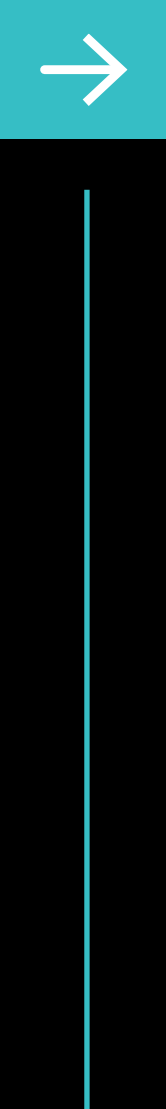


Best Practice Guide -

Recruiting Infrastructure Project Directors





The success of any project depends on getting the team right—‘getting the right people on the bus,’ as one colleague metaphorically put it, ‘and placing them in the right seats.’

Bent Flyvbjerg, *How Big Things Get Done*



This guide

- Purpose of this guide
- Why this guide?
- What is a Project Director?
- Understanding the Project Director Capability Framework (PDCF)
- Using the PDCF in recruitment
 - Prepare
 - Assess
 - Orientate
- Next steps



Purpose

Recruiting the right Infrastructure Project Director is essential to the successful delivery of complex public sector projects. This best practice guide provides a structured and consistent approach to identifying, assessing, and onboarding leaders with the right blend of technical expertise, leadership capability, and public sector insight.

It is designed to help public sector organisations strengthen their recruitment practices by integrating the Project Director Capability Framework (PDCF). Rather than repeating general recruitment advice, the guide focuses on practical ways to embed the PDCF into recruitment processes—ensuring alignment with the specific capabilities required for effective infrastructure project leadership and delivery.

This guide is not official guidance issued under [CO \(23\) 9](#)



Why?

This guide aims to:

- minimise the likelihood of appointing underqualified candidates, ensuring the right skills, experience, and leadership are in place.
- support consistency, transparency, and clarity across Public Sector Infrastructure recruitment.
- align recruitment practices with project goals and public sector priorities.

Who is it for

This guide is intended for anyone involved in recruiting infrastructure Project Directors for the New Zealand public sector.

It is particularly relevant for:

- **Public Sector leaders and hiring managers:** Supporting recruitment aligned with the strategic objectives and needs of government infrastructure projects.
- **HR professionals:** Providing tools and approaches to embed the PDCF into recruitment workflows.
- **Recruitment consultants:** Assisting in understanding public sector needs and aligning candidate evaluation with PDCF competencies.
- **Infrastructure agencies:** Enhancing organisational capacity by recruiting Project Directors with the skills and knowledge to deliver complex infrastructure projects effectively



Defining the role of Project Director

The Capability Framework outlines the skills, knowledge and attributes required of an Infrastructure Project Director in the Public Sector (Public Sector as defined by PSC). Job titles, tiers and delegations vary across agencies and entities, but this is the role positioned between the Project Manager and the Project Sponsor/Senior Responsible Owner.

Sponsor/ Senior Responsible Owner is responsible for ensuring the project aligns with government / agency objectives, secures funding, approvals, and resources. Maintains strategic oversight and ensures that the project delivers public value and meets promised outcomes

Project Director is to oversee and direct the project/programme to ensure that it aligns with organisational goals and strategic objectives. They translate high-level organisational priorities into specific project goals, oversee financial management to ensure budget adherence, and identify, assess, and mitigate risks. Additionally, they maintain open communication with stakeholders, oversee project timelines and scope, and ensure compliance with relevant standards and regulations. Their role is to deliver the project on time, on budget and with the promised benefits.

Project Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operational management and execution of the project. Handles tasks such as coordinating teams, tracking progress, managing resources, and ensuring that deliverables are completed according to the plan.



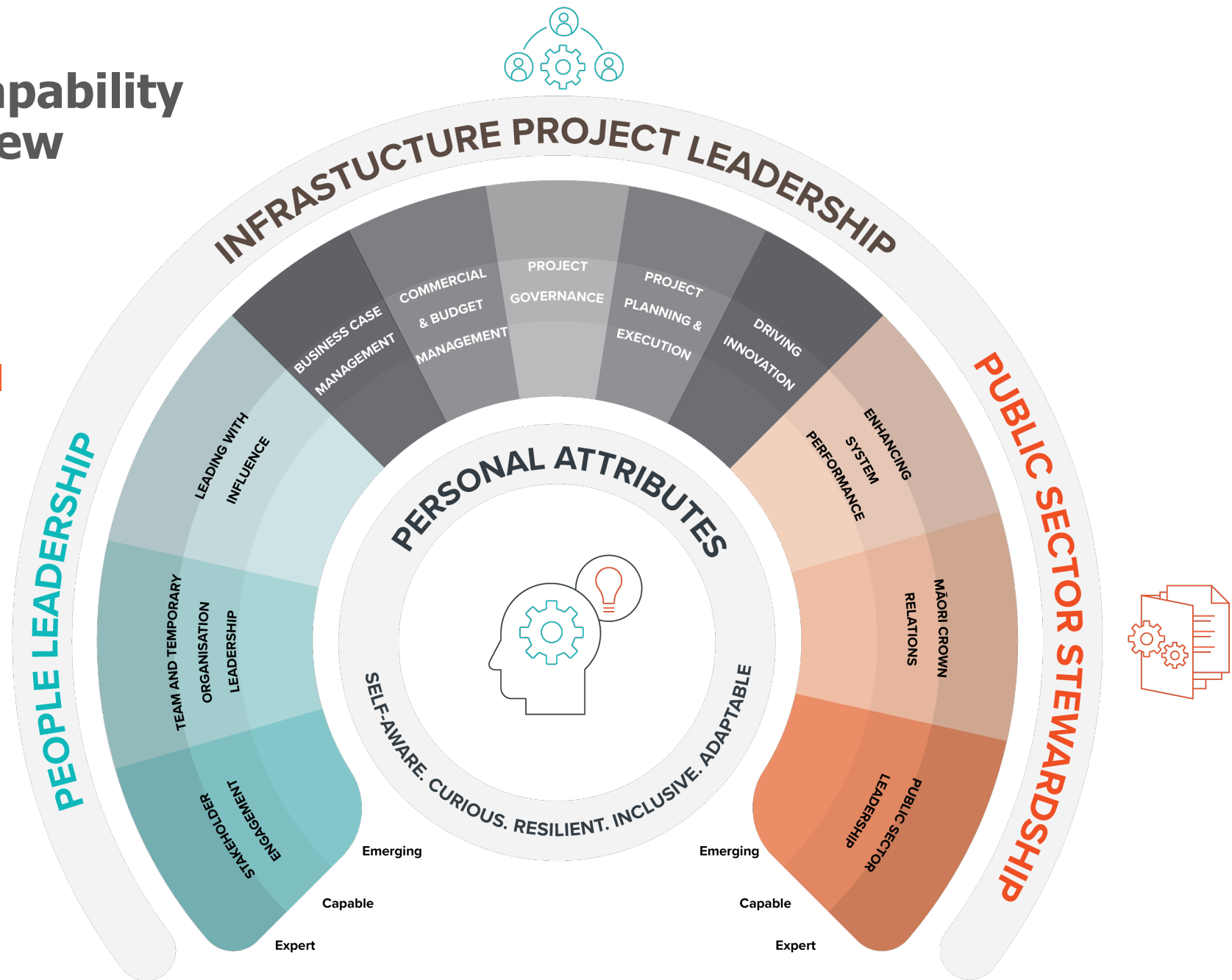
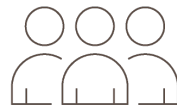
Using the Project Director Capability Framework (PDCF) in recruitment

This guide is designed to be used in conjunction with the full PDCF



Project Director Capability Framework Overview Diagram

The personal attributes and capabilities essential for successful infrastructure project delivery in the NZ Public Sector.



Project Director Capability Framework – Summary

The personal attributes and capabilities essential for successful infrastructure project delivery in the NZ Public Sector

People Leadership

Leading with influence

Articulates a clear and compelling vision for the project, communicating objectives in a way that builds trust and resonates with the team. Actively listens to feedback and fosters an environment where team members feel valued, motivated, and aligned toward the common goal.

Team and temporary organisation leadership

Leads diverse, integrated teams, fostering a positive, psychologically safe culture. Takes ownership of team performance and development, promoting growth through coaching, delegation, and feedback. Facilitates collaboration across multidisciplinary teams with clear communication to navigate change and drive high performance.

Stakeholder engagement

Recognises and values the different needs and objectives of all stakeholders, ensuring their active involvement in decision-making processes. Fosters an environment where different voices are heard and considered, enhancing stakeholder buy-in and commitment to the project.

Infrastructure Project Leadership

Business Case Management

Leads the development of robust, fit-for-purpose business cases that meet Cabinet expectations and adhere to NZ Treasury guidance. Ensures projects align with organisational objectives, incorporate whole-of-life asset management considerations, and deliver sustainable, long-term benefits. Revisits the investment case in response to evolving conditions to ensure continued value.

Project Governance

Implements robust project governance frameworks with clear roles, accountability, and timely decision-making. Monitors and proactively addresses risks, issues, and health and safety concerns. Ensures transparent, regular reporting to maintain trust while collaborating with senior leadership to ensure governance supports long-term goals.

Driving Innovation

Actively identifies emerging trends and evolving contexts, adjusting strategies to address changing infrastructure and workforce needs. Leads the adoption of modern design and construction techniques to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and to future-proof projects.

Commercial and Budget Management

Manages contractual, commercial, and procurement processes, including complex supply chains, long-term service contracts and contractor relationships. Oversees budget planning, allocation, and cost management to deliver value for money. Proactively manages contractor performance, identifies and mitigates financial risks, and ensures compliance with policies and funding requirements.

Project Planning and Execution

Leads project planning, execution, and quality assurance by developing plans, managing resources, and tracking milestones for timely delivery within scope, to budget and with the promised benefits. Monitors and proactively addresses risks, issues, and health and safety concerns. Incorporates lessons learned to continuously improve and ensure high-quality outcomes aligned with project goals.

Public Sector Stewardship

Public Sector Leadership

Navigates government policy, political expectations, and public interest to deliver complex projects. Upholds public sector principles by prioritising transparency, responsible financial management, and social accountability, while fostering public trust.

Māori-Crown Relations

Fosters strong Māori-Crown partnerships, that respect The Treaty of Waitangi | Te Tiriti o Waitangi and support community needs, aspirations and goals.

Enhancing System Performance

Leads a collaborative, cross-sector approach by leveraging strong relationships across the public and private sectors. Takes a systems-focused view to address complex issues.

Personal attributes

Self-aware

Has a deep awareness of feelings, strengths, and weaknesses. Understands what is known and what is not, and actively seeks the right people to provide support and expertise.

Inclusive

Leads by example, embracing diverse perspectives, challenging biases, and fostering an environment where everyone feels valued, heard, and empowered.

Curious

Shows curiosity, flexibility and openness when analysing and integrating new ideas and information. Encourages a culture of inquiry and continuous learning.

Resilient

Establishes clear, healthy boundaries to sustain personal and team wellbeing and drives performance in demanding and dynamic environment.

Adaptable

Adapts approaches in response to changing situations or unforeseen challenges, maintaining effectiveness in ever-changing contexts and environments.



How to use the PDCF in recruitment

Prepare: Job design & role definition



Source Candidates

- Which capabilities are essential for success in this role?
- What level of proficiency is required?
- Does the Job Description highlight the key attributes and capabilities required?
- Are there any capability gaps in the current team that this role should fill?
- Is the remuneration aligned to the scope and responsibilities of the role?
- Does the job advert clearly reflect the required capabilities?

Assess and Select



Pre-employment

- Use capabilities as criteria for CV and application screening.
- Use PDCF aligned interview questions.
- Evaluate personal attributes as well as technical, leadership and public sector expertise required for the project.

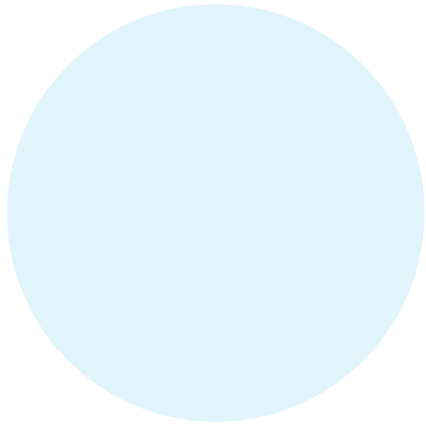


Hire



Orientate: Setting up for success

- Provide feedback linked to capability gaps or strengths.
- Build development plans around individual and team capability gaps.
- Align induction program with capability expectations.
- Set early performance goals based on the framework.



Prepare: Job design & role definition

Define the role by aligning the job description, capabilities, and remuneration with the demands of delivering major infrastructure projects.

Select descriptors in the following sections to include in the Job Description.

- Key attributes and capabilities
- Expertise
- Knowledge



Prepare: Job Description

Key Accountabilities

Consider incorporating some of the bullet points below in the Job Description. Include bullet points as is or adjust to reflect your project or organisation.

Key accountabilities	Select the appropriate statements to include
People Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead and inspire diverse, multidisciplinary teams, fostering a collaborative and psychologically safe environment.• Drive high performance through clear communication, coaching, and team development.• Engage stakeholders effectively, ensuring their needs and objectives are incorporated into project outcomes.
Infrastructure Project Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead the preparation of robust, evidence-based business cases, ensuring alignment with organisational objectives, Cabinet expectations, and Treasury guidelines.• Develop comprehensive project plans, manage resources, and oversee delivery to meet scope, budget, and timelines, while ensuring the promised benefits are realised.• Implement strong governance structures with clear roles, accountabilities, and decision-making processes, proactively managing risks and issues to support project success.• Identify and adopt modern construction techniques, sustainability practices, and innovative solutions to enhance project efficiency and resilience.• Manage procurement, contractual arrangements, and budgets, ensuring value for money and compliance with funding policies, while maintaining oversight of contractor performance and financial risks.
Public Sector Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navigate government policies and political expectations, delivering projects with transparency and accountability.• Foster strong Māori-Crown partnerships, respecting the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.• Collaborate across sectors to enhance system-wide performance and address complex infrastructure challenges.



Prepare: Job Description

Expertise

Consider including some of the bullet points below in the Job Description. Include as is or adjust to reflect your project or organisation. Requirements will vary depending on the project's stage in its lifecycle.

- Leading large-scale, complex infrastructure projects, preferably in the public sector.
- Proven experience leading projects within the specific asset class being developed, ensuring technical expertise and sector-specific best practices
- Directing infrastructure projects with a capital cost of up to \$X, ensuring successful delivery.
- Managing design and construction contracts within the infrastructure build industry, including risk mitigation and contract administration.
- Delivering business case development, project governance, and risk management, ensuring strategic alignment and value for money.
- Overseeing procurement, contracting, and financial management for multimillion-dollar budgets, demonstrating strong commercial acumen.
- Establishing and managing long-term partnerships and performance-based contracts, ensuring sustained project success.
- Identifying, managing, and monitoring complex project risks, particularly in safety management and design.
- Engaging and negotiating with stakeholders, including iwi, local councils, government agencies, and private sector partners.
- Leading and managing high-performing teams, ensuring capability development and accountability.
- Driving business transformation within infrastructure projects, ensuring adaptability to government priorities, technology shifts, and best practices.
- Ensuring transparency, public accountability, and compliance with the Official Information Act (OIA) through proactive information sharing and governance.
- Delivering infrastructure projects in politically complex environments, managing shifting priorities, ministerial expectations, and public scrutiny.
- Embedding Māori-Crown partnership principles into infrastructure projects, ensuring alignment with Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi and iwi engagement best practices.
- Managing projects within constrained resources, balancing cost, time, and quality in an environment of increasing fiscal pressures.
- Driving innovation in infrastructure delivery, leveraging new technologies, digital tools (e.g., BIM, digital twins), and modern construction methods (e.g., prefabrication, modular construction).
- Overseeing asset management strategies to ensure long-term infrastructure resilience, operational efficiency, and lifecycle cost optimisation.
- Ensuring infrastructure resilience to climate change, seismic risk, and other environmental challenges; integrating adaptive planning and risk mitigation strategies.
- Embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles in project planning and workforce development.
- Managing crisis and emergency response situations that impact project delivery, such as major weather events, supply chain disruptions, or regulatory changes.



Prepare: Job Description

Knowledge

Consider including some of the bullet points below in the Job Description. Include as is or adjust to reflect your project or organisation. Requirements will vary depending on the project's stage in its lifecycle.

- NZS3910 and CCCS contracts, including key obligations, risk allocation, and industry best practices.
- Full infrastructure project lifecycle, from strategic planning and feasibility to design, construction, operations, maintenance, and decommissioning.
- Public sector governance frameworks, procurement policies, and funding models, ensuring compliance and effectiveness.
- Sustainability principles and their practical application in infrastructure planning and delivery.
- Social and economic impacts of infrastructure projects, including staff, customer, and public considerations in service delivery and long-term benefits.
- Public sector transparency requirements, including OIA compliance, record-keeping obligations, and public engagement best practices.
- Construction methodologies and industry processes, including planning, design, and building workflows.
- Regulatory and policy frameworks governing public sector infrastructure, including the Infrastructure Funding & Financing Act, Resource Management Act (or its replacement laws), and Building Act.
- Infrastructure investment frameworks, including cost-benefit analysis (CBA), value-for-money assessments, and funding mechanisms (e.g. PPPs, value capture, user-pays models).
- Public and private sector collaboration models, including alliances, joint ventures, and integrated delivery teams.
- Strategic workforce planning and capability development, ensuring a sustainable talent pipeline for infrastructure leadership.
- Digital transformation in infrastructure, including the use of AI, IoT, and smart city technologies for better asset performance and service delivery.

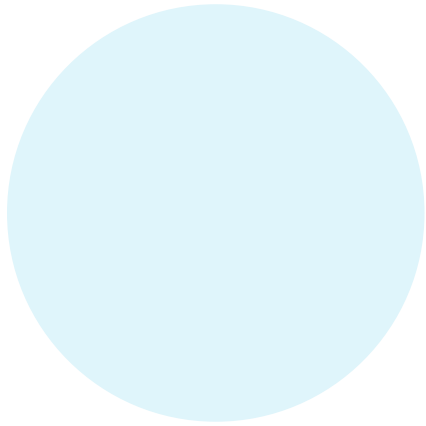


Remuneration Considerations

Remunerating Project Directors in the public sector can be challenging due to their specialised expertise and high demand globally and in the private sector. A significant gap sometimes exists between public sector pay scales and the expectations of candidates managing large, complex projects. Balancing competitive pay with public sector constraints is essential to attract top talent.

Balancing competitive pay, performance, and retention

- **Align with market conditions:** Recognise that Project Directors require specialised expertise and leadership experience, often needing remuneration beyond standard public sector scales.
- **Reflect project complexity:** Tailor remuneration to the type, scale, complexity, and risk of the project, ensuring it aligns with the significant responsibilities involved.
- **Benchmark with industry standards:** Use market data to ensure packages are competitive with private sector and international standards for comparable roles.
- **If possible, consider incorporating incentives:** Include performance-based incentives tied to key milestones and successful project delivery.
- **Support retention with non-monetary benefits:** Complement pay with benefits such as professional development opportunities and/or flexibility to retain top talent.



Assess and Select

Evaluate candidates on project experience and on the people leadership, public sector experience, and the personal attributes essential for public sector project success. The relative weighting of these factors should align with the specific job design.

Incorporate **some** of the following interview questions into your recruitment pack.



STAR based recruitment questions

We've developed interview questions aligned with the STAR method, which focuses on behavioral interviewing. STAR questions prompt candidates to provide clear, concise examples from their past experience, helping assess how they've handled real situations in previous roles.

What does STAR stand for?

- Situation – What was the context?
- Task – What needed to be done?
- Action – What did you do?
- Result – What was the outcome?

Why Use STAR-Based Questions?

- Encourages evidence-based answers.
- Reduces vague or hypothetical responses.
- Helps assess key behaviours and competencies.
- Creates a consistent, fair process.

Tips for Great STAR Questions

- Start with: "Tell me about a time when..."
- Ask about real past experiences.
- Use open-ended language.
- Ask follow-up questions to the suggestion questions e.g.
 - What specific actions did you take?
 - What did you do differently?
 - How did the team respond, and what was the final result?
 - How did you know it worked?
 - What impact did that have on delivery or outcomes?
- Stay neutral—don't lead the candidate.
- Probe for the "Action" and "Result" if missing.
- Keep the question tied to the job's key capabilities.
- Ask the same core questions of all candidates.
- Allow thinking time—don't rush them.
- Listen actively and take structured notes.



Assess – Personal attributes

Include as is or adjust the questions to reflect your project or organisation.

Self-Aware

1. Tell me about a time when you identified a gap in your knowledge and sought support to address it.
2. Give an example of how you evaluated your effectiveness as a leader during a complex infrastructure project.
3. Describe a situation in an infrastructure project where your assumptions were wrong and how you adjusted.
4. Tell me about a time when a project challenge required expertise beyond your own skills. How did you respond?
5. How have you balanced confidence in your decisions with humility to learn from others?

Curious

1. What steps have you taken to remain informed about emerging infrastructure trends and technologies? Share some examples.
2. Share a specific example where your curiosity led you to explore new ideas or question existing methods, resulting in improvement.
3. Describe a time you explored alternative methods when conventional approaches didn't meet project goals.
4. How have you encouraged innovative thinking within your project team?
5. Tell me about a time when your curiosity prompted you to seek feedback or input from others. What was the result?

Resilient

1. Provide an example of how you responded during a crisis in an infrastructure project.
2. Tell me about a time you managed team morale during delays or cost overruns.
3. What strategies have you used to maintain personal resilience during long-term projects?
4. Share a time when you resolved significant opposition to a project's delivery.
5. How have you helped your team stay motivated when facing project setbacks?

Inclusive

1. How have you ensured diverse perspectives were included in infrastructure planning or decision-making? Give an example.
2. Describe a time when stakeholder input significantly improved a project's outcome.
3. Tell me about a time you ensured community voices were represented, particularly in Māori-Crown partnership contexts.
4. Give an example of how you fostered inclusivity in a large, multidisciplinary team.
5. How have you balanced technical input with the needs of community and non-technical stakeholders?

Adaptable

1. Share an example of adapting your approach when a project encountered unexpected changes.
2. Describe how you navigated shifting stakeholder priorities during a long-term project.
3. Tell me about a time you had to adjust project scope without compromising outcomes.
4. How have you maintained project momentum amid external conditions, such as funding or policy changes?
5. How have you adapted communication to meet the needs of different infrastructure stakeholders?



Assess – People Leadership

Include as is or adjust the questions to reflect your project or organisation.

Leading with Influence

1. Share some examples of how you have built trust with stakeholders on high-profile infrastructure projects?
2. Can you share an example of aligning a diverse project team to deliver a shared infrastructure goal?
3. Describe a time when you had to influence decision-makers to approve a critical infrastructure solution.
4. How have you inspired teams to deliver projects when there have been long timelines?
5. What strategies do you use to ensure contractors and external partners align with project objectives?

Team and Temporary Organisation Leadership

1. Share an example of how you have built a high-performing culture within a project environment.
2. Describe a time you have managed conflict within a diverse or multidisciplinary team.
3. Give an example of how you've used coaching, delegation, or feedback to develop someone in your team.
4. What have you done in the past to ensure accountability within a large, multidisciplinary project team?
5. Describe a time you led your team through significant change or uncertainty.

Stakeholder Engagement

1. Share an example of when you have successfully balanced the priorities of technical experts and community stakeholders.
2. Describe how you maintained productive relationships with regulatory bodies.
3. Share a time when misalignment with stakeholders delayed a project. How did you resolve it?
4. What strategies have you used to ensure support from political leaders?
5. What actions have you taken to maintain public trust during disruptive phases?



Assess - Infrastructure Project Leadership

Include as is or adjust the questions to reflect your project or organisation.

Business Case Management

1. How have you ensured that a business case for an infrastructure project remained robust throughout delivery?
2. Share an example of how you linked an infrastructure business case to long-term community benefits?
3. Describe how you have incorporated whole-of-life asset management considerations into our business cases.
4. Give an example of a time you had to justify a significant budget increase or scope change during delivery.
5. Tell me about a time you aligned a business case with shifting government priorities or funding requirements.

Commercial and Budget Management

1. Describe a time when you successfully managed cost overruns on an infrastructure project.
2. Tell me about a situation where you ensured procurement delivered value for money and timely outcomes.
3. Share an example of successfully renegotiating a contract with a supplier or contractor.
4. Give an example of how you held contractors accountable while maintaining strong relationships.
5. Tell me about a time you used forecasting systems to manage infrastructure budgets.

Project Planning and Execution

1. Describe how you achieve project milestones without compromising quality.
2. Can you share an example of how you re-baselined a project plan to address unexpected challenges?
3. Tell me about a time you ensured health and safety was prioritised throughout delivery.
4. Give an example of using lessons learned to improve future delivery.
5. Describe a time you ensured alignment between project execution and long-term operations.

Project Governance

1. Tell me about a time you established governance frameworks for a high-risk infrastructure project. Can you share an example of how you managed conflicting governance decisions during a project?
2. Describe a time you ensured governance remained agile during delivery.
3. Give an example of involving senior leaders in governance without delaying decisions.
4. Tell me about a time transparent reporting helped build or maintain stakeholder trust.
5. How do you involve senior leadership in project governance without delaying decisions?

Driving Innovation

1. Tell me about a time when you identified an emerging trend that had implications for your project or organisation.
2. Describe a situation where you had to adjust your strategy in response to a significant change in the infrastructure or workforce environment.
3. Share an example of introducing a modern construction technique/new way of working to improve project efficiency.
4. Tell me about how you encouraged your team to propose or trial new ideas.
5. Share an example of using innovation to enhance long-term sustainability or resilience.



Assess – Public Sector Leadership

Include as is or adjust the questions to reflect your project or organisation.

Public Sector Leadership

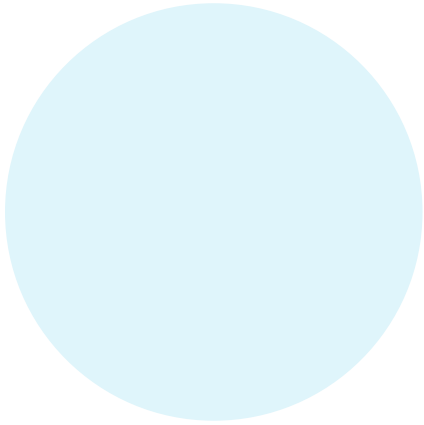
1. Tell me about a time when you ensured transparency and accountability in an infrastructure project while managing complex political expectations. What actions did you take, and what was the outcome?
2. Can you give an example of a project where you aligned its objectives with government policies or public sector priorities? How did you approach this, and what challenges did you overcome?
3. Describe a situation where you had to navigate conflicting priorities between different government agencies or public stakeholders. How did you manage these conflicts, and what was the result?
4. Tell me about a time when you built and maintained trust with senior public sector leaders and Ministers during project delivery. What strategies did you use, and how did this impact the project's success?
5. Share an experience where you had to adapt a project to meet changing political or policy conditions. What steps did you take, and what was the outcome?

Enhancing System Performance

1. Tell me about a time when you contributed to improving cross-sector collaboration. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?
2. Can you share an example of a project where you leveraged lessons learned from past projects to address systemic challenges. What impact did it have?
3. Describe a situation where you took specific steps to ensure the long-term sustainability and efficiency of infrastructure assets in the public sector. What actions did you implement, and what were the results?
4. Tell me about a time when you aligned a project with broader infrastructure strategies and sector-wide goals. How did you ensure alignment, and what was the outcome?
5. Can you give an example of how you worked with public and private sector partners to achieve better outcomes for the infrastructure delivery system? What strategies did you use, and what were the results?

Māori-Crown Relations

1. Describe how you have engaged with iwi or Māori communities to ensure their aspirations and needs are reflected in an infrastructure project.
2. How do you integrate the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi into your project planning and delivery?
3. Share an example of how you built a strong partnership with Māori stakeholders to enhance project outcomes.
4. How do you balance the cultural, environmental, and economic priorities of Māori stakeholders in infrastructure projects?
5. What strategies do you use to ensure Māori communities benefit equitably from public infrastructure investments?



Orientate: Setting up for success

Set up new Project Directors for success by ensuring they have an induction and development programme that aligns with PDCF capability expectations.

Support the hiring manager with the suggested following orientation elements.



Orientate: Setting your Project Director up for success

Clear expectations

- Provide detailed role descriptions, project goals, and key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Use the PDCF to outline the required capabilities and proficiency levels. Share strengths and gaps revealed through the recruitment process.

Leadership support

- Visible backing from senior leaders, such as the Senior Responsible Owner and Project Board, empowers Project Directors to engage stakeholders effectively, address barriers, and drive momentum.
- Schedule regular check-ins to provide guidance and remove obstacles.

Mentor/ Coach/ Independent expertise

- Facilitate peer and mentor support.
- Encourage the Project Director to join the TW Infrastructure Leaders Network ([ILN Link](#)).
- If the Project Director is *developing* in an essential capability area, consider engaging an external subject matter expert to provide short term bridging support.

Targeted development

- Provide funding for targeted development aligned to the capability framework e.g. Gateway, Business Case development, Australian Major Projects Leadership Academy (AMPLA).

Self reflection

- Incorporate regular self-reflection practices into performance reviews or team debriefs.
- Encourage the completion of the PDCF self-assessment (coming late 2025).

Clear accountability

- Track performance and development against capabilities during probation and early reviews.



What's next

Self-Assessment Tool: A self-assessment tool will be created to enable Project Directors to evaluate their current capabilities against the framework, identifying strengths and areas for targeted growth.

Q2 FY26

Development Suggestions: Specific development suggestions will be provided to help Project Directors address identified gaps, offering resources and learning activities tailored to each proficiency level.

Q3 FY26

Accreditation Pathway: An accreditation pathway will be explored to formalise and recognise Project Directors' capabilities, setting sector-wide standards and providing a structured path for professional advancement.

TBC