here: clear separation of roles, explicit alignment with elected priorities, disciplined evaluation, and a willingness to refine processes over time. A well-designed CIP Committee does not eliminate judgment or politics, but it creates a framework within which both can be exercised more responsibly.

Responsible capital planning is an expression of public trust. The work of standing up and sustaining a CIP Committee is not simply a technical exercise, but a leadership commitment to transparency, equity, and long-term stewardship. As local governments face growing infrastructure needs and constrained resources, disciplined capital governance will remain a defining element of effective public management.