1. **How do I become a member of a Steering Committee?**

Steering Committee members are usually selected during the early stages of a project. Members are selected for their individual knowledge, skills and specialist area of expertise. Some Agencies have special groups such as Executive Management Groups or Information Management/Planning Boards that perform the role of the Steering Committee for internal Agency projects.

If you would like to become a member of a Steering Committee, express your interest by approaching your Line Manager within your Agency.

2. **What fundamental project terminology should I make myself familiar with?**

There are a number of terms that you will regularly come across if you are a Steering Committee member for a project that has adopted the Tasmanian Government’s *Project Management Guidelines*. Developing a common understanding with your fellow Committee members will make your job a lot easier:

- Business Owner
- Corporate Client
- Issue
- Milestone
- Objectives
- Outcome Realisation Plan
- Outcomes
- Outputs
- Project Business Case
- Project Business Plan
- Project Execution Plan
- Project Schedule/Plan
- Project Sponsor
- Risk
- Risk Management
- Scope
- Stakeholder
- Stakeholder Management Plan

These terms are defined in the Glossary (Appendix 1) of the *Tasmanian Government Project Management Guidelines* on this website.
3. **How will I know what is expected of me by the Chair of the Committee?**

The role and responsibilities of the Steering Committee should be clarified at either the first or second time that the Committee meets. This can occur in a number of ways:

- The Committee may choose to adopt *Steering Not Rowing: A Charter for Project Steering Committees and their Members* which is Appendix 2 of the *Tasmanian Government Project Management Guidelines*; and/or

- Terms of Reference may be developed and adopted by the Committee.

If this has not been done, then you may like to suggest this at the next meeting.

4. **Do I have equal voting rights on the Committee?**

Yes you do! Each member on the Committee has equal voting rights, even though other members of the Committee may be of a higher level than you.

5. **Why is the Committee made up of such a mix of different levels and organisations/Agencies?**

Members are selected for a Steering Committee based on their individual knowledge, skills and specialist area of expertise. Where a project impacts across a number of different business areas or organisations/Agencies, there may be representation from these other areas.

Some Committees also benefit from involving an independent party, basically to provide an alternative, unbiased perspective. This may include a probity auditor, quality consultant, specialist consultant or a representative from another Agency.

6. **I want to do a good job; how much time will I need to set aside?**

The amount of time required varies between projects.

Firstly, there will be a meeting schedule and the frequency and duration of the meetings will depend on the project. This is the easiest part of the equation to work out.

Secondly, there will be business papers to be read in preparation for each meeting, and possibly an expectation that some matters will be handled ‘out of session’. Again the amount of time required varies between projects, but a guide would be to allow two (2) hours preparation time before each Steering Committee meeting.

7. **What if I haven’t been given a schedule of meetings?**

Ask for one! Individuals who are selected to participate on project Steering Committees are busy people. If a meeting schedule has not been developed, you may like to suggest this at the next meeting.
8. What questions should I be asking the Project Manager and myself?

The role of the Steering Committee is to ensure that their contracted agent (the Project Manager) completes the work of the project according to an agreed set of objectives, outcomes, outputs, people, time, cost and quality. These aspects of the project should be defined in the Project Business Plan. As such, this is a key document for the Steering Committee, and they are the only group that can authorise changes to the Project Business Plan.

Some of the questions you might think about are:

- Have any of the areas within the Project Business Plan changed? Did the Committee approve these changes?

- Are the project milestones being met, or do they continually get re-scheduled to later dates? Will this cause a problem for the rest of the project? Is this the symptom of an underlying problem, such as lack of resources?

- Is the project on budget – if not, is there a reason for the deficit/surplus, such as a delay in reaching a major milestone? If the project is currently on budget, but milestones are slipping will there be a blowout in the final budget?

- Are the changes in the grading of the risks realistic? What strategies have been put in place to minimise the impact? Have the strategies been effective? Are there any other major risks that should be added?

- Are there any issues that require the Steering Committee to determine an appropriate action/decision? Is there sufficient information to enable you to make that determination? Are there any other issues that should be raised?

The answer to these and many other questions should be available to you through the Project Status Reports prepared by the Project Manager for each Committee meeting. If you feel that the information provided is inadequate … ask for more!

9. Do I have to know about all the technical issues behind the project?

Definitely not at a detailed level!

The Steering Committee should not become involved in resolving technical issues. The interest for the Steering Committee is the impact that these technical issues may have on the components of the Project Business Plan such as the project outcomes, cost, time, quality etc.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the discussion during the meeting does not slip down to the technical level.

10. What is all the fuss about risks?

It is a rewarding experience to be a member of a Steering Committee for a successful project. As risks are any factor (or threat) that may adversely affect the successful completion of a project, risks become everyone’s business.
The role of the Steering Committee in relation to risks goes beyond simply monitoring the changes in the grading of the risks. As a member of the Committee you are expected to:

- participate in reviews of the list of risks for the project (Risk Register);
- approve the Risk Management Plan for the project, including the costs associated with any strategies to minimise the chances of the threat happening, or to minimise the impact if it does occur;
- identify/highlight new risks; and
- recommend that new risks be added to the risk register, as appropriate.

11. Are these official looking documents necessary?

Yes! If you are a Steering Committee member for a project that has adopted the Tasmanian Government’s Project Management Guidelines you can expect to see a number of key project management documents developed and maintained throughout the life of the project.

Each of the documents has a defined purpose. Briefly, the key documents are:

- **Project Business Case** – this is a one-off, start-up document used by senior management to assess the justification for a proposed project. You may be participating as a Steering Committee member as the funding for the particular project was approved through this process.

- **Project Business Plan** – this is the high-level management document for the project. You should expect that this document would be prepared by the Project Manager for endorsement by the Steering Committee. It is a ‘living’ document, which means that if changes were approved to the major areas of the project, you would expect that the Project Business Plan would be revised and provided to the Committee for endorsement again.

- **Outcome Realisation Plan** – this is a document that develops throughout the life of the project. The first time this document is tabled for endorsement by the Steering Committee, the Project Manager has prepared it. However, as the project progresses, the Business Owner(s) who will be responsible for utilising the outputs (deliverables) that the Project Manager and Team are busy producing, should take over the responsibility for updating and maintaining this document.

These documents should provide you with the confidence that the appropriate level of planning and scoping has been completed for the project.

Although these documents are important, you may notice that the detail in the documents can vary from project to project. This occurs because the size of the project usually determines the amount of project management activity and documentation required.
12. If I can’t make a meeting, can I send a proxy?

Not usually. As members are selected based on their individual knowledge, skills and specialist area of expertise, your proxy may not have a complementary set of knowledge and skills. If you feel it would be appropriate to send a proxy, then check with the Project Sponsor or Chair of the Steering Committee first.

Alternatively, read the material for the meeting and provide comments to the Project Manager, which can be tabled at the meeting.

13. What if I’m not happy with aspects of the Committee?

If you have a concern with any aspect of the Steering Committee, you should take it up in the first instance with the Chair of the Committee; this is usually the Project Sponsor.

If this has not produced satisfactory results, the project may have engaged an independent quality advisor to whom you could pursue your concerns.

14. Is there a valid reason for feeling like a ‘rubber stamp’?

You certainly should not be feeling under valued in your role and feel like a ‘rubber stamp’.

The feeling of only acting as a ‘rubber stamp’ at Steering Committee meetings could be due to a number of things:

- You have not been able to read all of the material in preparation for each meeting – possibly the papers are arriving too close to the meeting date, or you did not have adequate time due to your own work load.

- The Agency running the project has a prescribed internal procedure for approval of papers relating to changes in policy – by the time the documents gets to the Steering Committee it has been well refined by the key stakeholders. Where the project involves more than one agency, it is still important for these documents to be tabled for the Committee’s endorsement.

- The Project Sponsor has not provided adequate opportunity to canvas comments and feedback from the Committee members.

- You feel that your comments are not as consequential as the comments made by others – as an equal member on the Committee, this should not stop you from having your say.

- If things seem to be going ‘too good to be true’ then take a step back and re-assess where the project is going and where it has been:
  - Re-read the latest version of the Project Business Plan and compare it to the status reports;
  - Discuss your concerns with the Project Sponsor;
  - Discuss your concerns with the Project & Quality Management consultant (if any);
➢ Suggest that an independent review of the project may be required; and
➢ Ask for a Project & Quality Management consultant to be appointed.

If you feel that there is a problem in this area, you should discuss your concerns with the Chair of the Committee; this is usually the Project Sponsor.

15. Can I resign from the Committee at any time?

Of course! If you are experiencing difficulties in performing the role on the Steering Committee at an appropriate level (for whatever reason), you may want to resign from the Committee. This should be done through the Chair of the Committee.

As you will have been selected for the Committee on your personal knowledge and skills, the Chair of the Committee will be interested to establish your reasons for resigning. He/she may be able to address your concerns by juggling the meeting schedule, arranging for the business papers to be distributed earlier, or discussing your availability for meetings with your organisation/Agency.

The Chair of the Committee may also be interested in your opinion of a replacement for you, someone who has a complementary set of knowledge and skills.