

Project Stakeholder Roles and Implementation Plan

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Introduction

[Project implementation](#) succeeds when responsibility, authority, information, and stakeholder expectations are organized before execution begins. The original plan correctly identifies technical specialists, management experts, and public-relations staff, but qualifications alone do not create effective stakeholder engagement. A project also needs sponsorship, governance, user representation, risk ownership, procurement, operational handover, and a method for resolving conflict and change. This expanded plan uses a general information-technology and engineering project as its setting while remaining adaptable to public, private, or emergency-management work. Its purpose is to define who participates, what each stakeholder contributes, how decisions move, and how implementation will be controlled from approval through closure. (Project Management Institute, 2021; International Organization for Standardization, 2020)

Stakeholder Identification and Analysis

A stakeholder is any person, group, or organization that can affect the project, be affected by it, or believe that it may be affected. Identification should begin with the business case, legal environment, organizational structure, users, suppliers, communities, and operations that will inherit the outcome. The project manager should then analyze each stakeholder's interests, influence, urgency, information needs, likely concerns, and capacity to support or obstruct delivery. A power-interest matrix can guide engagement, but it should not become a reason to ignore people with little formal power. Vulnerable users or neighboring communities may experience major impacts despite limited institutional influence. Analysis must therefore include both power and consequence. (Freeman, 1984; Bryson, 2004)

Project Sponsor

The sponsor owns the strategic justification and provides authority that the project manager cannot create alone. The sponsor approves the business case, secures funding, confirms alignment with organizational objectives, appoints governance bodies, and resolves escalated barriers. During implementation, the sponsor should remain active enough to make timely decisions without taking over daily management. A sponsor who disappears after authorization leaves the project vulnerable when priorities conflict or resources are contested. The role also includes protecting benefit

realization after delivery, because a technically completed output creates little value if the organization does not adopt it. Sponsor performance should be defined through decision deadlines, attendance, and explicit accountability for strategic outcomes. (Project Management Institute, 2021)

Steering Committee and Governance

A steering committee provides oversight across major functions and represents interests that exceed the project team's authority. Membership may include the sponsor, finance, operations, technology, risk, legal, user leadership, and affected departments. The committee approves stage transitions, major scope changes, budget exceptions, risk responses, and decisions with significant public or organizational impact. It should not review every routine task, because excessive governance slows delivery and confuses accountability. Terms of reference should define quorum, meeting frequency, reserved decisions, conflict-of-interest rules, and escalation routes. Minutes and decision logs create transparency and prevent later disagreement about what was authorized. Governance is effective when it is proportionate, informed, and timely. (Project Management Institute, 2021)

Project Manager

The project manager integrates scope, schedule, cost, quality, risk, resources, communication, procurement, and stakeholder engagement. This role does not require being the most senior technical expert. It requires the ability to coordinate experts, expose trade-offs, maintain reliable information, and keep decisions connected to objectives. The manager develops the integrated plan, tracks dependencies, facilitates risk review, manages change requests, and reports honestly to the sponsor and steering committee. Ethical responsibility includes resisting pressure to hide delays or manipulate progress data. The project manager should have authority appropriate to assigned accountability; holding someone responsible for delivery while denying access to resources or decisions creates a governance failure rather than a personal performance problem. (Project Management Institute, 2021)

Engineering and Information-Technology Leads

Engineering and IT leads translate the approved need into technical requirements, architecture, interfaces, testing criteria, security controls, and implementation tasks. Selection should be based on relevant competence and experience, not on a rigid assumption that every participant must hold the same degree. These leads estimate technical effort, identify dependencies, evaluate feasibility, manage configuration, review supplier designs, and confirm that deliverables satisfy standards. They must also communicate uncertainty in language nontechnical stakeholders can understand. Technical teams should avoid gold-plating, in which attractive features are added without approved value. Their authority covers technical quality, while decisions involving business priority, budget, or risk

acceptance require the appropriate governance owner.

Operations and End-User Representatives

Operations personnel and end users should participate before design is complete because they understand workflows, constraints, maintenance needs, and the consequences of poor usability. Their responsibilities include defining user requirements, reviewing prototypes, participating in testing, planning procedures, and preparing for handover. Representative selection matters: one manager cannot automatically speak for every user, especially when frontline staff, disabled users, customers, and remote locations experience the system differently. Engagement should produce documented decisions rather than informal comments that disappear. Operational readiness includes staffing, training, support, data migration, equipment, service levels, and ownership after launch. A project is not implemented successfully if the output cannot be operated safely and sustainably. (Bourne, 2016)

Communication and Public-Relations Lead

The communication or public-relations lead develops messages for internal staff, sponsors, users, communities, regulators, and media when relevant. The role includes stakeholder briefings, issue escalation, feedback channels, change communication, and coordination of approved public information. Communication should not be reduced to promoting the project or concealing difficulty. Credibility depends on accurate, timely, audience-specific information and clear acknowledgment of uncertainty. The lead works with technical and legal experts so that messages are understandable without being misleading. In a public-facing project, community concerns should be recorded and answered through a transparent process. Crisis communication protocols should identify who may speak, how facts are verified, and how corrections are issued.

Finance, Procurement, Legal, and Risk

Finance confirms budgets, cash flow, cost controls, and financial reporting. Procurement develops fair selection processes, contract terms, supplier evaluation, and commercial monitoring. Legal advisers review regulatory duties, liability, privacy, intellectual property, accessibility, and contractual risk. A risk owner is assigned to each major threat or opportunity and remains responsible for implementing the agreed response. These functions should be integrated into planning rather than consulted only after problems appear. Procurement delays can determine the critical path, while poorly allocated contract risk can raise prices or create disputes. Financial control should distinguish approved scope from uncontrolled additions and provide forecasts early enough for governance to act. (Project Management Institute, 2021)

Community, Regulator, and External Stakeholders

External stakeholders may include regulators, emergency services, local communities, utilities, partner agencies, advocacy groups, and people whose land, data, safety, or access may be affected. Their involvement depends on the project, but legal consultation is not always equivalent to meaningful engagement. Communities should receive information early enough to influence decisions rather than after commitments become irreversible. Regulators require complete and accurate submissions, while partner agencies need defined interfaces and mutual responsibilities. External engagement should document concerns, responses, unresolved issues, and commitments. Projects lose trust when consultation is treated as a ceremonial requirement. The aim is not to promise agreement on every issue, but to make decisions informed, lawful, and explainable. (Bryson, 2004; Bourne, 2016)

RACI and Decision Rights

A responsibility-assignment matrix can clarify who is responsible for performing work, accountable for the outcome, consulted before decisions, and informed afterward. RACI is useful only when entries reflect real authority and are understood by participants. Too many accountable parties make ownership unclear, while assigning one person to every task can create a bottleneck. The matrix should cover key deliverables, approvals, risks, testing, communication, procurement, and handover rather than every minor activity. Decision rights should be linked to thresholds for cost, schedule, safety, security, and scope. When a decision crosses a threshold, escalation should be automatic rather than dependent on personal relationships or the willingness of junior staff to challenge senior leaders.

Implementation Phases

Implementation can be organized into initiation, planning, design, build or procurement, testing, deployment, transition, and closure. Each phase should have entry criteria, deliverables, responsible owners, and an approval point proportionate to risk. Iterative or agile delivery may combine phases and release value incrementally, while predictive projects may use more formal stage gates. ISO 21502 recognizes that project guidance can apply across predictive, incremental, iterative, adaptive, and hybrid approaches. The method should fit uncertainty and stakeholder needs. Regardless of approach, the team must manage scope, risks, dependencies, configuration, quality, and acceptance. Agile language does not remove governance; it changes the cadence and level at which decisions are made. (International Organization for Standardization, 2020)

Communication and Reporting Plan

The reporting plan should specify audience, content, format, frequency, owner, and response expected. Executives may need concise information about benefits, milestones, cost forecast, top risks, and decisions. Technical teams need detailed dependencies and defect data, while users need training and transition information. Status reporting should distinguish completed work from percentage estimates that cannot be verified. A single source of truth for schedules, risks, actions, and decisions reduces contradictory information. Meetings should be designed around decisions and coordination rather than repeating reports that could be read. Bad news should be escalated early; punishing messengers encourages delay and makes recovery more expensive.

Change Control and Conflict Resolution

Projects change because assumptions prove wrong, stakeholders learn, technology develops, or external conditions shift. A change request should describe the need, alternatives, impact on benefits, scope, cost, schedule, quality, risk, and operations. Minor changes may be approved within delegated authority, while major changes go to the steering committee or sponsor. Uncontrolled change creates scope creep and hidden trade-offs. Conflict should be addressed through facts, interests, decision rights, and documented criteria. When agreement is impossible, the authorized decision-maker must decide and record the rationale. Escalation is not failure; it is a governance mechanism for resolving issues beyond a team member's authority. (Project Management Institute, 2021)

Quality, Readiness, and Success Measures

Success should be defined before implementation through acceptance criteria and benefit measures. Technical completion may include performance, reliability, security, interoperability, safety, and compliance. Operational readiness includes trained staff, support arrangements, data quality, documented procedures, supplier commitments, and contingency plans. Stakeholder measures may include adoption, service quality, satisfaction, accessibility, and complaint resolution. The team should conduct testing at multiple levels and avoid allowing deadline pressure to convert unresolved critical defects into operational risk. After launch, benefits and unintended effects should be reviewed. Closure should capture lessons, release resources, archive records, transfer ownership, and identify responsibilities for post-project evaluation and continuing benefit measurement. (Project Management Institute, 2021; Heeks & Stanforth, 2014)

Conclusion

An effective implementation plan distributes work across a complete stakeholder system rather than relying only on technical experts and a manager. The sponsor protects strategic purpose, governance

bodies make major decisions, the project manager integrates delivery, specialists create and assure the solution, users prepare adoption, and external stakeholders shape legitimacy and compliance. RACI, stage criteria, communication routines, change control, and measurable acceptance convert these roles into coordinated action. Qualifications matter, but competence, authority, availability, and collaboration matter equally. Project success is not the result of placing impressive titles on an organization chart. It emerges when the right people receive clear responsibilities, credible information, and timely decision pathways throughout the project life cycle. (Project Management Institute, 2021; Bourne, 2016)

References

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