



NWCG Project Charter Guidelines

**Program
Management
Office**

Version 1.4

September 30, 2002

(supercedes Version 1.3, July 2002)

**National Wildfire
Coordinating Group**

**Information Resource
Management**

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I. Introduction

This document is written for business leaders and project managers and is intended to identify certain guidelines to be used in the development of NWCG project charters. This document is not all-inclusive and should be used in conjunction with current advice from the IRMWT and IRM-PMO. Each project is unique and will have special requirements and considerations that may not exactly fit the guidelines identified within this document.

The IRM-PMO harvests “lessons learned” from projects. As we develop more understanding of what it takes to achieve successful project outcomes, this document will change. Consider the date and version number, and check with the IRM-PMO for the latest version. Generally, the date of an IRM-PMO document determines its precedence over other IRM-PMO documents.

II. What Is a Project Charter?

The Project Charter is the agreement between the organization providing the product or service, and the customer organization requesting and receiving the project deliverable. It is a tool to obtain commitment from all affected groups (stakeholders) and individuals within a specific project.

It is a document issued by senior management that formally authorizes the existence of a project. It provides the project manager with the authority to apply organizational resources to project activities.

It is an agreement between the technical and business groups which defines:

- Partners and external stakeholders;
- The project management framework to be used on the project;
- Roles and responsibilities of the team members;
- Management commitments (specifically in terms of communications and control); and
- The empowerment framework.

The Project Charter is not only an effective project-planning tool; it is a communication vehicle that can be referenced throughout the project. It is a quick reference and overview of what the project is about, why it is being conducted, who is involved and in what capacity, and the general approach and timeline that exists for the project.

The original Project Charter does not change throughout the project life cycle. It is created at the beginning of the project, approved by the key project stakeholders, and is available for reference throughout the project life cycle. Modifications, additions, or change conditions may be appended to the original charter based upon agreement by all parties. The Project Charter is a single, consolidated source of information about the project in terms of initiation and planning, and provides information about project scope, objectives, deliverables, risks, and issues. It also lays the foundation for how the project

will be structured, and how it will be managed in terms of change control, oversight and control, and risk and issue resolution.

II. Why Create a Project Charter?

The Project Charter provides a consolidated and summary level overview of the project. It allows all parties involved in the project (stakeholders) to document the agreed upon scope and objectives, approach and major deliverables of the project. It also, at the outset of the project, documents the agreed upon communications plans, control mechanisms, and responsibilities of team members. In other words, the Project Charter is a fundamental communications tool within the project environment.

Additionally, the Project Charter contributes to the following key success factors:

- Structured management organization;
- Disciplined management processes;
- Project governance;
- Project management best practices; and,
- Internal/external communications.

Having a project charter will provide the following benefits:

- Improved client partnerships and other relationships;
- Improved project management processes;
- Improved headquarter/regional communications;
- Better project sponsorship;
- Recognition of senior management's role;
- Improved on-time and on-budget delivery of projects; and
- Progress towards industry best practices.

III. Who Is Responsible for the Project Charter?

The Project Manager has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the Project Charter is developed and approved. Development of the Project Charter cannot be done in isolation by any one party since it outlines an agreement among the project stakeholders of what the project will deliver and how. The Project Sponsor is instrumental in providing the Project Manager with a solid understanding of the background of the project. The Project Sponsor provides support and approval for the Project Charter.

IV. Tailoring the Project Charter to Specific Projects

Much work has been done on identifying best practices and critical success factors for IT projects. Regardless of the size and type of project, the fundamental project management processes and principles remain the same. Although the depth and scope of applying

these processes and principles may change from project to project, the inclusion of them within the project framework remains constant across all projects.

For example, on a larger project, sections of the project charter that deal with risk management, project organization, and/or project control may be quite substantial, and may, therefore, need to reference external documents that contain the details (e.g., a "Risk Management Plan" or a "Project Control Plan"). On a smaller project, all of these topics still need to be addressed, though they may be handled through a one or two paragraph reference to general or project-specific approaches that will be used.

V. What Goes into the Project Charter?

The following guidelines explain the Project Charter contents. Included are a brief description for each section along with an explanation of the contents of the section and/or the rationale for including that section in the Project Charter.

1. *Project Overview Section*

1.1 Identification

Identify the formal name and any associated acronyms or abbreviations for the project, the project team, and the product. This establishes the names to be used when identifying the project or product to stakeholders, users, and the general public.

1.2 Project Background

Provide background information about how and why the project was initiated. Include references to any associated projects or initiatives, as well as any studies with conclusions or recommendations related to this project.

1.3 Purpose / Business Need

A brief description of the project should be provided. This should describe **in business terms** the reason for the project and the overall timing and expectations. Reference any related business plans that may identify the business need. Describe who (in terms of individual roles and/or organizational areas) will use the final outcome of the project and identify any other stakeholders who will be impacted by the results of the project.

1.4 Project Scope

Identify boundaries of the project with respect to the project scope and the product/service scope.

The **product scope** defines the spectrum of features and functionality that will be delivered and the limits that have been imposed in order to control the release or delivery of the product or service (**what** the project will accomplish). The product scope description within the Project Charter will **not** constitute the requirements specification for the product. Rather, it is expected to provide a general description of the product and the initial understanding and agreement about the boundaries of that product.

The **project scope** defines the work that is required to deliver the project product or service to meet the project objectives and any limits that have been imposed on the project work (**how** the project will be accomplished).

Although the product scope and project scope are tightly related, the remaining sections of the Project Charter cover the **project scope** and the processes required to deliver the project. The focus within the Charter should remain on **project** processes.

1.4.1 Project Objectives

Identify the overall objectives for the project. Identify what the project is intended to achieve, in business and technical terms. Identify, in broad terms, the impacts the project will have on current operations and existing projects and systems.

1.4.2 Outstanding Issues

Identify any outstanding issues that need to be resolved within the scope of the Project. These are issues that have been identified through the project initiation process.

1.5 Sponsorship & Ownership

Identify the project sponsorship and final product ownership. This should include a listing of sponsoring stakeholders and a clear identification of the stakeholder that will have formal ownership of the application system delivered by the project.

For interagency projects, include all participating stakeholder agencies and identify the lead agency. Include a breakdown showing the distribution of cost and effort to be contributed by the participating agencies.

1.6 References

Identify any other documents pertinent to the project. Include the current revision number, issue date, author, location of the document, and method of access for each document or reference. It is not necessary to repeat the detailed content of these related documents. Rather, enough information should be provided in this section to explain how the document relates to the project, what it contains that is pertinent to the project, and how it can be located.

1.7 Terminology

Define any unique or significant terms and/or acronyms that will be commonly used within the project. Terms that may be new or confusing to project stakeholders should be clearly explained. Acronyms and abbreviations introduced in the “Identification” section of the charter should be included here, as well.

2. Project Approach Section

A brief description of the project approach should be included. Provide a high-level overview of the project approach, project team structure, and project plan.

Projects will be managed in cooperation and collaboration with other (NWCG) projects and in conformance with enterprise architecture, data, and repository principles,

guidelines, and standards. (See additional NWCG architecture, data, and repository documents)

Projects Managers will support the goals of the organization's IRM strategy by building systems that align and contribute to the evolution of the NWCG enterprise architecture. (See NWCG IRM Strategy)

2.1 Project Deliverables and Quality Objectives

Provide a list of major and key deliverables that will be generated during and on completion of the project. Identify key milestones. For each deliverable, provide a description of its quality objectives in terms of output quality and approval requirements. (For example, "interim status reports will be provided weekly to the Project Sponsor and Project Team Leaders and will be approved by each person prior to being accepted within the project archives.")

2.2 Organization and Responsibilities

This section identifies the required Project Team and, taking the project skill requirements into account, assigns roles and responsibilities to named individuals.

Within this section, describe the authorities and responsibilities given by the sponsors to the Business Leader, Project Manager, and Project Team members. Depending on the project and when the charter is developed, the need for and identity of many of the project team members may be unknown. At a minimum, this section should address the Business Leader, Project Manager, and the Executive Committee.

The organization may include:

- Executive Committee: Represents the sponsoring stakeholders with oversight & management authority. This could be the NWCG, the IRM Working Team (IRMWT), or another Working Team (WT). In any case, the Executive Committee should be a recognized business organization, not an *ad hoc* group.
- Business Leader (liaison with the business community),
- Project Manager (technical project manager),
- Project Team Leaders (assist the Project Manager in administering and/or managing specific aspects of the project),
- Project Team Members (including IT specialists, business clients, and subject matter experts (SMEs)),
- Test Coordinator,
- Quality Assuror,
- Configuration Controller,
- Change Controller.

The same person may have multiple roles on a project. For example, on smaller projects, the Project Manager may also be a Project Team member, Change and Configuration Controller and Test Coordinator. On smaller projects, the sponsoring stakeholders may decide not to appoint an Executive Committee and the Business Leader may handle the approval and oversight roles.

On larger projects, Project Team Leaders may be appointed to assist the Project Manager in coordinating the overall project activities and in managing specific deliverables. On large projects, the Project Manager and Business Leader should not fulfill other team member roles, as this distracts from their primary project management duties.

For NWCG-sponsored IRM projects, the minimum project organization should include coordination and oversight from the IRMWT, IRM-PMO and sponsoring WT, and should include both a Business Leader and a Project Manager. See Figure 1.

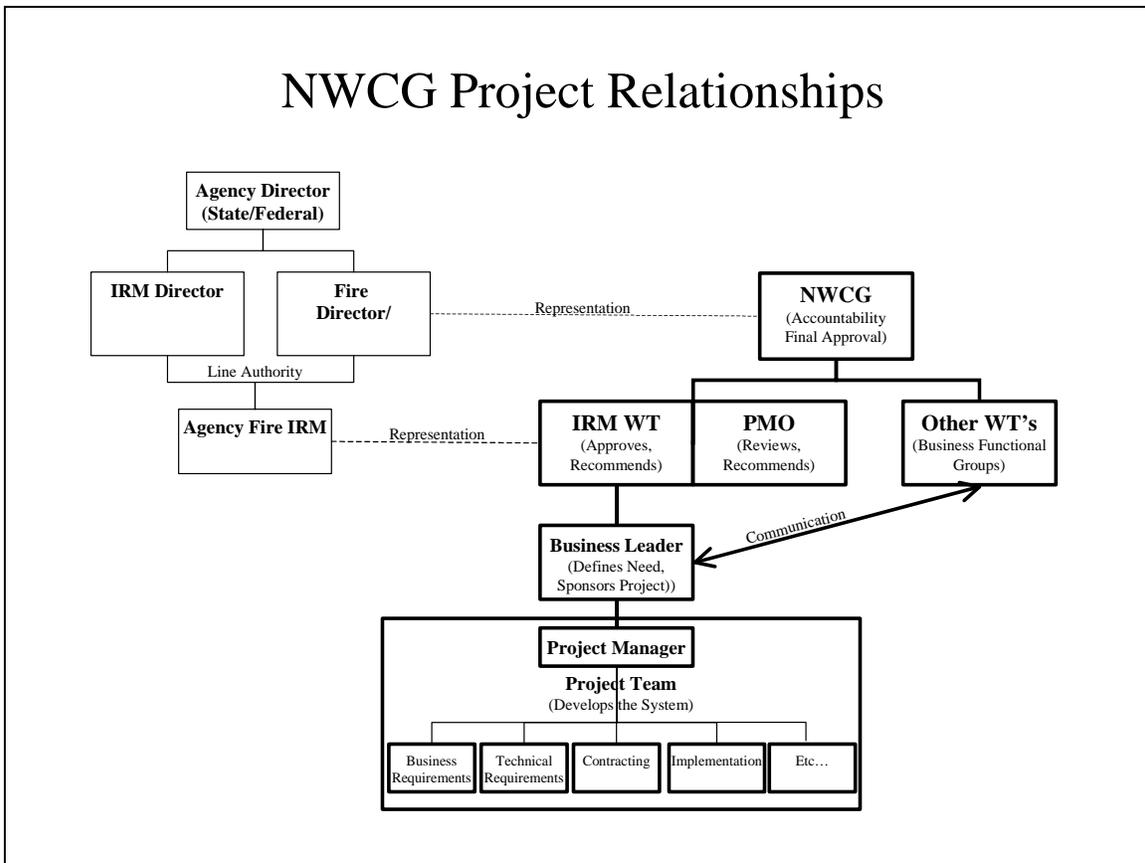


Figure 1 - NWCG Project Relationships

2.3 Reporting, Oversight, & Review

Reporting relationships and project interfaces should be described within this section. Identify required approvals and interfaces with organizations such as procurement. Document required interaction with the steering committee and any other review or oversight groups/offices. On a large project, this may be documented in a separate Communications Plan – if so, reference the Communications Plan in this section.

This section should include any inter-departmental/interagency approval mechanism (through the lead agency) and the project oversight authority and responsibility under NWCG (or other sponsoring agency/group).

2.4 Dependencies

Any dependencies outside of the Project Manager's direct control, or outside of the scope of the project (but which may influence the project success) should be identified. For example: activities to be carried out by a client or subcontractor, or needed deliverables from an external project.

Internal dependencies must also be considered. Dependencies of the project, and/or of a project deliverable (product) on other projects/products (existing or in development) should be clearly identified. For example, if a needed resource cannot become available until another project is completed, this dependency should be identified and the related risk documented in the appropriate section of the Project Charter. Required linkages to other existing or planned systems should also be identified.

2.5 Plans for Support Activities

Plans for project support activities are described here. Examples of support activities include training, quality assurance, configuration management, and documentation support. If these plans exist as documents external to the Project Plan (e.g. Configuration Management Plan, Quality Plan, Project Training Plan), they should be referenced here.

2.6 Project Facilities and Resources

The project's requirements for facilities and resources, such as office space, special facilities, computer equipment, office equipment, and support tools should be identified.

Responsibilities to procure or develop these items should be clearly assigned and described here. Identify any resources to be contributed by participating stakeholders.

Planning for adequate computer resources (i.e. memory, processor use, disk space) takes into account the size of the software solution being acquired and/or developed, the project staffing levels, and past history of similar projects.

2.7 Risk Management

Any risks associated with the project and the actions that can be taken during the project to minimize the risks need to be identified. Mitigation and planned response approaches should also be identified.

For example, a risk may be a dependency upon a single skill (one resource) within the organization. The management required would be, at least, to have identified alternative sources of that skill or provide on-the-job training for a backup resource. Use of a new type of hardware could also be considered to be a risk. The management required here could be to introduce early prototyping or additional testing.

The process for identifying, documenting, tracking and monitoring risks, as well as implementing risk avoidance, mitigation and response strategies needs to be defined.

On larger projects, the Risk Management Plan may be a document separate from the Project Charter. On smaller projects, it will begin as part of the Project Charter but will need to be updated throughout the life of the project within an external document or system.

2.8 Process Options and Deviations

A defined Project Management Methodology and Systems Development Life Cycle Methodology should be identified by reference in this section. If the organization or Lead Agency has standard/preferred methodologies, identify them.

If for any reason, deviations from these defined standards are deemed necessary and/or appropriate for a project, these deviations should be identified and the rationale and appropriate approval for such deviation should be recorded.

2.9 Process Stages

A description of the project life cycle (project) and the solution delivery life cycle (product development) should be included. A definition of the stages to be used on the project, the objectives of each stage and their entry and exit criteria need to be clearly defined.

For each life cycle phase, applicable procedures, methods, and standards should be referenced or identified.

2.10 Project Control

Project control explains the methods and processes that will be implemented to assist the Project Manager in identifying project progress and communicating that progress to the project team, project sponsor, and project stakeholders. It also includes definition of the approach for resolving deviations from the project plan and taking corrective action.

Project control should include:

- The type and frequency of project reports,
- The frequency and attendees of project team meetings,
- The frequency of stage checkpoint meetings (attended by the Executive Committee as appropriate),
- The frequency of Executive Committee meetings,
- The name and location of the project file,
- The methods to be used to log and control project actions,
- The criteria for issuing a revised version of the Project Plan,
- The metrics to be collected during the project, and the analysis to be performed on them.

This section should also identify the methods and policies to be used for project scope control, issue management, and change and configuration management.

Also within this section should be an outline of the project Communications Plan – the methods, timing, audience, etc. of project communications (tools to be used, methods of delivery, recipients, collection of project information and feedback and archiving of project working papers).

2.11 Quality Assurance and Control Activities

Quality assurance and control activities relate to both the project management processes and deliverables, and the product development processes and deliverables. A list of the quality reviews and quality tests that will be carried out during the project, including ownership, approximate schedule and effort required, should be included. For example, the review of the Project Plan, design reviews, unit testing, system testing, acceptance testing should be identified.

A list of all joint customer/client reviews should be included. Include meetings to review acceptance test results and conformance to agreed-upon requirements.

At the start of the project, the specific product-related reviews and processes (design reviews, system tests, etc.) might not be known. However, an overview of the types of reviews that are expected to take place and the level of involvement from various project stakeholders and team members should be listed here.

2.12 Project Schedule

Include a high-level schedule for the project. The project schedule must take into account critical dependencies between the project groups. Depending on the project and when the charter is developed, only a high-level task listing may be feasible. To the extent possible, this task list should be augmented with schedule information. The complete project schedule will be developed as part of the project plan during the project planning phase.

A Gantt chart of activities, resources and assigned responsibilities allocated to them can represent the project schedule. The organization or Lead Agency's Project Management Methodology and Systems Development Life Cycle Methodology may influence the creation of this Gantt chart (including the associated Work Breakdown Structure).

A project management software tool can be useful to produce the project schedule and to monitor the progress against the schedule. For a larger project, the use of such a tool is essential.

2.13 Project Effort Estimate

This section identifies the estimated project effort, in person days or work months. Effort should be broken-down by project stage and project phase.

Information used to derive the effort estimate should also be included (assumptions, historical results used to develop the estimates, etc.).

2.14 Project Cost Estimate

This section outlines the estimated project cost. Costs should be itemized (i.e. labor, equipment, office space) and broken down by project phase and stage.

Identify the costing method used and include the information used to derive the cost estimate (assumptions made, costing factors and parameters, sources of costing information, historical costs used to estimate the costs, etc.).

Additionally, the procurement policies and methods to be used within the project should be detailed (who is responsible for purchasing decisions and developing and managing purchase orders, requests for proposal, etc. and how will these be managed). Procurement, as addressed, should be in line with the Lead Agency's procurement policies and procedures.

3. *Approval Section*

This section identifies the names and roles of the major project stakeholders and indicates their approval of the project charter. Signatures are included in this section. Appropriate representatives from the sponsoring entity, the lead agency, and the project manager should sign the charter. Additional signatories may include other sponsors and key stakeholders. By signing, the signatories indicate their agreement and acceptance of the project charter and their commitment to the project and end product.

4. *Appendices*

Changes to the original Project Charter must be signed by the appropriate parties and appended. Other appendices should include a fully developed and completed business case (OMB A11, 300), additional agreements, and other documents related to project scope, cost, and schedule.

VI. Bibliography

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