



**Victorian
Public Sector
Commission**



When to brief your minister

An overview of the types of matters you need to brief your minister on

Matters of significance

You need to brief your minister on matters of significance. A matter of significance is anything important your minister needs to know.

Matters of significance can include:

- new policy proposals and projects
- spending large amounts of public money
- serious incidents within portfolios regarding health, safety or security; death or injury to citizens or staff
- serious problems for the Victorian public such as public transport delays or hospital waiting times
- risks to public health or breaches of the law – including actual or imminent events that could lead to a major emergency
- issues arising in the news and other media
- anything being or required to be considered by the government at Cabinet or its committees
- appointing people to senior roles – such as appointments to public entity boards or appointing a public entity's CEO
- new or changed risks to policies, public services

- important events or meetings
- managing major projects and contracts.

This list doesn't cover all matters. Instead, it's designed to help inform your thinking, judgement and discretion. You're encouraged to discuss this with your colleagues, managers and executives.

Executives handle interactions between the minister's office and the VPS, supported by DLOs.

Officers generally won't interact with a minister's office except in limited circumstances and with approval from their executive.

If you're a VPS officer, you should still proactively tell your manager about anything you think may be important. Ultimately, executives decide when to brief their minister – not officers.

Managing major projects

We've provided more advice on managing major projects, as they can be complex, expensive and have greater risks.

Major projects often require a high degree of technical knowledge, experience, detailed planning and project management. For example, large IT projects and capital works like new rail or road infrastructure.

Projects don't have to be expensive to be considered major or complex. For example, projects that have high community impacts like the development of a treaty with Victoria's First Peoples or the making of voluntary assisted dying laws.

This guide can be applied equally to each category of major project, whether it be a capital project, service delivery or reform project. You should apply the same judgement you would to determine a matter of significance.

Major projects often require frequent briefings to manage significant developments well. This includes matters at key project milestones like entering into contracts and approving expenditures.

Project and risk management frameworks may help you identify when to brief your minister on a project. For example, when the project:

- won't meet the timelines in the project plan

- has cost overruns
- has frequent changes or an unclear scope
- has unclear lines of responsibility and accountability
- doesn't follow good project management processes
- raises legal, health and safety risks or stakeholder concerns
- delivers outputs that don't meet the project's objectives or specifications
- has been affected significantly by an unforeseen event.

If any of these risks occur, you'll likely have to brief your minister. Bring it to your minister's attention if you have:

- any or a combination of these risks
- any with a high-risk rating
- the potential for serious consequences with any of these risks.

Some major capital projects will also need to go through the [High Value High Risk Framework](#) (HVHR). This involves a higher level of oversight by the Department of Treasury and Finance. When a project is classified as HVHR, it means there's an increased need to ensure matters are brought to the minister's attention.

Raising a matter of significance

Matters of significance can arise for different reasons but often occur from an unforeseen event or a failure in process.

If you identify a matter of significance, you may feel like there isn't enough time to get the right information or that you don't want to point out when something has gone wrong. You may feel like you'll be held responsible or suffer repercussions for speaking up.

Many VPS officers and executives have had this experience at some point in their career. You should always speak to your manager or someone you trust if you are in this situation.

Providing frank, impartial and timely advice is part of how we all serve the Victorian community and live the public sector values.