

Divisions of General Practice

Information Management Maturity Framework
(IMMF)

**Toolkit – Guidelines for an IM issues
and opportunities register**



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Toolkit – Guidelines for an IM issues and opportunities register

Purpose

The purpose of the “Guidelines for an IM issues and opportunities register” is to assist Divisions to address the action task below.

Action Tasks	Capacity Gap	IMMF Element
Implement an IM issues and opportunities register for change management	Unaware to Reactive	Divisional Context

1. This task should have been identified from the Information Management Maturity Framework (IMMF) gap analysis and toolkit specification.

This tool provides advice for Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) who wish to create a single information management (IM) issues and opportunities register for all Division staff to access and to allow external stakeholders to contribute. Its use will assist CEOs to achieve a sound approach to capturing, managing and communicating IM issues and opportunities.

The orientation is towards improving processes and procedures and encouraging a culture within a Division that values continuous improvement through explicitly incorporating the recording and management of IM issues in a formal register as part of routine behaviour. It should be read in conjunction with the Toolkit - “Inventory of existing issues and opportunities registers” which offers information about the experiences of Divisions who have implemented Issues and Opportunities Registers and the technologies they have used.

Explanatory notes

Information management is defined as “the umbrella term for the means by which a Division collects, organises, and uses information, in whatever format, and from internal or external sources, leading to continuous improvement in the Division’s business programs and member services” IMMF Toolkit- Glossary and Fact sheet.

An IM issues and opportunities register is an important tool for managing the day to day business of a Division as well as the Division’s projects. Divisions that have ISO accreditation will have created issues registers and in many cases, the issues they contain will relate to information management, particularly if the work of a Division is seen as primarily concerned with the collection and distribution of information. However establishing an IM issues and improvements register will enable IM issues to be dealt from a Division wide perspective and not risk being lost if they are dealt with in a project specific register that does not have such a perspective. Some Divisions may use a module in DIS (customer relationship management software) specifically to address issues and support regular meetings, record minutes and action points, responsible persons and due dates.

This tool was developed by reference to the personal experience of the authors and from consultation with State Based Organisations (SBO) and the Divisions network.

Instructional design

The tool has two sections to be read as guiding principles:

2. Part 1 – Purpose of recording, tracking and managing IM issues in a register

Part 2 – How to operate an IM issues register



Part 1 begins with a brief description of what IM issues registers do and extends into definitions of the terms “issue”, and “register”, providing several examples of each. This Part of the tool also lists the main benefits of using an IM issues register.

Part 2 of the tool contains a narrative outlining basic operations of an IM issues register including the role of the registrar, major tasks such as the acceptance and maintenance of a submitted issue and the rules for closure of an issue. Part 2 concludes with a flowchart tracing a possible passage of an issue in an IM issues register from its creation to its resolution. CEO’s should use this material to implement a local IM Issues Register and to foster a culture of reporting and taking responsibility for issues.

Summary of outcomes and resources

Workstreams	Outcomes	Resources
<p>New processes or procedures to be adopted</p>	<p>Within a Division, an IM issues and opportunities register is created, and is used and becomes an integral part of the periodic assessment of the day-to-day operations of the Division and driving the course of events in projects.</p> <p>Rules and conventions for using the register are in place.</p>	<p>This tool is self administered.</p>
<p>Culture and change. management requirements</p>	<p>Acceptance of the issues register as a useful and necessary management tool for recording and tracking issues and opportunities.</p> <p>Allocating and accepting responsibility for dealing with issues and exploring opportunities.</p>	



Part 1: Purpose of recording, tracking and managing IM issues in a register

In the short term, issues registers allow Divisions to record significant courses of events and ensure that outcomes, both positive and adverse, are controlled as effectively as possible. In the long term issues registers can be used to sustain continuous improvement. Records of resolved issues in an IM register can become the foundation of a knowledge base suitable for reference to how similar issues have been resolved in the past and can offer advice about responses to issues that have been successful or otherwise.

An *issue* or *opportunity* may refer to:

- A problem potentially impacting the business of a Division adversely.
- An observation or an occurrence that needs to be communicated amongst stakeholders.
- An idea or a suggestion aimed at improving the business, its performance or otherwise providing a benefit for stakeholders.
- A situation to be understood.
- A decision to be made.

An issue or an opportunity may originate within a Division or amongst Divisions. Alternatively it may come from one or more external stakeholders. The register must be capable of accommodating both internal and external issues and opportunities.

A *register* can be a paper-based or an electronic store that:

- Records the creation of an issue.
- Holds administrative information about the persons involved and relevant times of events relating to that issue.
- Builds a history of significant events in the life of an issue.
- Shows the current status of an issue.
- Records its ultimate fate.
- May include a list of related issues and a cross reference of related documents.

A sample register format is presented in the IMMF Toolkit – Inventory of Existing Issues and Improvements Registers.

In the day-to-day operations of a Division, the benefits of actively using an IM issues register are that it:

1. Forms a consistent basis for regular reporting to stakeholders of the status, progress, risks and difficulties associated with an issue.
2. Helps to minimise the risk that an issue is lost or orphaned, ensuring that someone is responsible.
3. Records the expected actions, the timing for those actions and the expected date for resolution of an issue, promoting a well-coordinated response amongst all stakeholders.
4. Helps to raise awareness amongst managers of the existence of an issue before it grows to an unmanageable size.
5. Creates a shared understanding of an issue that helps to ensure that responses are commensurate with the significance of the issue, its potential impact and urgency.
6. Captures emerging trends and issues that recur in systems such that they can be dealt with systematically.
7. Builds a running sheet about an issue which can be an important and auditable record when actions must be explained or defended.



8. Allows staff and managers to see whether a similar issue has emerged in the past, describes the courses of action that were taken and assess their effectiveness in that Division and potentially across many or all Divisions.
9. Provides an opportunity for all staff and managers to record what they consider to be an issue and gauge the extent to which their view is supported.



Part 2: How to operate an IM issues register

An IM issues register should be created, maintained, reported and managed by a single administrator – a registrar. If it is an electronic register, it may be stored in a common area or a private area of a network server and may be open for controlled access by any stakeholder with a legitimate interest.

Maintaining an issues register requires a sound knowledge of the business of the Division, the external stakeholders and the environment within which the Division operates.

Contributions of issues and opportunities may be moderated (i.e. captured in a private holding space and not posted to the register until appropriate consideration of validity, risk, accuracy and potential consequences of posting the contributions have not revealed any contra-indications). Accepted contributions may then be posted and managed (logged, edited and have their status set), usually by the registrar.

The registrar may also be tasked with alerting persons responsible for managing the relevant business activity or project and some systems have the capacity to automatically inform interested stakeholders that a particular issue or opportunity has been raised. Similarly, the registrar may also alert a contributor that their submission has been accepted for posting.

Contributions may be sent to the registrar by any medium, however electronic transfer in the form of an e-mail, an attached file or by direct entry into a specialised application e.g. DIS, will assist in improving the efficiency and accuracy of maintained issues.

Conventional usage suggests that a published set of rules stating who may undertake what operations – and the circumstances that must prevail, should be used except for private registers where no-one other than the owner, or possibly an approved auditor is granted access.

Typically issues may be automatically flagged for closure after a period of inactivity; however it is unusual to delete an issue on that basis. Deletion loses important information such as an issue that has existed in the past – as well as the knowledge about whether it was resolved, how it was resolved and what unproductive actions were taken.

When registers grow large, the managers may elect to archive closed issues in the interests of maintaining the search performance of the register – according to agreed rules, and it is their responsibility to do so in a way that allows the material to be retrieved from archive within an acceptable timeframe.

Review of the issues register is a key component of periodic project meetings and routine operations meetings. A project issues register is best developed at the outset of the project and many issues can be predicted from the project risk assessment, the project business case or brief.

Periodic reporting from the register to executive staff usually includes lists of current issues and issues resolved at a specific date, issues open for a responsible person or for a particular project and the names and locations of documents associated with issues.

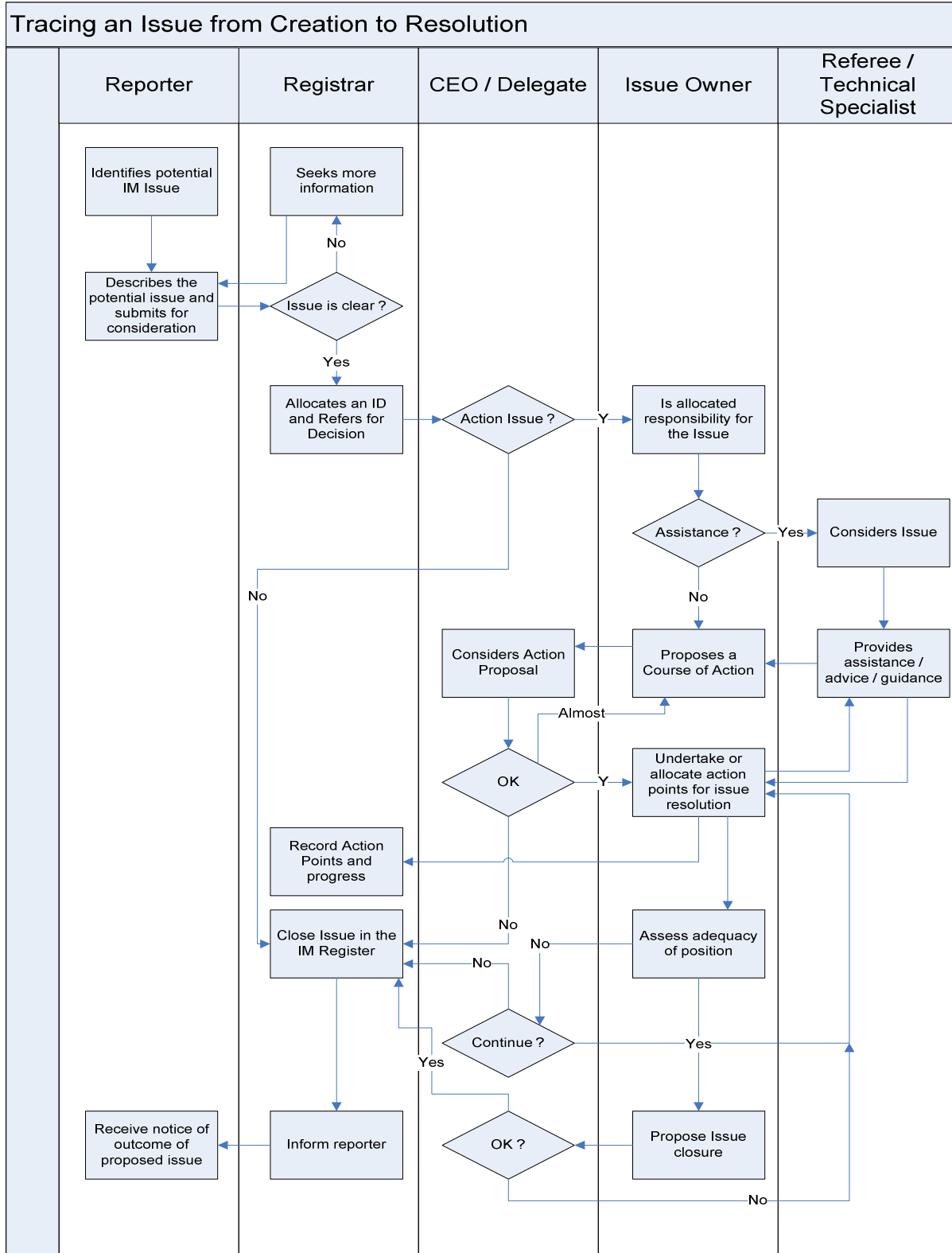
The tasks associated with creating and using a simple issues register typically include:

- developing a spreadsheet or Word Document and storing it such that appropriate managers and staff have controlled access;
- deciding simple rules and conventions for using the issues register – who may lodge an issue and how they may do so, who may allocate responsibility, monitor progress and change the status – or close an issue;
- deciding what is an issue or opportunity – and whether it may be recorded in the register;
- allocating a responsible individual;
- describing and recording the issue;
- considering if it is a one-off occurrence or is likely to become a systemic or recurrent issue;
- considering the ramifications – operational / services impacts, financial, professional, ethical and political;
- discussing and deciding what (if anything) to do about the issue; and



- consideration of the range of responses and their possible costs:
 - do nothing;
 - monitor the issue; or
 - plan an action, take action, assess the results and adjust the response; and
- periodically, reviewing and updating the register and decide which issues may be closed.

The flowchart below illustrates the process of tracing an issue from creation to conclusion.



* Source: Tool Developer



References

This tool was developed by reference to the personal experience of the author and from consultation with SBO and the Divisions network.

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