

THINK TANK: What counts as a problem?
RESOURCE GUIDE

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This guide is here to help you answer one question: is what I've noticed worth submitting?
 In most cases, the answer is yes.

You don't need to have a solution. You just need to have noticed something — and be able to describe it.

What counts as a problem

For the Think Tank, a problem is anything in our day-to-day work that:

- Uses more time, effort or resource than it should
- Happens repeatedly - not just once
- Affects you, your team, or the people we serve
- Could be better if someone decided to change it

It can but doesn't need to be big. Small problems that happen every day often turn out to be just as impactful.

✓ Yes — this is a problem worth submitting	✗ Not quite — this one might not fit
✓ Something that slows you down or takes longer than it should	✗ Something happening in another organisation or industry that we can't influence
✓ A step you do every day that feels unnecessary — or that could be done once instead of five times	✗ Something that's uncomfortable but exists for a clear safety or compliance reason
✓ A workaround your team uses because the 'official' way doesn't actually work	✗ A personal preference about how a task should be done differently
✓ A task that takes skilled people's time when it doesn't need to	✗ Something that only affected you once and doesn't happen regularly
✓ Something that causes errors, rework or confusion — regularly	✗ A complaint about a person or a team's attitude (this isn't the right forum for that)
✓ A gap between how something is supposed to work and how it actually works	✗ Something that's genuinely being addressed through an existing project or initiative

Still unsure? If it slows you or your team down, and it happens more than occasionally, it's worth submitting. The panel will help assess the rest.

THINK TANK: What counts as a problem?

Problem, symptom, or gripe?

These three things can feel similar – but they're different, and the difference matters for your submission.

A problem	A specific, recurring issue with a cause you can point to. It happens in a particular process, step, or system. It has a pattern. You can describe what goes wrong and when.
A symptom	A sign that something is wrong – but not the problem itself. 'Works orders are always wrong' is a symptom. The problem is whatever causes them to be wrong.
A gripe	A frustration about something that's difficult to change, highly subjective, or not within TasNetworks' control. These are real – but they're not the right fit for the Think Tank.

Here's what the difference looks like in practice:

✓ A problem	~ A symptom	✗ A gripe
<i>"Our inspection data entry process requires the same information to be entered three times across separate systems that don't connect."</i>	"Works orders keep getting raised with the wrong asset details."	"The systems are a nightmare to use."
<i>"Our team spends about 6 hours a week re-entering data that should only need to be entered once."</i>	"Something always goes wrong with the defect reporting process."	"Nobody ever fixes anything around here."
<i>"New staff don't know which of the three induction processes to follow because all three still exist and none of them are current."</i>	"Onboarding new people takes forever."	"HR is disorganised."

The goal: Start with what you've observed – even if it feels like a symptom or a gripe. The 5 Whys tool in Resource 4 will help you move from what you've noticed to the actual problem underneath it.

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Sound familiar?

These are the kinds of thoughts that usually mean there's a problem worth submitting.

If you've had any of these, you're already most of the way there.

If you've thought this...	...it's worth submitting
"Every time I do this, I have to..."	Repetition is a strong signal. If you find yourself doing the same workaround over and over, something in the process isn't working.
"Why do we even do it this way?"	If you've ever asked this — even silently — that's curiosity pointing at a problem. The fact that no one can answer it clearly makes it stronger, not weaker.
"This takes way longer than it should."	Your instinct about time is usually right. If it feels slow, it probably is. You don't need to have measured it to know there's a problem.
"I'm not sure anyone actually uses this."	If work is being produced but not used — reports, data, meetings, processes — that's a problem. Someone's time is going somewhere it doesn't need to.
"We all just know not to do it the official way."	Unofficial workarounds are one of the clearest signs a process has broken down. If the team has invented its own way around something, the official way isn't working.
"I've mentioned this before but nothing changed."	This is exactly the kind of problem the Think Tank is for. It's real, it's known, and it hasn't been fixed through normal channels. That makes it a good candidate.
"I don't know why, but this always seems to go wrong here."	Recurring errors or failures at the same point in a process are a signal. Something in the design of that step is creating the problem.
"Someone more senior probably knows about this already."	Maybe. But maybe not. And even if they do — they might not know the impact it has on the ground. Your experience is evidence.

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How big does the problem need to be?

The Think Tank is open to problems of all sizes. There's no minimum scale.

What matters more than size is whether the problem is real, specific and something TasNetworks can act on.

Size	What it looks like	Example
Small	Affects your immediate team. Happens regularly. Could likely be fixed with a process or system change that doesn't need major investment.	"We receive the same request from three different inboxes. We could fix it by consolidating to one."
Medium	Affects multiple teams or work areas. Has been around a while. Fixing it would require some planning and coordination across teams.	"Our field crews and the planning team use different versions of the same asset data. Nobody owns the discrepancy."
Complex	Affects a large part of the business. Root cause is structural or systemic. A real solution would need new capability, technology or a significant process change.	"Our three field data systems don't connect. A fix would need technical integration work and possibly new tooling."

Problems don't need to be big to be worth submitting. A small problem that affects your team every single day might have more impact than a large problem that rarely surfaces.