

# Exploring Project Steering Committees

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**Quick Reference Card Project Steering Committees**  
 Goal To provide Governance & Support, to reach the objectives as set by the funder, taking into account stakeholders

Via:

- Direction towards Project Management
- Holding Project Management to account on Performance and Conduct
- Helping the project team move forward

**Formation**

- Only form a steering committee if organizational rules or project complexity warrant the time spent by the members
- Determine where the steering committee has additional authority compared to the authority of the members from their permanent positions
- Determine the authorities of the project manager and when further needs steering committee approval
- List the steps, phases or products to be explicitly approved
- Select members first based on the roles needed, but try to take personal characteristics into account
- Include external vendors only if the project is innovative and there is high trust
- Determine the decision-making process in the steering committee
- Describe when the project is a success
- Share project goals, steering committee responsibilities and individual responsibilities

**Members**

- Relates to the Project Owner: responsible for the business case of behalf of the funder, clients
  - Use representatives to gather requirements, accept delivery and prepare user organization
  - Supplier to supply critical resources
- Support organization representatives to gather requirements, accept delivery and prepare support organization
  - Quality Assurance on behalf of end-user towards the steering committee
- Agree on who represent departments or processes which do not deliver members
  - Take engaging measures: training, trusted mentors, coaching... If competence, knowledge, authority, or time are lacking
- Make the roles and responsibilities of each member explicit including for which departments/functions and processes

**Do's for a member**

- Understand which external factors influence the validity of the business case
- Work on mutual trust between members and share overall goals
- Be able to disagree, based on your own responsibilities
- Use experiments / POCS for complex issues
- Plan project reviews
- Ask questions to understand what status reports mean for your responsibilities
- Take action in the standing organization you represent
- Together with other members plan decision making outside the authority of the steering committee
- Together with other members champion the project upwards, sideways and downwards
- Trust the project management, though provide rates and organize checks
- Organize your personal trusted assistant who can probe project deliverables
- Motivate the project team

**Don'ts for a member**

- Report status reports as just 'FYI'
- Call the messenger
- Assume resources are infinite and time can be stretched
- Negotiate with the project manager
- Leave actions or decisions open
- Decide on topics outside your own responsibilities
- Put all actions on the name of the project manager
- Send a replacement to the steering committee meetings
- Assume you have all the skills needed for your role
- Only let the project manager determine the agenda
- Add members just as they are informed
- Manage the project team
- Think cancellation of the project is no option

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**Goal:** To provide Governance & Support, to reach the objectives as set by the funder, taking into account stakeholders

**Via:**

- ▶ Direction towards Project Management
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- ▶ Helping the project team move forward

# Formation

- ▶ Only form a steering committee if organizational risks or project complexity warrant the time spent by the members
- ▶ Determine where the steering committee has additional authority compared to the authority of the members from their permanent positions
- ▶ Determine the authorities of the project manager and when he/she needs steering committee approval
- ▶ List the stage-gates or products to be explicitly approved
- ▶ Select members first based on the roles needed, but try to take personal characteristics into account
- ▶ Include external vendors only if the project is innovative and there is high trust
- ▶ Determine the decision-making process in the steering committee
- ▶ Describe when the project is a success
- ▶ Share project goals, steering committee responsibilities and individual responsibilities

# Members

- ▶ Roles can be:
  - Project owner; responsible for the business case of behalf of the funder, chairs
  - User representative; to gather requirements, accept delivery and prepare user organization
  - Supplier; to supply critical resources
- Support organization representative; to gather requirements, accept delivery and prepare support organization
- Quality Assurance on behalf of and advise towards the steering committee
- ▶ Make the roles and responsibilities of each member explicit including for which departments/organizations and processes
- ▶ Agree on who represent departments or processes which do not deliver members
- ▶ Take mitigating measures (training, trusted assistants, coaching, ...) if competences, knowledge, authority, or time are lacking

## Do's for a member

- ▶ Understand which external factors influence the validity of the business case
- ▶ Work on mutual trust between members and share overall goals
- ▶ Dare to disagree, based on your own responsibilities
- ▶ Use experiments / POCs for complex issues
- ▶ Plan project reviews
- ▶ Ask questions to understand what status reports mean for your responsibilities
- ▶ Take action in the standing organization you represent
- ▶ Together with other members plan decision-making outside the authority of the steering committee
- ▶ Together with other members champion the project upwards, sideways and downwards
- ▶ Trust the project management, though provide rules and organize checks
- ▶ Organize your personal trusted assistant who can probe project deliverables
- ▶ Motivate the project team

## *Don'ts* for a member

- ▶ Regard status reports as just "FYI"
- ▶ Kill the messenger
- ▶ Assume resources are infinite and time can be squeezed
- ▶ Negotiate with the project manager
- ▶ Leave actions or decisions open
- ▶ Decide on topics outside your own responsibilities
- ▶ Put all actions on the name of the project manager
- ▶ Send a replacement to the steering committee meetings
- ▶ Assume you have all the skills needed for your role
- ▶ Only let the project manager determine the agenda
- ▶ Add members just so they are informed
- ▶ Manage the project team
- ▶ Think cancellation of the project is no option

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