

**Better practices for executives** during planning and approving a project. By following these personal practices, executives can help improve the quality of project proposals. Additional guidance is available in the ANAO Better Practice Guide *Planning and Approving Projects – an Executive Perspective*.

A project is a short term endeavour to provide products that meet specified requirements. Generally, the desired business outcomes flow from using the products.



### 1 Concept phase: project sponsor

- Be available to planning teams to discuss possible projects and entity priorities.
- Maintain a strategic awareness of policy directions, and the opportunities and risks of emerging technologies and alternative delivery approaches.
- Encourage a degree of questioning and innovation.
- Maintain active external relationships and involve fresh perspectives early.
- Keep the project team focused at a concept level at this early stage, so as to avoid premature consideration of detail or specific solutions.

These questions are intended to assist executives during the planning and approval of a project. These practices may need to be tailored to take account of a specific entity's circumstances.

### 3 Approval phase: decision-maker

- Be clear about scope of role as a decision maker.
- Encourage an environment of open and honest discussion, and of continuity of attendance by members of review and approval committees.
- Focus on the central elements of project proposals relevant to approval (such as outcomes, costs, timeframe, feasibility, risks, and contribution to goals).
- Consider the overall effect of projects under consideration, including opportunities or difficulties arising from the impact of one project on another, or their effect on business-as-usual activities.
- Keep in mind the option of conditional or staged approvals to better manage projects risks.
- Regularly consider opportunities to improve the assessment process (for example, the format of submissions, role and resourcing of support).

### 2 Business case phase: project sponsor

- At the start of detailed planning, confirm the broad concept, appoint an appropriate person or team to develop the business case, consider whether specialist assistance will be useful, and commence engagement with stakeholders.
- Consider procedural requirements, including possible application of Gateway Review or ICT Two Pass Review process.
- Gain assurance that probity and record keeping needs will be addressed.
- Provide enough time and resources so planning is of appropriate quality.
- Keep watch on the direction and cost of planning. If costly, consider a smaller proposal to justify the cost of a more comprehensive business case.
- Maintain a close relationship with senior stakeholders, to help clarify requirements and constraints, and remain aware of their commitment.
- Be readily accessible to the planning team, to provide guidance on strategic issues.
- Consider seeking independent assurance on draft business case.
- Assess realistically whether there is adequate internal capability to effectively govern and deliver the project.
- Consider which information is of most interest and relevance to decision makers and stakeholders. Make it clearly visible for them in the business case, including outcomes which will not be delivered by the project.

Project implementation

Deliver the specified products

Consider for  
**3. Approval**

**2. Business case**

Specify outcomes, requirements, costs, timeframe

**1. Concept plan**

Clarify outcomes  
Check logic

**Review questions for use by executives** during planning and approving a project. These questions help assess whether a project is ready to proceed to the next stage. Additional guidance is available in the ANAO Better Practice Guide *Planning and Approving Projects – an Executive Perspective*.

**Tip:** Effective project planning engages people – those implementing the project, those using the project products, those benefiting, and those who are funding the project.



## 1 Concept plan

- Developed in a broad context.
- Business outcomes clear.
- Extent of improvement (or performance) for outcomes indicated.
- Proposed business outcomes largely independent of factors external to the project scope.
- Outcomes supported as important by key stakeholders.
- Reliable chain of reasoning from the proposed project requirements or products to the desired outcomes.
- Definite contribution to one or more broader goals. E.g. client satisfaction, agency flexibility and capability, cost control and enabling staff.
- Important assumptions, risks, and constraints identified.
- Overall, the concept has realistic and tangible business results, and a reasonable underlying logic.**

These questions are intended to assist executives form judgements about a project proposal. Consideration of the questions should be complemented by appropriate quality assurance of information being provided to executives for their review.

## 3 Approval – issues for consideration

**Decision-maker to form own view on key issues, in an overall context.**

- Relative importance of outcomes, contribution to goals.
- Likelihood of on-time, on-budget completion.
- Allocation of responsibility for products and outcomes.
- Project option chosen is most appropriate investment.
- Appropriateness of acceptance of residual risks.
- Appropriateness of review and exit points to avoid loss.
- Appropriateness of project governance team to the risks.
- Compliance with entity and APS policies.
- Compatibility of project with other projects and workloads.
- Setting of specific controls to support senior management in external liaison, monitoring, corrective action.
- Overall, the project is an appropriate use of resources, taking into account the outcomes, costs, risks and alternative uses of funds.**

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## 2 Business case

- Outcomes, costing and timeframe clearly described, sufficiently reliable.
- Responsibility allocated for all project products, expenditure, business outcomes.
- Business outcomes will be measured before rollout, and subsequently.
- Requirements are complete. E.g. functionality, quality, volume, security.
- Right people consulted on requirements.
- Operational manager agrees product acceptance criteria and that the business outcomes are achievable with the product.
- Options provide a real choice on level of investment.
- Risks and assumptions have been reliably assessed.
- Any significant residual risks accepted by relevant person.
- Risk treatment and monitoring funded.
- Operational requirements, such as staff and accommodation, budgeted for.
- Data issues addressed.
- The communications and stakeholder relationship approach is appropriate.
- Project phasing has review and exit points to reduce loss if problems occur.
- Able to develop or procure products.
- Product rollout and handover to operations budgeted.
- Project governance team are appropriate to the risks of the project.
- Overall, the business case puts forward business outcomes that are realistically achievable in the proposed timeframe and cost, with appropriate risk mitigation, risk responses and fall-back options.**

These questions may need to be tailored to take account of a specific entity's circumstances.