



Community of Practice

IT Project Management

March 31, 2022

Governance First!

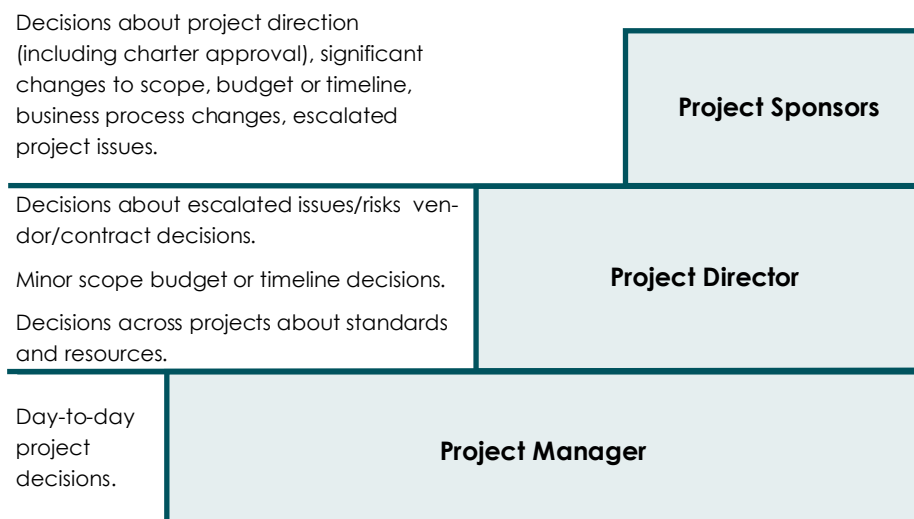
Successful projects depend on clear decision-making.

Amy McMahan, Project Management Office Director
Department of Retirement Services

Projects can sink fast when it is not clear who is responsible for making decisions, or how decisions get made. A lack of governance can lead to:

- Sponsors who don't know what you need from them (don't assume they know their role).
- Decisions that don't get made with the right information.
- Decision-making that slows the project down.
- People feeling excluded from decision making, leading to hard feelings that make project teams awkward.

The Department of Retirement Services (DRS) has adopted a governance first strategy when it comes to projects. Even before finalizing a project charter, DRS works to define sponsor(s) and determine what decisions are escalated. Below is a picture of its model for most projects.



When projects get bigger, DRS takes a more formal approach and creates a governance, oversight and accountability plan – a strategy learned from another agency's project management team (thanks DSHS!). DRS is happy to share a [sample plan](#) from its CORE program.

Of course, a plan is only good if used, so here is how DRS implements it:

- All project team members, including sponsors, are educated on the decision-making model at kick-off for each project.
- Sponsors and project team are accountable for following documented decision-making.
- If there are any questions about who has what authority in the project, DRS references back to the governance document.

There are some best practices and lessons in the [OCIO Lessons Learned Repository](#). As you go, apply your lessons learned and adapt. We sure have.