

Prompts for policy Commissioning Conversations

Open, early Commissioning Conversations are the starting point for quality policy

The questions listed on the next page are a guide for effective Commissioning Conversations. They can help you consider the most important elements that shape a policy project and determine the quality of its outputs.

A Commissioning Conversation kicks off the Start Right Exploration phase. Adopting the right behaviours and continuing to have open conversations through the exploration phase will improve the overall quality of the thinking.

There's no right way to document a Commissioning Conversation. These prompts should guide you to capture and share the outputs of the conversations in a way that works for your context. They provide critical inputs for the Start Right Exploration phase.

Policy commissioning behaviours and values

When having a Commissioning Conversation, there are certain traits that increase your chance of success.



Curiosity and openness

When you're starting out, focus on outcomes, impact and objectives, rather than jumping to solutions or policy options.

Seek out a range of voices and opinions, including on what the problem is.



Political savvy

Test your thinking with senior people or experienced and trusted advisors.

Ask "who are all the people who need to agree to this?"



Stewardship

Know the views of your minister but ask what a future or different minister might want.

Ask what the impact is on the next generation of people in New Zealand.



Agility

Ask what would change if a major assumption turned out to be incorrect.

Think about what you would do differently if you had half the time or resources. What if you had double?



Courage and honesty

Ask for more clarity, if necessary, from busy or difficult commissioners.

Admit that you don't have all the skills and resources to do the job, and seek support by partnering with others.

Conversation prompts

Policy context and purpose

- Why are we doing this project? Why now? How will our advice be used?
- What is success? Who will benefit and who might lose out?
- What are our starting assumptions?
- What has been done before? Are there previous advice or existing policy settings to consider?
- Who are our authorisers/customers (e.g. ministers) and what are their expectations and views?
- What is the role of our policy function in delivering the outcome? Who else needs to be involved?
- Is this work supported by other agencies, ministers and external stakeholders? Is there any resistance? Are there any sensitivities we need to manage?
- What are the key risks and current issues? What will happen if we do nothing?

Policy impact and quality

- What is the response or decision we want from this work?
- How will we know when we have succeeded? Are we aiming for good advice or a good outcome?
- What is in scope? What is not in scope? What level of flexibility do we have?
- How will support and agreement be reached and secured? Who needs to be convinced?
- What is the right depth, accuracy, format and style for this advice?
- What have we done before this? What have others done? How does this fit in with other work?
- How will we ensure quality throughout?
- What are our key messages or communications aims? Who is our audience?

Policy approach and collaboration

- What are the timeframes and key milestones? What level of flexibility do we have?
- Who is in the chain of authorisation and what do we need to do to prepare them for our advice?
- From whose perspective are we viewing this issue? What data or evidence should inform our advice?
- Which collaborators across our agency/other agencies/external partners should be involved?
- What is the priority of this policy initiative? What resources and costs are appropriate?
- What have we learned from previous projects or quality processes that should shape our approach?

Green Light Framework

The Green Light Framework below lets you record the things you learned during the Exploration phase. The Framework can be used to seek agreement and authorisation, and should be iterated over time as required. Getting the Green Light means your policy project can proceed in earnest.

The Green Light point should occur soon after the Start Right Exploration has been performed. It's the point where the people commissioning the work, and the managers and teams undertaking the work agree on the main details.

The Green Light Framework is designed for:

- smaller policy projects (in which the Framework is a guide to the things that should be known or agreed at the Green Light point)
- medium sized policy projects (in which the Framework should inform the development of fit-for-purpose documentation within your context, such as a project mandate or project brief).

For larger projects, consider using your agency's formal project management framework or tools.

In the left-hand box (What we think today) you can flesh out your starting hypothesis and any initial information. The right-hand box (What we'll do from here) can be used to record the processes or investigations you'll undertake to verify assumptions, conduct analysis, and generate a policy proposal.

Clarify the opportunity and our definition of success

- The context, scope and purpose of the policy project
- The desired outcome from the work, and the people that will benefit (or lose out)
- What has been done before, and what has been done elsewhere
- The rationale for government action, and for the timing of that action
- The role of other actors in the system – inside and outside of government
- Data and evidence of the scale and distribution of the issue, and its drivers or root causes
- The levers that will make the right impact

What we think today:

What we'll do from here:

Analyse the situation and the options

- The way we will seek to understand or analyse the situation; the analytical framework and rationale
- Other analytical frameworks available, and when we might need to employ them
- The mandatory approaches that apply in our circumstances (e.g. Regulatory impact analysis)
- The appetite for risk and innovation amongst decision makers for this initiative
- The impacts on project approach, quality, skills, resources, and timeframes related to different methods

What we think today:

What we'll do from here:

Validate our thinking and planned approach

- The plan for who we will test our views and assumptions with, and how to manage sensitivities
- Views of partner agencies, affected stakeholders and interested parties
- The delivery or value chain, and the parties within it
- How we might change our thinking or processes based on validation and testing activities
- Our approach to validation and testing, and the way we will leverage and build our relationships

What we think today:

What we'll do from here:

Influence and implement to create the conditions for agreement and success

- The views of decision makers and key influencers, the basis for their choices, and their criteria for success
- The stakeholders or groups that need to support or agree to the change, and how that will be determined
- The operational impact of policy options (if known), and any wider operational ramifications, including the engagement of operational staff in the design of the initiative
- The long-term implications of policy choices (if known)
- The indicators that will show performance and impact, and the way performance data will be used to adjust and refine the policy
- The way that evaluation or new evidence will inform this policy and future policies

What we think today:

What we'll do from here:

Deliver the policy project and make a difference

- The key milestones and timeframes, and the mandatory steps along the way
- The scope of the initiative or policy question, and the resources required
- The commitment and responsibilities of all other contributing parties
- The way the project will be governed and how decisions will be made
- The skills and capabilities we have, and the plan for how we'll bridge any gaps
- The way acceptance, implementation, risk and change will be managed
- The way we are incorporating lessons from previous policy projects
- The best approach to ensure quality throughout, and the role of quality coaches
- The next opportunity to check in to ensure this Green Light remains valid

What we think today:

What we'll do from here: