The review itself

Before the first interview, explore the areas you have all identified and agree priorities for the topics to be covered. As well as your list of discussion topics, create a list of emerging issues as soon as the review starts.

Use open questions and active listening to understand other lines of questioning that might not have been obvious during your reading time. Your topic list, rather than specific questions, will help to keep the discussion open. It is often difficult to anticipate what will be important. Use your own experience to identify where the problems are likely to occur. But always retain an open mind - perhaps something is being done in an innovative way that you have not experienced before. Be prepared to quickly change direction if other more important issues emerge. Encourage interviewees to explain what they think requires particular attention in the project and to offer their proposals on how things could be improved.

If you believe you have found all the key recommendations before completing the interviews, be prepared to cancel those final interviews and shorten the review. Use a 'wash-up' session at the end of each day to report on progress, to explore the emerging issues and also to clarify any anomalies with the SRO or project manager.

Report

Keep the level of detailed content in line with the importance and impact of the recommendation. If the review is green, there may be little need for detailed explanations. At all times, try to be succinct. It should be possible to explain any point in five or six lines.

Remember that few review reports, even high risk, run to more than 12 pages. A report of half this size may describe the full findings of a low risk review.

Ask the SRO and others with whom he/she shares the draft report to check for any factual errors. If an important point could be better made in another way, invite the SRO to suggest wording to help sell the point.

If you feel a management summary would be useful, think about creating a PowerPoint presentation that could be used to feed back to the SRO and also act as the management summary.

Conclusion

The Gateway Review process provides everyone with an opportunity to learn lessons from the experience, directly as a project team or indirectly as reviewers. You should aim to share these lessons (while observing due confidentiality) for the benefit of future projects.

In particular, everyone involved should recognise that the Gateway Process is 'designed for your success' and focus their efforts on achieving project success.

Further information

For more information about the OGC Gateway Process, training and advice on best practice, contact your Departmental Gateway Co-ordinator or visit the OGC website: www.ogc.gov.uk

OGC's Successful Delivery Toolkit (www.ogc.gov.uk/sdtoolkit) has online versions of the Gateway workbooks with best practice advice for each question and links to more detailed advice and guidance.

About OGC

OGC - the UK Office of Government Commerce - is an Office of HM Treasury.

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The OGC Gateway™ Review Process
Running an effective review
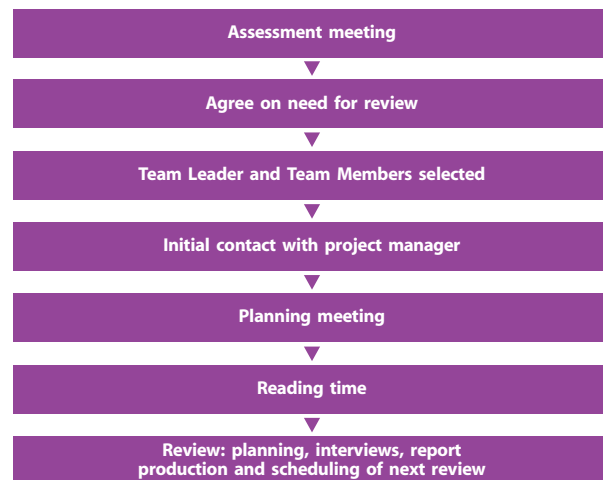
Gateway to success

Introduction

This briefing provides OGC Gateway Review teams with practical advice on making the most of an OGC Gateway Review. It will also be of interest to the project team whose project is being reviewed and others who require an understanding of the practicalities.

Every OGC Gateway Review is a process of intense concentrated effort over a very short period of time. Your aim is to identify the project issues that are really important and to focus on these areas, while ensuring that the review is thorough. There may be no need to ask every question in the Gateway workbooks; rather, you should use your skills and experience of project delivery to direct your efforts on the aspects that will make the project successful.

Overview of the OGC Gateway™ Review process

The chart below summarises the steps in organising and carrying out an OGC Gateway Review. It starts with an assessment meeting to determine whether an OGC Gateway Review is desirable and concludes with the production of a review report and plans for the next review.

Assessment meeting
▼
Agree on need for review
▼
Team Leader and Team Members selected
▼
Initial contact with project manager
▼
Planning meeting
▼
Reading time
▼
Review: planning, interviews, report production and scheduling of next review

The sections below describe the review process in detail, highlighting the practical aspects that you will need to consider as a Review team.

Openness - the Gateway Review philosophy

A spirit of openness and a willingness to work together are essential to the achievement of a useful review report.

Openness and mutual trust will help to build the relationship between the project team and the review team. Communicating what you are doing and why you are doing it will help to promote this openness. It is important to emphasise to the project team that information shared is confidential to the department and will not be disclosed to third parties. The Gateway Review Team will use this information to formulate constructive advice about the project and for no other purpose.

Before the planning meeting

The Review Team Leader will wish to contact the project manager early to set the logistics for the planning meeting, including any documents that should be read before the meeting.

Experience shows that organising interviews is the biggest challenge in any review; get dates in the diaries of key interviewees early. This process will start at the assessment meeting, when the project manager will have been asked to create a draft interview schedule. Gain an early understanding of the context for the project - for example, look at references to the project on the departmental web site; and talk informally to those outside the project for their perspectives of it.

Initial team meeting

If you have already received some documentation, explore the areas you have all identified. Agree the Code of Conduct for this review. Decide how you are going to work together from a practical viewpoint to ensure that you produce the best result in the time available.

Planning meeting

You will need to understand who all the stakeholders are. Decide which ones will give the most informed feedback; decide which ones you could exclude. You will always interview the project's Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) and the project manager. Ask the project team to explain why the individuals on the draft interview schedule are important to the project. An independent view is always useful - for example, a Project Board member who is not from the sponsoring department or team.

Start engaging with the project team and promoting a culture of openness: explain what you are trying to achieve and look for their support. Establish the Code of Conduct between the review team and the project team. At this point, explain the Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status.

Interviews do not all need to be the same length. The SRO and project manager will probably have the longest interviews. Plan to do the most important interviews first to help you to gain a broad perspective early.

For all reviews, try to organise the review to minimise disruption to the project team and the project's stakeholders. For low risk reviews, bear in mind that the effort in taking part in a series of reviews may represent a significant part of the total project resources and try to reduce the length of the review accordingly.

Reading time

Ask the project manager to send the key documents only - and to highlight the important information for you. The Project Initiation Document (or equivalent information about project start-up), business case, procurement strategy, risk register, issues log and Project Board minutes are usually key documents. Try to identify the key issues and prepare to address these. Are there any question areas that are clearly unimportant for this review? Use the summary OGC Gateway material to give precision to the areas to probe and to highlight subjects you may have missed during the planning meeting. Refer back to the scope agreed at the planning meeting.