

The Northern Territory Auditor-General's Office (NTAGO) hosted its first Audit Committee Forum on 20 February 2026.

The forum focused on the expectations of effective audit committees, strategies for building effective audit committees and how committee members can improve audit quality. Key points of the forum are provided below.

Keynote address

Peter Wilson AM's keynote highlighted that the role of an Audit Chair extends far beyond technical knowledge. Effective Chairs combine governance expertise with strong leadership, emotional intelligence, and the ability to motivate organisations toward better practice.

Using metaphors of a “cascading waterfall” (well governed organisation) versus a “muddled scramble” (fragmented governance), the keynote address outlined diagnostic signs of each and the role of the Chair in moving an organisation towards clarity, alignment, and disciplined risk management.



Key actions for new audit committee Chairs include thorough due diligence, early engagement with auditors and executives, building credibility through early wins, and

fostering a culture of responsibility and continuous improvement.

The final message: strong leadership, consistent encouragement, and clear navigation can help audit committees—and organisations—work through challenges and achieve good governance outcomes.

Panel discussion

The panellists, Peter Wilson AM, Ken Davies PSM and Terri Hart PSM, discussed what does a “well-functioning” audit committee look like in practice—not in theory. The panellists brought different perspectives based on their experiences – commercial, government and NGO sectors.



Terri Hart PSM, Ken Davies PSM, Jara Dean and Peter Wilson AM

The discussion highlighted the risk to agencies and their Chief Executives when audit committees are treated as a “check-the-box” compliance requirement rather than a governance partner.

All panellists commented on the importance of regular communication between the Chief Executive and the audit committee Chair. It was suggested that the Chair serves as a confidential sounding board for the Chief Executive regarding risk management, compliance, and financial reporting issues. While the Audit Committee holds a monitoring and oversight role to protect the organisation, and in the case of government departments the Chief Executive, this specific advisory relationship allows the Chief Executive to test ideas, discuss emerging risks, and seek guidance on complex governance matters in a safe, constructive, and non-executive manner.

The relationship between the audit committee and the Auditor-General is equally important and should be fostered. Better practice involves inviting the Auditor-General to attend all committee meetings to discuss key audit matters, including private, in-camera sessions without

management present. After all, both parties should foster a relationship of trust to improve public sector performance.

NTAGO update

Jara Dean shared the results of the 2025 client survey, in which clients expressed **high confidence** in the professionalism, skills and conduct of NTAGO auditors. However, **timeliness, audit scheduling** and **communication** were areas for improvement.

To address the feedback, NTAGO will be implementing audit plans for all engagements to clarify roles between NTAGO, Audit Service Providers, and audit clients; improve communication with Chief Financial Officers and governing bodies and ensure stronger early-stage planning.



Changes in the delivery of audit work in government departments to support the audit of the consolidated financial statements of the Territory are underway. NTAGO is moving away from broad coverage to a targeted approach. While this approach means that there will be fewer departments subjected to audit work, this approach should ensure that components are risk-prioritised and there is deeper testing, resulting in higher assurance improved audit quality and directing resources where it matters most.

If you didn't get a chance to provide feedback on the day, please fill out the feedback form online. Click to follow link - [Audit Committee Forum - 20 February 2026 – Fill in form](#)

Resources

[Governance Lighthouse](#) (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2015)

[Guide to Good Practice](#) (Auditing and Assurance Standards Board, Australian Institute of Company Directors and The Institute of Internal Auditors-Australia, 2017)

[Better Practice Guide on a page](#) (Queensland Audit Office, 2020)

[Getting the most out of your department's Audit and Risk Committee](#) (Controller and Auditor-General of New Zealand)

[Audit Committee Toolkit](#) (Queensland Treasury, 2023)

- **Independence and composition** - Template Composition Report
- **Skills of audit committee members** - Template Audit Committee Skills Matrix
- **Audit committee self-assessment and continuous improvement** - Template Self-Assessment Questionnaire & Management Feedback Questionnaire

[Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Effectiveness Tool](#) (National Audit Office, UK, 2022)