

From Accidental to Deliberate Sponsor

A 10-Question Reflection Guide

Whether you're a first-time sponsor or considering how to develop your capability as a sponsor, we've developed a 10-question deep dive to reflect on your role, responsibilities and how to guide your approach.

The following questions are intended as reflection questions and a practical tool to help you consider where additional clarity, support or engagement may be needed.

If you find yourself relying on assumptions, reassurance, or someone else's explanation, that's a useful signal to engage with more experienced sponsors in your organisation or look for the

opportunity to explore sponsor training.

Use this guide if you are:

- when first stepping into a new sponsorship role
- when a project feels harder to steer than expected
- before key approvals, funding decisions or board discussions.

10 Questions to Consider as a New Sponsor

Can you clearly explain how your project delivers outcomes?

What to reflect on: Can you explain the connection between the work being done and the outcomes expected? Could you describe this without slides, plans or reports in front of you?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear line from effort > change > benefit • Understanding of which outcomes matter most 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your project team to walk you through the logic, not the timeline • Focus on why activities exist, not just what is being delivered

What assumptions must hold true for this project to succeed?

What to reflect on: What needs to be true about people, technology, timing or behaviour? Which assumptions are explicit — and which are implied?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of fragile or high-risk assumptions • Early indicators that an assumption may not hold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask what would invalidate the current plan • Discuss how quickly the team would know if an assumption was wrong

Which parts of the scope are most critical to benefits?

What to reflect on: If trade-offs were required, which elements must be protected? Which deliverables carry the most impact if delayed or compromised?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation between "important" and "nice to have" • Awareness of benefit-critical components 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask which outcomes would be most affected by scope reduction • Clarify where flexibility exists — and where it doesn't

Which risks sit within your control as sponsor?

What to reflect on: Where does your authority materially reduce risk? Which issues require your active involvement to resolve?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear ownership of decision-related risks • Understanding of escalation thresholds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask where delays or indecision would have the biggest impact • Clarify when the team needs you involved — not just informed

Is your confidence in the project based on logic or optimism?

What to reflect on: Why do you believe this project will succeed? Is that belief grounded in evidence, reasoning and insight?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Confidence supported by clear rationaleComfort discussing uncertainty without defensiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ask what evidence would change your viewPressure-test whether optimism is masking unresolved risk

How often are you actively guiding the project?

What to reflect on: Are you shaping direction, or primarily receiving updates? How often do you influence decisions outside formal forums?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ongoing engagement between steering meetingsProactive involvement at decision points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increase informal touchpoints with the project leadFocus discussions on choices, not just progress

Are key decisions being shaped early, or presented late for endorsement?

What to reflect on: When do you first see important decisions? Do you have time to influence them meaningfully?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Early visibility of emerging optionsSpace to challenge assumptions before work is committed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ask to be involved earlier in option shapingClarify which decisions require sponsor input upfront

Which outcomes are most sensitive to delay or sequencing changes?

What to reflect on: Where does timing matter most? What dependencies amplify risk if schedules shift?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understanding of critical path from an outcome perspectiveAwareness of compounding impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ask which delays would be hardest to recover fromExplore contingency options early

If the project started to drift, how quickly would you expect to know?

What to reflect on: What signals would tell you something is off track? Would those signals reach you early or late?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Leading indicators, not just lagging reportsWillingness from the team to surface bad news	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ask what the earliest warning signs areCreate space for honest escalation without penalty

What support do you need to sponsor this project deliberately?

What to reflect on: Where would additional guidance, coaching or structure help? What would make you more confident in your decisions?

What to look for	If this feels unclear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Willingness to seek support as a risk controlRecognition that sponsorship capability can be developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Engage the PMO or delivery leaders earlyTreat capability uplift as an investment, not a weakness

More Information

Deliberate sponsorship is not about having all the answers. We hope you've found this guide valuable on your sponsorship journey. Reach out to us on 1300 841 048 or info@quayconsulting.com.au if you'd like more information about sponsor training.

Sponsor Training From Good to Great

Talk to us about joining our upcoming roundtables or how sponsor training can take your team from accidental to deliberate sponsors.

Contact Us