



Government Chief Digital Officer Assurance Services Panel

The Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) Assurance Services Panel (GCDO Panel) makes it easy for agencies to access highly qualified providers of assurance services for digital investments.

Benefits

The objective of the GCDO Panel is to improve the quality, consistency and independence of assurance services provided to agencies in order to achieve the following outcomes:

- Helping agencies to make better informed investment decisions
- Providing confidence to the Chief Executive and other key stakeholders that the expected investment outcomes and benefits will be achieved
- Delivering value for money and efficiencies for agencies by not having to maintain their own panels or perform lengthy tender processes.

Our definition of assurance...

“An independent and objective assessment that provides credible information to support decision-making.”

Government Chief Digital Officer System Assurance Team

New Zealand Government

Who has to use the GCDO Panel?

The following agencies are required to use the GCDO Panel for Independent Quality Assurance (IQA) and Technical Quality Assurance (TQA) services for digital investments regardless of whether the investment is high-risk or not:

- Public service departments
- Non-public service departments
- District Health Boards
- Certain crown entities (ACC, EQC, NZQA, NZTA, HNZA, NZTE, TEC).

Other agencies are encouraged and welcome to use the GCDO Panel.

IQA services available—Portfolio assurance, Programme assurance, Project assurance

TQA services available—Technical design assurance, Technical implementation assurance

How do I access the GCDO Panel?

The GCDO Panel is a sub-panel under MBIE's All-of-Government (AoG) Consultancy Services Panel (AoG Consultancy Panel). Agencies that are eligible to participate in AoG contracts can automatically access the GCDO Panel provided they have signed up for the AoG Consultancy Panel.

Further information on the AoG Consultancy Panel can be found on MBIE's website under contracts www.procurement.govt.nz.

Selecting a provider

Providers appointed to the GCDO Panel must meet the GCDO's quality requirements covering:

- Lead Reviewers responsible for delivering assurance engagements
- Engagement terms of reference
- Maintaining the independence of providers
- Assurance reports.

You can choose to source a provider directly from the GCDO Panel or undertake a secondary selection process. In making this decision consider the budget, timeframes, specific nature of your requirements and any existing or past relationships as well as any internal financial delegations and processes your agency may have.

A secure web-based online panel directory is available to assist you with searching for and identifying a suitable provider for your assurance engagement. You are able to search by IQA/TQA assurance services category, GCDO quality rating, AoG tier status and daily rate range.

The online panel directory is only available to agencies participating in MBIE's AoG Consultancy Panel. You should contact your approved agency procurement representative to obtain the login details for your agency.

Contact us

The GCDO Panel Manager can be contacted for queries, advice and guidance at gcdopanelmanager@dia.govt.nz

Additional guidance and templates can be found on the GCDO's website:

<https://www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/governance/system-assurance/all-of-government-portfolio-programme-and-project-assurance-framework/Guidance-and-templates/>



Lessons Learned from System Assurance

The System Assurance team plays a key role in ensuring the quality of assurance services provided to agencies by third party assurance providers.

As part of this role, we review the quality of terms of reference and assurance reports for high risk digital investments. We have identified the following lessons learned from our reviews to help you avoid some of the common pitfalls that we see.

Assurance engagement terms of reference

As the complexity and risks of digital investments continues to grow, the importance of a well-developed engagement terms of reference is critical to ensure high quality assurance reports.

- Be clear about the purpose of the review – avoid a long list of objectives and ensure they are focused, unambiguous and pertinent to the current delivery phase.
- Frame the terms of reference around specific risks – insist on a tailored and insightful review that assesses the impact of these risks on outcomes.
- Think about the questions that you want answered by the review – what areas of concern have been raised by the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) and other key stakeholders and how will these be answered by the review.
- Be clear about the scope and more importantly what is out of scope.

- Consider the particular skills and experience you want in a Lead Reviewer and/or review team and ensure that they have the requisite subject matter knowledge and expertise for the review. For example, do they have experience in the delivery methodology?
- 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 GCDO's Report Rating System if you don't have your own.
- 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 Internal Audit or Head of relevant Enterprise Portfolio or Programme Management Office.

Assurance report executive summaries

The executive summary may be the only part of an assurance report the SRO or governance body reads, so it is critical that it contains what they need to know to make well informed decisions.

- An assurance report should always have an executive summary. A summary of findings, introduction or background are not the same as or an alternative to the executive summary.
- Language should be targeted for the audience – independent assurance reviews are typically for senior executives so executive summaries should be brief and to the point i.e. what are the key messages and avoid technical language and terminology.
- Don't just 'cut and paste' findings and recommendations from the body of the report – it doesn't always tell the entire story about delivery confidence – reference sections in the report where necessary.

- There should always be an assessment of delivery confidence – this helps the reader to quickly determine the level of confidence in the project or programme to successfully deliver based on the next significant milestone.
- The purpose and scope of the review should be clear – what are the questions being asked by the review or the areas of concern identified by key stakeholders; what's in scope (and what's not) and why.
- The major findings that are most relevant to the review should be outlined – these should be evidence-based and well reasoned.
- The key recommendations should be outlined – these are the recommendations that will 'make the difference'; don't concern the governance body with low priority recommendations
- The key decisions required should be outlined including when these decisions are required by – prioritise and timeline the decisions for the governing body.
- Ensure the SRO includes a management response to accept the findings or to record if there is a disagreement over a finding or recommendation.

Related tools and templates

- GCDO Assurance Services Guide
- Terms of Reference Template
- Terms of Reference Quality Review Checklist
- GCDO Report Rating System
- Assurance Report Quality Review Checklist

