New Zealand Government

INTERNAL AFFAIRS
Te Tari Taiwhenua

Top 10 Lessons Learned from ICT-enabled Projects and Programmes and GCIO ICT Assurance Expectations

These lessons learned are based on analysis of the findings and recommendations from eight reviews of ICT-enabled projects and programmes. Lessons learned are grouped by category (based on the Gateway Lessons Learned themes) and ranked in order based on a count of the number of lessons learned for each category. We have mapped the GCIO's ICT assurance expectations to each category to assist agencies in understanding how to apply the principles of the All-of-Government ICT Projects and Programmes Assurance Framework and avoid some common pitfalls.

#	Category	ICT-enabled Projects and Programmes Lessons Learned	GCIO ICT Assurance Expectations
1	Governance	• The right mix of skills and experience at the governance level is vital to hold the project team accountable, including consideration of appropriately skilled people from other public sector agencies and external advisors. • Progress reports to the governance body should cover all key aspects of the project / programme to enable effective decision making. Ensure that progress against the critical path is evident.	• Assurance plans must clearly state assurance roles and responsibilities at the governance level. • The assurance plan must be signed off by the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and endorsed by the governance body and GCIO ICT Assurance. For high risk / high value projects and programmes, the assurance plan should be endorsed by the Chief Executive (CE). • The terms of reference for the governance body must include assurance roles and responsibilities and be signed off. • Progress against the assurance plan must be reported to the governance body on a regular basis (i.e. as a standing agenda item). • Assurance reports must be provided to the governance body in full. For high risk / high value projects and programmes, assurance reports should be sent to the CE as a matter of course.
2	Programme and Project Planning	• Establish formal stage gates for key decision points within the project / programme where ongoing viability and alignment to strategic objectives is assessed before moving into subsequent stages. These should include clearly defined off-ramps in the event a project is no longer viable, particularly with respect to commercial agreements.	• The business case and project plan must include formal stage gates and off-ramps. • Assurance activities must be scheduled prior to each stage gate / phase end. • Significant changes to the project / programme scope must trigger a review of the assurance plan by the governance body and GCIO ICT Assurance.
3	Sourcing Strategy	• Ensure external vendors are clear on the scope and how their deliverables will contribute towards the outcomes desired. • Avoid entering into contracts with significant 'agree to agree' provisions, particularly those related to the definition of requirements. • Ensure vendors are overseen closely and if performance issues are being experienced address these early.	• Assurance plans must cover the end-to-end supply chain with specific assurance activities related to key vendors. • High risk / high value projects and programmes with significant procurement activity must consider an independent probity audit. • External assurance providers for Independent Quality Assurance (IQA) / Technical Quality Assurance (TQA) must be subject to formal procurement processes. • Terms of reference for IQA / TQA for all high risk / high value ICT-enabled projects and programmes must be endorsed by GCIO ICT Assurance.
4	Stakeholder Engagement	• Establish a stakeholder engagement group between key stakeholders to ensure their needs are understood and use this as a forum for communication.	• Assurance plans must cover customer / cross-agency / sector impacts and engagement where the programme goes beyond the boundaries of the lead agency.
5	Management of Change	• Involve relevant users of the service or system in the development of requirements, testing and implementation, in a meaningful way.	• Assurance plans must cover business change management with specific assurance activities related to organisational change impact and change readiness.

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6	Risks and Issues	• Establish a separate risks and issues management plan with early identification of risks documented. • Revisit risks with the governance body at regular intervals to ensure they are being managed to acceptable levels for the organisation.	• Assurance plans must be risk-based; there should be a clear link between the strategic and delivery risks to achieving benefits and the detailed assurance activities. • The impact of any new risks or significant changes to existing risks must be considered from an assurance perspective.
7	Resourcing	• The assignment of appropriately experienced and skilled 'professional' project / programme managers in key roles is essential. • If resource capability is not working out, manage this closely to replace with more appropriate resources. • Ensure resource requirements are identified at the outset and that demand, supply and management of resource risks are included in the resource management strategy.	• Assurance plans must be fully funded and resourced. • Assurance plans must include estimated assurance costs and state whether these have been budgeted for in the business case. • The terms of reference for IQA / TQA must be specific about the skills and experience required of the provider personnel.
8	Business Case	• The business case needs to adequately address technology and risks.	• Agencies must follow the Treasury Better Business Case (BBC) framework for all projects requiring cabinet approval; however, BBC can and should be adopted as a best practice framework for all projects. • All business cases must be supported by an assurance plan. • Prior to any investment decision, all monitored projects must have an IQA performed that includes all the project artefacts. High risk / high value projects and programmes are also subject to Gateway review.
9	Programme and Project Management	• The adoption of a formal project / programme methodology is an important starting point. However, project / programme management discipline needs to be applied firmly and consistently to maintain control.	• Assurance plans must include a detailed schedule of the assurance activities to be undertaken during the project / programme life-cycle. This should include assurance activities related to: - Critical milestones / decision points / contract stage gates. - Ongoing assurance activities (e.g. project health checks). - Key dependencies. • Assurance plans should be reviewed and updated every six months. • Issues raised in assurance reports must be logged and tracked until they are completed; the status of issues should be reported to the governance body and CE on a regular basis.
10	Transition into Service / Testing	• The testing team need a clear communication to the governance body that is separate from the delivery arm of the project. This will ensure quality issues can be raised effectively.	• Go-live assurance plans must be completed prior to go-live and approved by the SRO and endorsed by the governance body. Go-live assurance plans should: - Summarise the results of assurance activities performed (including Gateway 4 'Readiness for Service' if required) and any outstanding issues. - Plans in place to manage the transition into service e.g. cutover plan, business continuity plan, etc.