

ASSURANCE GUIDANCE

BETTER INFORMATION, BETTER CONVERSATIONS, BETTER DECISIONS



What is Assurance?

Assurance is an independent and objective assessment that provides valuable information for decision-making by giving a level of confidence as to whether business outcomes will be achieved.

Guiding Principles:

Assurance should align with the following guiding principles:

- ✓ *Be risk and value-based*
- ✓ *Be impartial and independent*
- ✓ *Be planned from the outset of the project or programme*
- ✓ *Be forward looking by providing an assessment of 'Delivery Confidence'*
- ✓ *Be conducted to inform key decisions*
- ✓ *Be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose.*

INDEPENDENT ASSURANCE REPORTS: TERMS OF REFERENCE [What you ask for is what you get]

As the complexity and risks of ICT-enabled programmes and projects continues to grow, the importance of a well developed terms of reference is critical to ensuring that investors are provided with high quality assurance reports.

At a system level, the System Assurance team has the lead role in ensuring the quality of assurance services provided to agencies by third party providers. As part of this role, we review the quality of terms of reference for high risk programmes and projects.

This guidance is drawn out of the 'lessons learned' from our reviews of the quality of terms of reference. It sets out the characteristics of what a good terms of reference looks like and is based on the GCIO's quality standards.

We encourage agencies to talk with the System Assurance team to benefit from the learnings of our scanning across the system.

What does a good terms of reference look like?

1. Be clear about the purpose (objectives) and outcomes required of the review—avoid a long list of objectives and ensure they are focused, unambiguous and pertinent to the current phase of the project or programme.
2. Frame the terms of reference around specific risks—insist on a tailored and insightful review that assesses the impact of these risks.
3. Think about the questions that you want answered by the review—what areas of concern have been raised by the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and other key stakeholders and how will these be answered by the review.



GCIO Assurance Services Panel:

The GCIO Assurance Services Panel (provides agencies with access to 26 highly qualified providers of Independent Quality Assurance (IQA) and Technical Quality Assurance (TQA) services for ICT-enabled projects and programmes.

The objective of the panel is to improve the quality, consistency and independence of Assurance Services provided to government agencies.

The GCIO Panel is mandated for all Public Service and non-Public Service departments as well as ACC, EQC, HNZC, NZTA, NZTE, NZQA, TEC and the 20 DHBs. Other agencies are encouraged and welcome to opt-in at any time.

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4. Be clear about the scope and more importantly what is out of scope.
5. Consider the particular skills and experience you want in a Lead Reviewer / review team and ensure that they have the requisite subject matter knowledge and expertise for the review.
6. Ensure the deliverables are clearly defined in the terms of reference—in particular, how will delivery confidence be assessed and recommendations prioritised? Refer to the GCIO Report Rating System for guidance if you don't have your own rating system.
7. Ensure the terms of reference is approved at an appropriate level within the organisation—this should be the SRO or equivalent e.g. Head of Risk and Assurance or Head of relevant Enterprise Portfolio or Programme Management Office.

Quality review and support

System Assurance has published a Terms of Reference Quality Review Checklist that you can use to do your own self-assessment of the quality of the terms of reference.

If the terms of reference does not meet these important standards then talk with your reviewer and have them make the necessary changes before approving the terms of reference. We recommend that you do this at before the start of fieldwork.

You can also contact the System Assurance team if you have any questions about the quality of the terms of reference.

Additional resources

Additional resources are available on the [GCIO's website](https://www.ict.govt.nz/ict-system-assurance/gcio-assurance-services-panel/gcio-sub-panel-additional-resources/) (<https://www.ict.govt.nz/ict-system-assurance/gcio-assurance-services-panel/gcio-sub-panel-additional-resources/>) including:

- ✓ GCIO Assurance Services Guide
- ✓ GCIO Terms of Reference Quality Checklist
- ✓ GCIO Terms of Reference Template
- ✓ GCIO Report Rating System

Contact us

If you have any questions about this guidance or the GCIO Panel, email us at:

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