



Best Practice Guide

How to be an effective
Senior Responsible Owner



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Introduction

Congratulations on your appointment as a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO).

This guide is designed to help you set yourself and your project/programme up for success. It takes a practical approach and is intended to complement, not replace, formal requirements such as Cabinet Office circular CO (23) 9, Treasury's Better Business Cases, and (for high-risk investments assessed as Risk Profile Assessment Level 3 or above) Gateway reviews.

Infrastructure projects are complex, costly, and highly visible. They involve multiple stakeholders, long planning horizons, and significant public investment. Because of their scale and impact, these projects not only shape economic performance and community wellbeing but also attract close scrutiny from government, industry, and the public.

Effective governance and capability are therefore essential to ensure these projects deliver value and maintain public trust. Their success or failure often comes down to leadership, and in particular, the role of the SRO.

While this guide is aimed at first-time public sector infrastructure SROs, experienced leaders will also find value in reflecting on and refreshing their practice. It may also be useful for leaders of other project types that operate in complex, multi-stakeholder environments.

This guide brings together the two dimensions of effective leadership, the doing and the being.

The doing is the practical side: the frameworks, tools, and processes that underpin good governance and sound decision-making.

The being is the human side: the behaviours, culture, and leadership presence that create trust, alignment, and clarity under pressure.

Both matter. The best SROs combine confident action with self-awareness – knowing when to lean on process and when to lead through presence.

A list of resources for further reference is included at the end of the guide.

About this guide

This guide was developed by the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission, Te Waihangā, to support SROs leading major public sector infrastructure investments. It reflects the collective insights and lessons of New Zealand's infrastructure system. While written primarily for central government settings, many of the fundamentals also apply in local government, where SROs face similar leadership, governance, and delivery challenges. Some processes will differ, for example, local approval pathways and obligations under the Local Government Official Information and Local Government Act, but the core principles of effective SRO leadership remain the same.

The content draws on:

- **Engagement with leaders** – Over 250 senior leaders contributed through the Infrastructure Leaders Network, Communities of Practice, targeted interviews, and feedback forums.
- **Workshop insights** – Including materials from the SRO workshops.
- **Consultation with key agencies** – Public Service Commission; Treasury; Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment; NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi; Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities; Crown Infrastructure Delivery; National Infrastructure Funding and Financing; and others provided feedback to ensure alignment with system expectations.
- **Expert insight and experience** from Karen Tregaskis, an independent consultant.
- **Lessons from New Zealand projects** – Reviews of Transmission Gully, City Rail Link, and the Mental Health Infrastructure Programme, among others.
- **International frameworks** – Adapted from the UK Infrastructure and Projects Authority (now called NISTA – National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority) and global good practice in benefits management, assurance, and project governance.

- **Core New Zealand public sector guidance** – Cabinet Office circular (23) 9, Treasury's Better Business Cases guidance, Gateway Investment Assurance Reviews, Public Service Commission integrity standards, and the Infrastructure Priorities Programme (IPP) that Te Waihanga administers.

How to use this guide

This guide is designed as a practical companion. It is not a comprehensive manual, but a set of reference points to support you in the moments that matter.

- **Read Part 1 early** – It introduces the role, your authorising environment, and the capabilities and mindsets you'll need.
- **Use Part 2 in your first 90 days** – It captures common traps and tips from experienced SROs, helping you establish mandate, relationships, and governance foundations.
- **Return to Parts 3–5 as you gain experience** – These sections cover owning the business case, benefits realisation, risk and assurance, governance, and commercial acumen.
- **Keep Part 6 in mind throughout** – It deals with vision, culture, partnering with your Project Director, and stakeholder relationships.
- **Plan for continuity with Part 7** – It highlights the importance of tenure, handover, and building capability across the system.

To keep it useful and quick to apply, the guide includes:



Checklists – simple prompts to test whether you are on track.



Red flags – pitfalls to watch for.



Nudges – practical habits recommended by experienced SROs.

Additional **tools & templates** will be published in 2026.

Use this guide alongside your agency's governance processes and in partnership with your Chief Executive, Project Director, and system partners such as Treasury, the Public Service Commission, and Te Waihanga.

Part 1:

Foundations – being the SRO

1.1 What an SRO is (and isn't)

While “SRO” is the standard term within central government the function is also referred to as Project/Programme Executive, Project/Programme Sponsor, or other equivalent titles. For ease of reading, we will refer to the role as SRO. Regardless of the specific title, the focus remains on the function.

As the SRO, you are the single point of accountability for an infrastructure investment.

- You own the business case, from development through delivery and benefits realisation.
- You are accountable for time, cost, scope, and benefits – and cannot delegate or share that accountability.
- You govern the project. You do not manage it. Your role is to steer the ship, not row it.

Your Project Director (PD) manages the day-to-day delivery.

Your Chief Executive is accountable for the organisation. Ministers make policy and investment decisions. But when it comes to whether this investment succeeds, you are the named individual responsible.

Treasury Definition

The Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for an investment has delegated authority from the Chief Executive to oversee the:

- development of a business case for the investment
- delivery of the investment so that the expected benefits and outcomes can be realised.

The SRO also:

- makes sure investment-related risks are identified and managed across the agency
- champions the investment to make sure all critical stakeholders are appropriately engaged in the agency, and if appropriate the sector, partners and the wider community.

<https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/public-sector-leadership/investment-management/investment-management-system-roles-and-requirements>

A simple way of thinking about the role of the SRO

The SRO represents the interests of the investor throughout the design and delivery of the investment and is illustrated in the diagram below.



Remember accountability cannot be delegated or shared.



Remind yourself: ***"I steer, I don't row."***
Your role is to govern, champion, and ensure benefits are delivered, not to manage the daily delivery.

1.2 Your authorising environment

You operate within a system of rules, approvals, and oversight.

Within your organisation

Your accountability flows from your Chief Executive, who formally delegates the SRO role to you. You report through your agency's governance arrangements, typically an executive leadership team, a project steering group, or an internal project board. These forums provide oversight and support, but they do not remove your personal accountability for the success of the investment.

Across the public sector

Agencies deliver investments on behalf of Ministers and the government, and are accountable for meeting formal expectations for how those investments are planned, assured, and delivered. Your project sits within a set of formal investment frameworks that set clear standards and provide independent assurance:

- CO (23) 9 outlines Cabinet's expectations for how departments and Crown entities manage investments.
- Treasury's Better Business Case framework guides how investments are developed, tested, and approved.
- Gateway Investment Assurance Reviews are independent peer reviews that take place at key points in the project's lifecycle. They give you insight into how well placed your project is to deliver its outcomes and benefits and provide recommendations on how you could improve delivery.
- Medium- and high-risk investments are required to complete Treasury's Quarterly Investment Reporting.
- The IPP, administered by Te Waihangā, is an

independent and standardised process to identify proposals and projects that will meet New Zealand's strategic objectives, represent good value for money and can be delivered.

Alongside formal investment frameworks, SROs must operate in a culture of transparency and accountability that is unique to the New Zealand public sector.

- The Official Information Act (OIA) means that most documents, advice, and correspondence relating to your project may be requested and released. Write every paper, email, and project board minute with this in mind.
- The Auditor-General and Parliament's select committees can review the governance and value-for-money of major investments.
- Agencies are also expected to meet high standards of proactive disclosure and transparency – including publishing business cases, performance reports, and project updates.

For an SRO, this means leading in a way that stands up to public and political scrutiny. Decisions, risks, and trade-offs should be documented clearly, be defensible in hindsight, and communicated early to your Chief Executive and Ministers.

Think of your authorising environment as the scaffolding that gives you support, but also holds you to account. You are expected to **navigate it, not hide behind it.**



Remember that every board paper could be requested under the OIA tomorrow.



Map your authorising environment on one page – then test it with a critical friend.

1.3 Mindsets and capabilities that matter

Being an effective SRO is not just about knowing the frameworks – it's about how you lead and what you focus on. Success depends on a blend of **capabilities** (the technical and leadership skills you use) and **mindsets** (the qualities and stance you bring to the role). Both are essential.

Our work with New Zealand public sector SROs, along with lessons from the UK's NISTA and other jurisdictions, shows that few leaders walk into the role with the full skill set. That's why self-awareness is the single most important starting point. Know your strengths, know your gaps, and surround yourself with the right expertise.

Capabilities are the “doing” side of the role: leading strategically, engaging stakeholders, managing risk and assurance, overseeing delivery, acting as a savvy client, and safeguarding value.

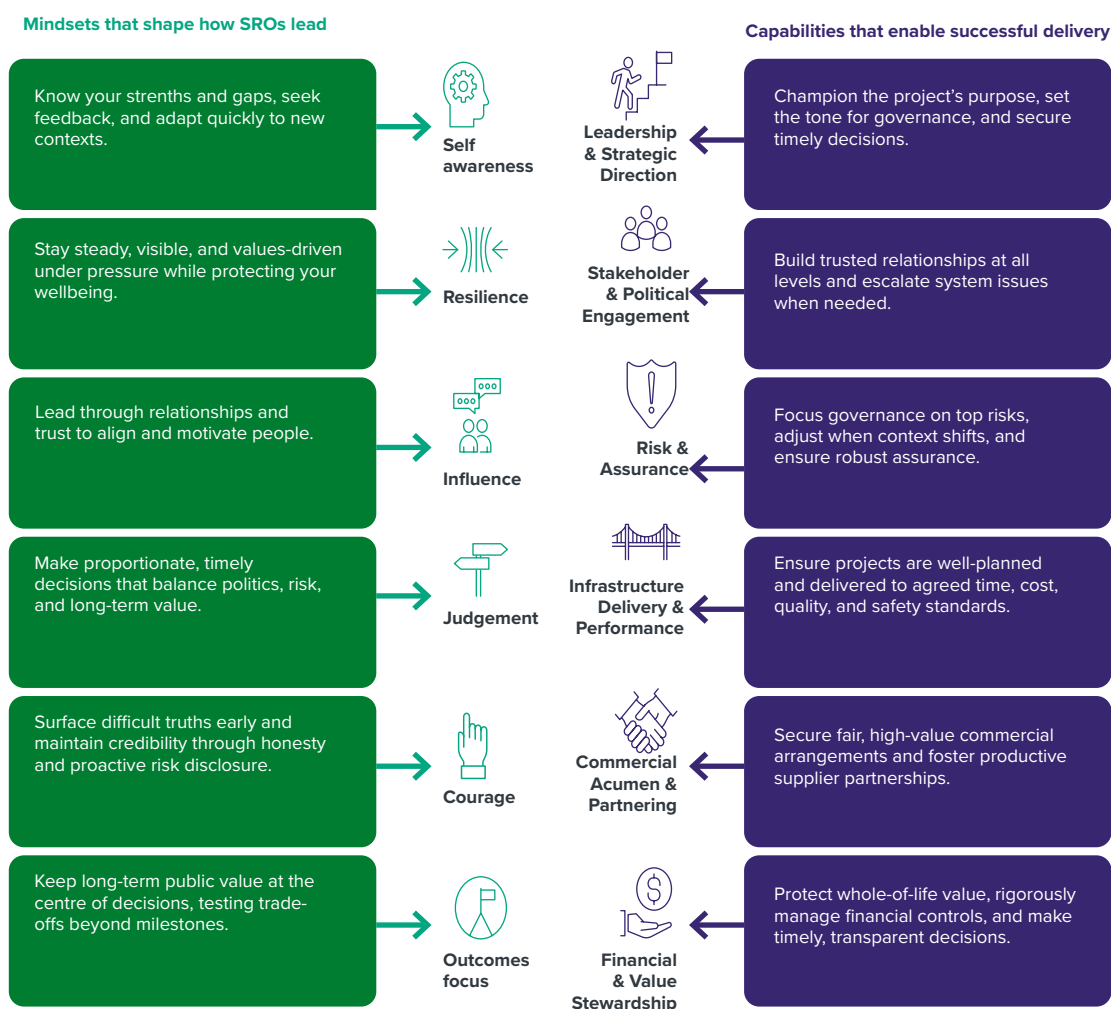
Mindsets are the “being” side: how you show up with focus on outcomes, exercise judgement in the grey, stay resilient, influence without direct control, and have the courage to speak truth to power.

Your role as SRO:

- Be honest with yourself about which of these you bring naturally and which you need to develop or support.
- Use the six capabilities to frame how you govern the project.
- Apply the six mindsets to how you show up in meetings, briefings, and stakeholder engagements.

Figure 1 shows the six mindsets and six capabilities that form the backbone of effective SRO leadership (More details in Appendix 1)

Fig 1: Mindsets and Capabilities for SROs



Checklist – Am I bringing both the “doing” and the “being”?

- ✓ Do I have the right governance and technical skills (capabilities) to steer this project? If not, what am I doing about it?
- ✓ Am I showing up with the presence and attitudes (mindsets) that build trust and confidence?
- ✓ Where are my gaps, and who or what can I draw on to fill them?
- ✓ Am I balancing “what we do” with “how I lead” every week?



Remember that the SRO role is not just technical, it hinges on relationships, mindsets, and trust.



Ask – “*Am I leading with self-awareness, empathy, and courage?*”

Part 2:

Your first 90 days – a very Quick Guide

Your first three months as an SRO set the tone for the entire project. This is the time to establish credibility, confirm your authority, and lay the foundations for successful delivery.

The choices you make now will shape whether you are recognised as the clear owner of the mandate, whether governance and assurance are fit for purpose, and whether benefits and outcomes remain central.

The following focus areas outline what good looks like – and the common pitfalls to avoid – as you step into the role.

Focus area	What good looks like	Watch out for
Secure your mandate	Get a formal appointment letter from your Chief Executive/project board confirming your role, accountability, time commitment, and expected tenure.	Taking on the role “in name only” while someone else holds the real authority.
	Clarify reporting lines and decision rights – don’t leave this ambiguous.	Agreeing to be SRO without clarity on time commitment or tenure.
	Confirm that the Minister’s expectations, priorities, and tolerances for the project are clearly understood and reflected in your mandate.	Assuming alignment with the Minister without it ever being explicitly confirmed.
	Make sure your appointment is visible to key players: project board, Treasury, Te Waihangā, and Ministers’ offices.	Assuming others will know you’re the SRO – they may not.
Own the business case from day one	If completed, read the business case cover to cover – don’t rely on summaries.	Skimming the executive summary – key risks and assumptions are usually buried deeper.
	Test whether costs, scope, schedule, and benefits are realistic.	Treating the business case as a hurdle for funding rather than the reference point for delivery.
	Treat the business case as a living document – keep checking alignment as context changes.	Outsourcing ownership of the business case to consultants or the Project Director.
	Make sure every project board member has read it and understands its role as the contract for delivery.	Making assumptions about the project board’s understanding of the business case and their role.

Focus area	What good looks like	Watch out for
Check the governance and assurance foundations	Establish the project board quickly. Choose members for skills and consider the level of seniority required.	Letting the project board drift into project management detail rather than governing for outcomes.
	Approve a clear term of reference and start a decision log from the first meeting.	Being overly informal so that decisions and key discussions cannot be located or are misrepresented later on.
	Confirm an assurance plan and book early reviews: Gateway, Independent Quality Assurance (IQA), technical reviews.	Treating assurance as a compliance exercise instead of a source of insight.
Lead with outcome focus and transparency	Put benefits and outcomes at the centre of early project board conversations, not just schedule and cost.	Focusing on milestones while benefits get forgotten and/or allowing scope changes to diminish the expected benefits.
	Practise “no surprises” leadership – brief your Chief Executive and Ministers early on risks and trade-offs.	Allowing delivery pressures to undermine outcomes or long-term value.
	Write every paper, email, and project board minute as if it could be released under the OIA.	Underestimating the visibility of your project – public scrutiny is part of the job.
	Be clear about how your project connects to system priorities.	Thinking your investment is unique in some way and therefore exempt from system expectations.
Sustain your leadership	Build strong connections early with your Chief Executive, Project Director, project board members, Ministers’ offices.	Letting the role consume all your time and focus – burnout comes quickly if you don’t set boundaries <i>or</i> being consumed by other responsibilities and neglecting these key relationships.
	Protect time for reflection and recovery – your judgement is your most important asset.	Believing you have all the answers or that asking for advice is a weakness.
	Seek out a specialist advisor, trusted mentor, or peer network to build capability and gain perspective.	Treating relationships as transactional, or only engaging when problems arise.
	Commit to active learning – immerse yourself in the project history, context, and wider system priorities.	Assuming because you have expertise in your business, this will be sufficient to ‘see you through’ a complex infrastructure project.

Checklist – Your first 90 days

- ✓ Appointment letter signed, mandate and tenure clear.
- ✓ Project board stood up, terms of reference and decision log in place.
- ✓ Assurance plan agreed; first reviews booked.
- ✓ Secretariat support confirmed.
- ✓ Mentor/peer support arranged; early system engagement complete.
- ✓ Benefits and outcomes visible in project board agendas.
- ✓ Time commitment agreed and protected.



Part 3:

Owning the business case

3.1 The business case is yours

The business case is the formal agreement between the agency and the Crown (through Ministers and Cabinet) about what will be delivered, why, how much it will cost, and what success looks like.

Your job is to sponsor, own, and carry the business case through the system – from initial drafting, through approvals by Treasury and Cabinet, to ensuring delivery and benefits realisation. It must remain a living document, developed and updated as assumptions shift and context changes.

The business case is the key document for the project – read it, understand it, and make others do the same.

The business case sets out the justification for investing in something and should provide sufficient information to enable the investor to have confidence that the investment is:

Attractive – the outcome or benefits of the investment are well worth the cost (including non-financial resources and effort) and the inherent risk of the investment.

Affordable – the investment can be funded, and any ongoing operational costs are understood and able to be funded.

Achievable – the organisation, or the sector, has the capability and capacity to deliver the programme or project. If external expertise or suppliers are also needed, appropriately experienced providers exist, are interested and available.

The main thing is to get the business case right from the start. Your investment will never be in

better shape, than when it is first approved.

“... the lowest standards that are set at the start of a project are the highest standards that can be expected for the rest of the project. Investment of time and resource in a rigorous process at the outset is essential for success, and deficiencies cannot be recovered later.”¹

3.2 Better Business Cases

As you will know, Better Business Cases (BBC) is the methodology that provides objective analysis in a consistent format to decision-makers. It allows for better comparability and transparency that lets government make smart investment decisions that maximise public value.²

The Five Case Model (5CM) is the organising framework for a Better Business Case. The 5CM:

- gives discipline and structure to a business case in the investment lifecycle, and
- aims to address specific questions and give evidence to satisfy decision-makers and approvers.

¹ Lord Browne of Madingley. 2013. *Getting a Grip: How to Improve Major Project Execution and Control in Government*, Cabinet Office, London.

² www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/public-sector-leadership/investment-management/better-business-cases

Figure 2: Five Case Model (5CM)



Before starting a business case, remember you need:

- risk profile assessment and strategic assessment
- business case scoping document
- strategic thinking and planning.

More details are available on the Treasury website.

Your role as SRO

- Own the business case from start to finish. It is the agreement between your agency and the Crown.
- Sponsor its development: make sure it is evidence based, realistic, and aligned with the strategy.
- Carry it through the approvals process – Budget, Cabinet, and Ministers.
- Test and re-test its assumptions as context changes and update it if needed.
- Treat it as a living document – within the proper governance process.
- As SRO, your role is to **sponsor** and **steward** the case throughout delivery, not to make unilateral changes.
- Be prepared to recommend stopping the project if the case no longer stacks up.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Writing in isolation – treating the business case process as a paperwork exercise without input from delivery teams, users, or stakeholders.
- Focusing on compliance, not content – chasing approval rather than testing value and viability.
- Over-reliance on consultants – outsourcing the business case itself rather than using the expertise to strengthen thinking.
- Under-developed business cases – business cases that are vague, poorly tested, or unrealistic will fail at final approval or worse, be approved and then collapse in delivery.

Checklist – Business case questions

- ✓ **Strategic Case** – Is this the right thing? *What is the specific problem we are solving, and what evidence shows the investment is justified?*
- ✓ **Economic Case** – Is this the best option? *Does the preferred option clearly deliver the greatest public value compared with all credible alternatives?*
- ✓ **Commercial Case** – Can the market deliver it? *Is there a feasible, fair, and defensible path for the market to deliver what we need without creating unmanageable commercial risk?*
- ✓ **Financial Case** – Can we afford it? *Are the full, whole-of-life costs understood, affordable, and backed by secure funding?*
- ✓ **Management Case** – Can we deliver it? *Is there a realistic, fully-resourced plan with governance, capability, risk, and benefits ownership strong enough to deliver?*



Treating the business case as a one-off hurdle for funding rather than a living reference point throughout delivery.



At every project board meeting, ask:
“Does what we are doing still align with the business case?”

3.2 Benefits first, always

Benefits are the reason the project exists. They must stay front and centre, even when delivery gets noisy.

As SRO, you are accountable for ensuring the benefits set out in the business case are realised – not just that the project is delivered.

- Make the business case benefits your baseline – track them as actively as costs and schedule.
- Ensure every benefit has a named owner who remains responsible, even once the project transitions into business-as-usual.
- Require benefits to be reported at project board level throughout delivery, not deferred until closure.
- Be ready to recommend a pause, reset, or stop if the benefits case no longer stacks up.

Your role as SRO

- Rehearse how you would explain the project's benefits in one clear sentence – the test is whether it makes sense to Parliament, Ministers, or the public.
- Insist on a **benefits dashboard** reviewed at the same cadence as the delivery dashboard.
- Make benefit ownership visible – confirm with named individuals that they accept responsibility.
- Use assurance, including Gateway, Independent Quality Assurance (IQA), quantitative risk assessments (QRAs), to test whether the benefits are still credible, not just whether delivery is on track.

Checklist – Benefits discipline

- ✓ Do we have a clear benefits map, with owners named?
- ✓ Are benefits a clear focus at every project board meeting?
- ✓ Do we know what data will prove benefits have been realised?
- ✓ Are trade-offs (time, cost, scope) being tested against benefits, not just milestones?



Benefits left vague or deferred until after the project will rarely materialise without active ownership.



Ask at each project board meeting:
“Does what we’re doing still deliver the benefits we committed to in the business case?”

"The Value of infrastructure investment lies not in the assets created but in the benefits delivered to people and economies."

World Bank (2020) Infrastructure for Development: An Overview.

Part 4:

Governing for delivery

4.1 Run a high-value project board

Public sector project governance is rarely simple. Most projects sit within a web of formal and informal decision-making rights that can include Ministers, councillors, governing boards, central agencies, funders, planning authorities, and delivery partners. As SRO, you operate within this system, not above it. A core part of your role is to navigate this complexity and make it as clear and workable as possible for others – by securing clear delegations, defining roles, and ensuring governance forums function well.

You will usually chair the project board – sometimes referred to as project governance board (PGB). The project board is your primary mechanism for direction, oversight, and assurance. Its purpose is distinct from a Crown entity's governing Board (capitalised), which holds statutory or corporate decision-making powers.

A well-run project board does not manage day-to-day delivery. It creates clarity, tests assumptions, and provides informed challenge. How you chair will set the tone for delivery and determine whether governance adds value or becomes a burden.

Where appropriate, independent project board members can strengthen challenge, reduce groupthink, and provide specialist expertise. Some agencies also use an independent board chair for major, high-risk investments, particularly where neutrality, technical depth, or probity considerations are important. The key is to ensure the project board is composed and chaired in a way that provides credible, independent scrutiny and supports disciplined delivery.

Navigating complexity

- Recognise that your project board operates within a wider system of governance – it does not sit at the top.

- Be clear about what the project board can decide, what must be escalated, and what requires ministerial or Cabinet approval.
- Map formal and informal decision-rights early and keep them under review as the project evolves.
- Use your project board to help create coherence – ensuring information and decisions flow smoothly between agencies and Ministers.

Your role as Chair

- Lead the project board so that it fulfils its purpose and adds value.
- Set and own the agenda, ensuring time is spent on what matters most.
- Facilitate discussion that is robust, inclusive, and focused on outcomes and benefits.
- Act as spokesperson for the project board when required.
- Build a constructive project board culture where members feel able to speak up and challenge.
- Work closely with the secretariat to ensure agendas, papers, and records are fit for purpose.

Meeting rhythm

- Project boards normally meet monthly. More frequent meetings may be necessary during pressure points, but beware the cost in papers and staff effort, and the risk of sliding into management.
- Use an annual meeting calendar to plan for key approvals, deep dives, and to smooth the workload.
- Consider scheduling short “board-only” time before meetings to allow members to raise concerns, particularly regarding the project board itself – but never let it replace full and transparent discussion during the meeting.

Agendas and papers

- Own the agenda – don't let it be driven only by what arrives from the project team.
- Be clear about the purpose of each item: decision, endorsement, or assurance.
- Prioritise the most critical items first and allocate time proportionate to importance.
- Insist on short, clear, decision-focused papers. Recommendations should ask the project board to approve, endorse, or agree. "Noting" papers should be rare.
- Make the business case the board's "bible" and test decisions against it regularly.

Records and follow-up

- Keep a decision log and action log, maintained by the secretariat.
- Ensure minutes are a concise record of decisions and key rationale – not a verbatim transcript.
- Track whether actions are closed, and decisions implemented.

Culture and capability

- Choose project board members for skills and independence, and with sufficient seniority to have influence.
- Support members to grow their governance capability.
- Encourage openness, constructive challenge, and accountability.
- Ensure conflicts of interest are declared and managed transparently, with records kept in a register.

Traps to avoid

- Boards drifting into management detail and micromanagement.
- Meeting too frequently, creating unnecessary workload without improving outcomes.
- Accepting poor-quality papers or papers with only "noting" recommendations.
- Failing to document decisions and their rationale, leaving you exposed later.

Running a high-value project board is less about frequency or formality and more about focus. A well-chaired board that concentrates on outcomes, risks, and benefits will support you as SRO to govern with confidence.

Checklist – Project board meetings

- ✓ Ensure you have an agreed and published terms of reference.
- ✓ Establish a decision log (to record what was decided and why).
- ✓ Insist all members have read the business case – and return to it often.
- ✓ Set the tone: focus on benefits, risks, and outcomes.



Project boards that drift into project management detail, leaving strategy and benefits unchallenged.



Remind the project board regularly, ***"Our job is to govern for delivery, not to manage the schedule."***

4.2 Make assurance work for you

Assurance matters – a lot. It is a critical SRO responsibility and should be taken seriously.

Assurance is one of the SRO's most important tools. It provides an independent view on whether the project is still viable, on track, and delivering value. Done well, it protects against blind spots, groupthink, and over-optimism. Treated lightly, it becomes a box-ticking exercise that adds little value.

Assurance is not about whether you “trust” your Project Director or delivery team – you can't delegate your responsibility as SRO to seek sufficient, independent insight. The type and intensity of assurance should be proportionate to the scale and risk of the investment. For small, low-risk projects, assurance may be light touch. For high-risk or politically sensitive investments, it must be robust, independent, and frequent.

A useful way to think about assurance is through the **three lines of assurance**:

- **First line** – day-to-day project controls: reporting, quality standards, contract management, health and safety checks.
- **Second line** – organisational or partner oversight: internal audit, governance committees, peer reviews, internal quality review assessment (QRA) processes or independent experts.
- **Third line** – independent external assurance: IPP, Gateway reviews, IQA, Independent QRAs, technical quality assurance (TQA), Auditor-General reviews.

Your job is to ensure the right combination is in place and scaled to the risk of the investment.

- **IQA:** provides an external check on whether project controls, planning, and reporting are reliable, and should be used to validate that information coming to you and the project board is sound.
- **QRA:** gives you realistic cost and schedule ranges, evidence-based contingency, and clarity on the biggest risks that could derail delivery.
- **Optimism bias adjustments:** correct for systematic under-estimation and must be applied for medium- and high-risk investments unless you can demonstrate active mitigation.

- **Delivery Confidence Ratings (DCR):** DCRs from Gateway reviews are a key early-warning signal of project viability and must trigger timely action and escalation when required.

Your role as SRO

- Approve an assurance plan that covers the whole lifecycle and is proportionate to project risk.
- Commission the right reviews at the right time – Gateway, IPP, IQA, technical and financial reviews, and QRA for medium- and high-risk investments.
- Ensure reviewers report directly to you and the project board, so reporting is not filtered through the project team.
- Treat delivery confidence ratings as early warning signals and escalate amber/red and red ratings promptly.
- Ensure findings feed directly into the risk register, benefits tracking, and agreed escalation pathways (Chief Executive, Treasury, Ministers).
- Address systemic risks, adjust course where needed, or pause/stop the project if viability no longer holds.
- Reinforce that assurance is a value-adding discipline and ensure the project budget includes sufficient funding for assurance.

Checklist – Assurance essentials

- ✓ Approve an assurance plan covering the full lifecycle.
- ✓ Ensure assurance effort is proportionate to project risk and funded appropriately.
- ✓ Review terms of reference for each review – they must target the real risks.
- ✓ Require independent reviewers to report directly to you and the project board.
- ✓ Apply QRA and challenge optimism bias for medium- and high-risk investments.
- ✓ Use delivery confidence ratings to trigger timely escalation when needed.
- ✓ Update the risk register and benefits tracking based on assurance findings.
- ✓ Track recommendations to closure and use them to inform decisions.



Assurance reports filed away without action – or “sanitised” before reaching the board.



Ask every reviewer: ***“What’s the one thing that should be keeping us awake at night about this project?”***

"Optimism bias is a systemic bias, not a random error."

Bent Flyvbjerg, *Megaprojects and Risk*, 2003.

4.3 Own risk and delivery confidence

As SRO, you are the primary owner of outcome risk – the risk that your project does not deliver the benefits it was approved to achieve. The Project Director manages day-to-day delivery risks, but it is your responsibility to ensure those risks are translated into the bigger picture: organisational, sector, and system-level risks.

Risk allocation is one of the most complex aspects of project governance. This requires identifying the drivers of each risk, close collaboration between project, commercial, legal, and technical teams, and a shared understanding by all parties of the cost, schedule, and behavioural implications. Allocations must be revisited as the project evolves, market conditions shift, or new information emerges. Clear allocation underpins credible business cases, fair commercial arrangements, and realistic delivery confidence ratings.

Risk is not a one-off register or a box to be ticked. It runs through everything you do as an SRO, the business case, the project board, assurance reviews, stakeholder engagement, and commercial partnerships. Your job is to join the dots, so the right risks are visible, understood, and acted on.

Your role as SRO

- Ensure risk registers track not only delivery risks such as time, cost, and scope, and threats to benefits realisation, but also opportunity risks that could be leveraged to improve outcomes.
- Test whether the business case assumptions and mitigations are still valid as context changes.
- Use the project board to interrogate the top risks, not just to receive updates.
- Escalate systemic risks that cannot be managed within the project (for example, workforce shortages, funding constraints, policy shifts).
- Balance technical risk with political and reputational risk and make sure your Chief Executive and Ministers are briefed early (“no surprises”).
- Insist that assurance reviews are targeted at the areas of greatest uncertainty.
- Use delivery confidence ratings, QRA, and external reviews to check whether optimism bias is creeping in.

Checklist – Risk rhythm

- ✓ Require a risk dashboard at every project board meeting, showing the top five risks to outcomes/benefits.
- ✓ Ask your Project Director: “What risks keep you awake at night that aren’t on this list?”
- ✓ Ensure the secretariat maintains an up-to-date risk log and tracks actions against it.
- ✓ Schedule periodic “deep dives” into key risks – financial, benefit realisation, reputational, organisational or system level.



Risk allocation is treated as fixed and not revisited as the project evolves.



Ask: ***“If I had to brief the Minister tomorrow, what three risks would I talk about?”***

Part 5:

Being a great client

5.1 Value over cost

As SRO, you are expected to champion value for money – not just the cheapest option. Major infrastructure projects are long-term investments of public money, and decisions made today will shape costs, risks, and outcomes for decades. The role of the SRO is to ensure commercial arrangements are set up to deliver enduring benefits, not simply to meet budget pressures in the short term.

What value means in practice

Value is more than delivering an asset on time and on budget. It means ensuring that:

- the business case outcomes and benefits are achieved
- whole-of-life costs, including maintenance and operations, are factored into investment decisions
- risks are allocated to the parties best placed to manage them, without creating adversarial relationships
- procurement models and contracts incentivise performance, innovation, and collaboration – not just lowest cost
- projects support a healthy and capable New Zealand infrastructure sector.

Your role as SRO

- Interrogate procurement strategies. Check that approaches align with the outcomes in the business case and do not incentivise cost-cutting at the expense of benefits or quality.
- Test value at each decision point. At every project board meeting, ask: “How is this decision improving value, not just reducing cost?”
- Champion whole-of-life thinking. Push for design and procurement decisions that consider operational, maintenance, and renewal costs.
- Engage early with the market. Support transparent and timely market engagement to build supplier confidence.
- Balance accountability and flexibility. Ensure financial delegations and controls protect public money, while avoiding delays to critical decisions.

What to watch out for

- Over-optimistic savings assumptions or reliance on “future efficiencies” without evidence.
- Procurement models that shift unreasonable risks onto supplier or client.
- Decisions made under political pressure to meet short-term budgets or schedules at the expense of long-term value.
- Projects that fail to account for the ongoing operating costs that agencies will inherit once the asset is delivered.

Checklist – Are we focused on value?

- ✓ Does the procurement approach align with the business case outcomes?
- ✓ Have whole-of-life costs been analysed and factored into decision-making?
- ✓ Is risk being allocated fairly and sustainably?
- ✓ Are contracts set up to incentivise collaboration and innovation?



Over-optimistic savings promises or reliance on “future efficiencies” without evidence.



At every milestone, ask: ***“How is this decision improving value, not just managing down delivery cost?”***

5.2 Partnering well

Projects succeed when the public sector acts as a savvy, consistent, and reliable client. As SRO, your role is to set the tone, both in formal governance and in the behaviours you model. The way you and your project board treat suppliers directly influences the quality of bids, the health of relationships, and ultimately, the project's outcomes.

Your role as SRO

- **Behavioural leadership** – model fairness, transparency, and respect. Small signals (how you respond to bad news, how openly you communicate) shape trust.
- **Smart contracting** – support commercial arrangements that allocate risk appropriately, reward performance, and enable constructive working relationships. Poorly managed relationships or unclear accountabilities can strain trust and undermine delivery in any contract form.
- **Market confidence** – a well-run project attracts and retains better suppliers. The quality of engagement you lead signals to the market whether it's worth bidding next time.
- **Continuous engagement** – endorse early, open market engagement (consistent with MBIE and Te Waihangā guidance) so suppliers see a predictable pipeline and clear expectations.

Principles of being a good client

Successful SROs model these behaviours in every interaction with suppliers and delivery partners:

- **Consistency** – predictable processes and messages reduce uncertainty and build trust.
- **Transparency** – open sharing of information avoids surprises and supports better decision-making.
- **Fairness** – allocate risks to the party best placed to manage them and resolve issues promptly.
- **Respect** – treat suppliers as long-term partners, not adversaries.
- **Learning** – capture lessons with the market as the project progresses, not just at closure.

Checklist – Healthy client behaviours

- ✓ Do we run supplier engagement sessions openly, with consistent messages to all parties?
- ✓ Do our contracts incentivise collaboration and whole-of-life performance, not disputes and claims?
- ✓ Are supplier concerns heard and escalated quickly – or do they linger unresolved?
- ✓ Am I setting expectations of professionalism and fairness in every meeting, both with the project team and external partners?
- ✓ Have we built in feedback loops with suppliers, so we learn and improve together?



A culture of blame between client and supplier – it usually signals bigger delivery problems.



Spend time “walking the floor” with supplier teams – they often know issues before the project board does.

Part 6:

Leading for success

This role is about more than following process. It's about how you lead: holding the vision, shaping culture, partnering with your Project Director, building confidence with stakeholders, and showing up as a system leader. The habits you set here will carry the project through pressure and change.

6.1 Hold the vision

Every successful project starts and ends with a clear sense of purpose. As SRO, you are the custodian of that purpose. You need to keep the project's outcomes and benefits alive from the very beginning – through business case development, approvals, delivery, and beyond into benefits realisation.

The vision is more than words in the business case. It is the “golden thread” that connects strategy, investment decisions, delivery activity, and outcomes for New Zealanders. Projects often become noisy with schedules, risks, and contractual disputes, but your role is to keep the focus on why the project exists and what it will achieve. Ministers, Chief Executives, boards, suppliers, and communities all take cues from you. If you can explain the benefits in a single sentence – and consistently tell that story – the project has a much stronger chance of staying aligned.

Your role as SRO

- Champion the purpose and outcomes in every project board meeting, paper, and briefing.
- Connect strategy, business case, delivery milestones, and benefits realisation into a coherent story.
- Test trade-offs (time, cost, scope) against outcomes and value, not just delivery milestones.
- Reinforce the project's public value story with Ministers, stakeholders, and the public.

Checklist – Vision in action

- ✓ Can I explain the project's benefits in one clear sentence?
- ✓ Do project board papers link decisions back to outcomes and benefits?
- ✓ Are changes in scope or schedule tested for their impact on benefits?
- ✓ Is the project's public value story consistent across papers, engagements, and communications?



Losing sight of the “why” as delivery pressures mount. If project board packs, updates, and conversations are dominated by schedules and spend but rarely return to benefits, the project is already drifting.



Open every major decision with three prompts: “**Why now? For whom? To what effect?**” – it keeps the golden thread of purpose front and centre.

6.2 Lead the culture

Culture is the multiplier. A strong governance culture can carry a project through complexity, while a weak one can derail it even with the best plans in place. As SRO, you set the tone. The way you chair meetings, respond to issues, and model behaviours will shape how the project board, project team, and suppliers behave.

Good culture doesn't emerge by accident – it must be designed and reinforced. That means clear expectations, open discussion, and respectful challenge. Effective boards work to principles: agendas are owned by the Chair, minutes capture decisions and rationale, papers are concise, and assurance findings are acted on. Just as important, you create psychological safety: people must feel safe to raise issues early, rather than wait until problems are in the headlines. Culture also includes learning habits: taking time after milestones or crises to reflect and improve, not just move on.

Your role as SRO

- Set the governance tone: openness, constructive challenge, and “no surprises”.
- Ensure project board processes support effectiveness: owned agendas, clear terms of reference, decision/action logs.
- Create a safe environment where risks and concerns can be raised without blame.
- Embed learning rhythms: quick retrospectives, deep dives, and occasional “away days” for strategic thinking.

Checklist – Culture by design

- ✓ Have we agreed on governance behaviours or a short charter for the project board?
- ✓ Do minutes record decisions and rationale, not just discussions?
- ✓ Is silence in the room checked and addressed as a risk signal?
- ✓ Are assurance findings presented directly and tracked to closure?



A culture of blame between client and supplier, or a project board that avoids difficult conversations.



Close each project board meeting with two questions: **“What did we learn?”** and **“What will we do differently next month?”**

"Behaviour from important people that is inconsistent with the vision overwhelms words."

John Kotter, Leading Change, 1996

6.3 Partner with your Project Director (PD)

The partnership between the SRO and the PD is one of the strongest predictors of project success. You govern; they deliver. Alignment without overlap is essential. If this relationship is weak or unclear, governance falters and delivery drifts.

Your PD leads the day to day: managing suppliers, contracts, risks, and schedules. You lead governance: setting direction, protecting outcomes, and making system-level decisions. The line between you must be clear. A written agreement setting out expectations, decision points, and escalation routes can prevent confusion. Weekly 1:1 conversations (outside the board) help build trust and surface issues early. Your role is also to remove barriers the PD cannot – political, organisational, or system level. Back your PD publicly, challenge them privately, and make sure they have the resources, authority, and support to succeed.

Your role as SRO

- Define role clarity: governance is yours; delivery is theirs.
- Set an agreement: expectations, escalation, decision rights, update cadence.
- Meet regularly to align, share concerns, and test delivery confidence.
- Remove system and political barriers your PD cannot resolve.
- Work with your Chief Executive, human resources and finance team to secure the calibre of PD required, even if remuneration challenges exist.

Checklist – A healthy SRO and PD relationship

- ✓ Is there a written and reviewed plan between SRO and PD?
- ✓ Do we have a clear escalation map (project → agency → system)?
- ✓ Are we aligned on delivery confidence and benefit risks before each project board meeting?
- ✓ Does the PD have the resources and authority to deliver?
- ✓ Do I back the PD publicly and challenge constructively in private?



The SRO doing the PD's job – or the PD left to manage the board.



In your weekly 1:1 ask: ***“What’s one thing that would make a difference for you?”***

6.4 Build stakeholder confidence

Confidence is one of your most valuable currencies as an SRO. It is earned through clarity, consistency, and “no surprises” leadership. Projects can survive difficult delivery challenges if stakeholders trust that issues are understood, communicated early, and managed responsibly. Lose that confidence, and even small problems can escalate into crises.

Your stakeholders are wide-ranging: Ministers, your Chief Executive, Treasury, Te Waihangā (including the IPP process), New Zealand Infrastructure Funding and Financing Co (NIFF), the Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) for digital projects, New Zealand Government Procurement (NZGP) for procurement, iwi, communities, and delivery partners. Each has different interests and levels of influence. Your job is to engage them early, brief them honestly, and maintain alignment.

Assume every paper, email, or briefing could be released under the OIA – your communication must always be accurate, evidence-based, and defensible.

Confidence also depends on consistency: the story you tell internally, to Ministers, to suppliers, and to the public must align.

Your role as SRO

- Maintain regular, open communication with your Chief Executive and Ministers, ensuring risks and trade-offs are raised early.
- Map your stakeholders and understand their priorities, concerns, and influence.
- Stay engaged with central agencies (Treasury, Te Waihangā, GCDO and NZGP) to meet system requirements and build support.
- Engage iwi, communities, and partners respectfully and early, closing the loop on issues raised.
- Ensure messaging is consistent across board papers, market engagements, and public communications.

Checklist – Confidence signals

- ✓ Do I have a simple monthly one-pager for Chief Executive/ Minister covering outcomes, risks, and upcoming decisions?
- ✓ Is there a live stakeholder map with owners and an engagement plan?
- ✓ Are risks and trade-offs explained in terms of benefits and outcomes, not just delivery detail?
- ✓ Are papers and communications written to withstand OIA release and public scrutiny?
- ✓ Do all our messages – internally, to Ministers, and externally – tell the same story?



Stakeholders hearing bad news from someone other than you.



Book two informal catch-ups each month with key influencers (internal or external) and ask: ***“What are you worried about that we aren’t talking about?”***

6.5 Be a system leader

Your project is not just about delivering an asset – it is also part of the wider system of public sector investment. As an SRO, you carry influence that goes beyond your immediate project. How you lead affects trust in government delivery, market confidence, and the capability of future SROs. You are both a custodian of outcomes today and a builder of system capability for tomorrow.

System leadership means thinking beyond your project boundaries. Continuity of SRO leadership has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of success.

Finally, system leadership is about leaving a legacy. Share lessons, mentor new SROs, and contribute to communities of practice so that the system improves with every project.

Your role as SRO

- Manage continuity: commit to tenure where possible; if you must step away, ensure a structured handover.
- Support procurement approaches that are fair, collaborative, and grow long-term market capability.
- Share lessons through Te Waihangā, Treasury, and networks like the Infrastructure Leaders Network.
- Mentor and support newer SROs, helping build a stronger pipeline of leaders.

Checklist – System leadership

- ✓ Have I committed to an appropriate tenure, or planned a robust handover if change is likely?
- ✓ Have I escalated systemic risks beyond the project to my Chief Executive or central agencies?
- ✓ Do our commercial settings support a healthy, confident supplier market?
- ✓ Have I shared lessons learned and offered support to peers or the incoming SRO?



Avoid stepping into the SRO role without securing the context you need to lead well.



After each milestone, run a short after-action review and share three key insights with your project board, Chief Executive, and peer network.

"SROs are system leaders. They hold responsibility not only for the success of their project, but for ensuring the programme contributes to improved performance across the wider public service system. "

System Leader

Part 7:

More useful links and resources

There is a huge range of useful information available to SROs. The following list is organised by sections to enable you to focus on areas you have gaps in your knowledge.

Two good reads to start

- **The Teal Book.** UK guidance for practitioners and teams to direct and manage portfolios, programmes and projects in government. <https://projectdelivery.gov.uk/teal-book/home/>
- Flyvbjerg, B. & Gardner, D. (2023). *How big things get done: The surprising factors behind every successful project, from home renovations to space exploration.* Macmillan, New York USA.

Public Sector

- Public Service Commission. (2025). Standards of Integrity and Conduct. <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/guidance/standards-of-integrity-and-conduct>
- Leadership Development Centre. (2025). Public Service Core Learning Hub. Core Capability. <https://www ldc.govt.nz/public-service-core-learning-hub/core-capability>

Public Sector delivery agencies

- Crown Infrastructure Delivery (CID) – New Zealand’s central government delivery agency for major and complex projects. Provides commercial expertise, project delivery support, and assurance for high-risk investments. <https://www.crowninfrastructuredelivery.govt.nz/>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Funding and Financing Co (NIFF) – Provides alternative funding and financing solutions for local and central government projects, particularly where traditional funding channels are constrained. <https://www.niffco.govt.nz/>

New Zealand public sector governance and investment guidance

- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Webpage. Last updated 2023.

CO (23) 9: Investment Management and Asset Performance in Departments and Other Entities. <https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/co-23-9-investment-management-and-asset-performance-departments-and-other-entities>

- Local Government New Zealand. Webpage. Governance guides. <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/learning-support/governance-guides/>
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. (2019). Construction project governance. <https://www.procurement.govt.nz/assets/procurement-property/documents/construction-project-governance-construction-procurement.pdf>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2019). Major infrastructure project governance guidance. <https://tewaihanga.govt.nz/our-work/project-support/guidance/project-governance>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2019). Market engagement guidance. <https://tewaihanga.govt.nz/our-work/project-support/guidance/market-engagement>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2024). Project leadership capability framework. <https://tewaihanga.govt.nz/our-work/project-support/guidance/project-leadership-capability-framework>
- The Treasury. Webpage. Last updated 2023. Gateway Reviews. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/public-sector-leadership/investment-management/gateway-reviews>
- The Treasury. (2024) Independent Review of business cases for high risk investments prior to Cabinet decisions. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/guide/independent-review-business-cases-high-risk-investments-prior-cabinet-decisions>
- The Treasury. Webpage. Updated 2024. Risk Profile Assessment and Strategic Assessment. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/public-sector-leadership/investment-management/investment-planning/risk-profile-assessment-and-strategic-assessment>

- The Treasury. Webpage. Issue date 22 May 2025. Guide to the Budget process. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/guide/guide-budget-process>
- The Treasury. Webpage. Updated July 2025. Webpage. Better Business Cases | The Treasury New Zealand. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/public-sector-leadership/investment-management/better-business-cases>
- The Treasury. Webpage. Last updated 2025. Quarterly Investment Reporting. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/public-sector-leadership/investment-management/investment-management-system-reporting/quarterly-investment-reporting>

Infrastructure projects – lessons learned

- Controller and Auditor-General. (2022). Governance of the City Rail Link project. <https://oag.parliament.nz/2022/city-rail-link>
- Controller and Auditor-General. (2023). Making infrastructure investment decisions <https://oag.parliament.nz/2023/infrastructure-decisions>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2024). Transmission Gully post-construction review: Executive summary and insights for the future. <https://media.umbraco.io/te-waihanganga-30-year-strategy/03vbqymv/transmission-gully-post-construction-review-executive-summary-and-insights-for-the-future.pdf>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2024). City Rail Link Lessons Learnt. <https://tewaihanganga.govt.nz/our-work/reviews/city-rail-link-lessons-learnt>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2024). Mental Health Infrastructure Review. <https://tewaihanganga.govt.nz/our-work/reviews/mental-health-infrastructure-programme-review>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2024). Delivering better value and better outcomes. <https://tewaihanganga.govt.nz/our-work/research-insights/delivering-better-value-and-better-outcomes>
- New Zealand infrastructure Commission. (2025). Insights for major project delivery. <https://tewaihanganga.govt.nz/our-work/research-insights/insights-for-major-project-delivery>
- Controller and Auditor-General. (2023). Making infrastructure investment decisions quickly. <https://oag.parliament.nz/2023/infrastructure-decisions>

Commercial guidance

- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. (2025). Government Procurement Rules: Responsible expenditure of public funds. <https://www.procurement.govt.nz/procurement/principles-charter-and-rules/government-procurement-rules/>
- New Zealand Infrastructure Commission. (2024). Market engagement. <https://tewaihanganga.govt.nz/our-work/project-support/guidance/market-engagement>

International resources

- The Art of Brilliance (UK IPA). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d2455d840f0b660abe6e9a6/The_Art_of_Brilliance_-_COMPLETE.pdf

Performance reporting

- Controller and Auditor-General. (2024). Performance Reporting. <https://oag.parliament.nz/good-practice/docs/performance-reporting.pdf/view>

SROs may find the following short courses helpful

- Asset Management Governance – Āpōpō Gov 101. <https://apopo.co.nz/digital-badges/>
- Gateway training. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/state-sector-leadership/investment-management/gateway-reviews/gateway-training>
- Institute of Directors offers a range of governance development. <https://www.iod.org.nz/governance-courses>
- The Infrastructure Commission's one-day training programme for Public Sector Infrastructure SROs who are new to the role. <https://tewaihanganga.govt.nz/our-work/leadership-learning/workshops>
- Project, Programme and Portfolio Governance Professional (P3GP). <https://www.projectplus.co.nz/courses/181-project-programme-and-portfolio-governance-professional-p3gp/>
- Public Governance Aotearoa. <https://itikopara.org.nz/>

Appendix 1 Checklist

Mindsets and capabilities that matter | Am I bringing both the “doing” and the “being”?

- ☐ Do I have the right governance and technical skills (capabilities) to steer this project? If not, what am I doing about it?
- ☐ Am I showing up with the presence and attitudes (mindsets) that build trust and confidence?
- ☐ Where are my gaps, and who or what can I draw on to fill them?
- ☐ Am I balancing “what we do” with “how I lead” every week?

Your first 90 days – a very Quick Guide

- ☐ Appointment letter signed, mandate and tenure clear.
- ☐ Project board stood up, terms of reference and decision log in place.
- ☐ Assurance plan agreed; first reviews booked.
- ☐ Secretariat support confirmed.
- ☐ Mentor/peer support arranged; early system engagement complete.
- ☐ Benefits and outcomes visible in project board agendas.
- ☐ Time commitment agreed and protected.

Owning the business case | Business case questions

- ☐ **Strategic Case – Is this the right thing?** What is the specific problem we are solving, and what evidence shows the investment is justified?
- ☐ **Economic Case – Is this the best option?** Does the preferred option clearly deliver the greatest public value compared with all credible alternatives?
- ☐ **Commercial Case – Can the market deliver it?** Is there a feasible, fair, and defensible path for the market to deliver what we need without creating unmanageable commercial risk?
- ☐ **Financial Case – Can we afford it?** Are the full, whole-of-life costs understood, affordable, and backed by secure funding?
- ☐ **Management Case – Can we deliver it?** Is there a realistic, fully-resourced plan with governance, capability, risk, and benefits ownership strong enough to deliver?

Benefits first, always | Benefits discipline

- ☐ Do we have a clear benefits map, with owners named?
- ☐ Are benefits a clear focus at every project board meeting?
- ☐ Do we know what data will prove benefits have been realised?
- ☐ Are trade-offs (time, cost, scope) being tested against benefits, not just milestones?

Governing for delivery | Project board meetings

- ☐ Ensure you have an agreed and published terms of reference.
- ☐ Establish a decision log (to record what was decided and why).
- ☐ Insist all members have read the business case – and return to it often.
- ☐ Set the tone: focus on benefits, risks, and outcomes.

Make assurance work for you | Assurance essentials

- ☐ Approve an assurance plan covering the full lifecycle.
- ☐ Ensure assurance effort is proportionate to project risk and funded appropriately.
- ☐ Review terms of reference for each review – they must target the real risks.
- ☐ Require independent reviewers to report directly to you and the project board.
- ☐ Apply QRA and challenge optimism bias for medium- and high-risk investments.
- ☐ Use delivery confidence ratings to trigger timely escalation when needed.
- ☐ Update the risk register and benefits tracking based on assurance findings.
- ☐ Track recommendations to closure and use them to inform decisions.

Own risk and delivery confidence | Risk rhythm

- ☐ Require a risk dashboard at every project board meeting, showing the top five risks to outcomes/benefits.
- ☐ Ask your Project Director: “What risks keep you awake at night that aren’t on this list?”
- ☐ Ensure the secretariat maintains an up-to-date risk log and tracks actions against it.
- ☐ Schedule periodic “deep dives” into key risks – financial, benefit realisation, reputational, organisational or system level.

Value over cost | Are we focused on value?

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- ☐ Are contracts set up to incentivise collaboration and innovation?

Partnering well | Healthy client behaviours

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Hold the vision | Vision in action

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Lead the culture | Culture by design

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- ☐ Do minutes record decisions and rationale, not just discussions?
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- ☐ Are assurance findings presented directly and tracked to closure?

Partner with your Project Director | A healthy SRO and PD relationship

- ☐ Is there a written and reviewed plan between SRO and PD?
- ☐ Do we have a clear escalation map (project → agency → system)?
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- ☐ Do all our messages – internally, to Ministers, and externally – tell the same story?

Be a system leader | System leadership

- ☐ Have I committed to an appropriate tenure, or planned a robust handover if change is likely?
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- ☐ Do our commercial settings support a healthy, confident supplier market?
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