

Know What a Charter Is

A charter -- team charter, project charter, or program charter -- is used to formalize a set of expectations for a working relationship. In the context of a project, a charter is the statement of scope, purpose, and participants in a project. It begins the process of defining the roles and responsibilities of those participants and outlines the objectives and goals of the project. The charter also identifies the key stakeholders and defines the authority of the project manager.

Know Why Charters are Useful

A charter states the focus or main directive(s) of a group of people. Without a charter, it might be more difficult to remain focused on the shared purpose or objective of the project. The charter serves as a reference document that covers these two key points:

- What is the essence of the project? What are the goals and objectives of the project? How are you planning to reach and achieve these goals and objectives?
- Provide a shared understanding of the project. The charter should communicate its value and/or reason for existence to every person who has a part in it including: team members, project manager, stakeholders, sponsors, etc.

Know What a Good Charter Looks Like

Creating a good charter, early on, is fundamental to running a successful project. While there are many ways to build a charter, it is important to first understand the primary uses of the document:

- Your charter is your elevator pitch, you need it to get buy-in for your project. This is the document that sells the project to your stakeholders and defines the project's benefits. Your charter is a point of reference for roles, responsibilities, and scope management. This is a document that stays with you throughout the life cycle of the project.



Establish or Update Your Charter



The following is an effective project charter template:

Background

[Why is the project being undertaken? Describe an opportunity or problem that the project is to address.]

Goals

- [specific & measurable goal 1]
- [specific & measurable goal 2]
- [specific & measurable goal 3]

Scope

[What will be the end result of the project? Describe what phases of work will be included. It's also important to mention what activities will not be included in this project.]

Key Stakeholders and their Roles

Sponsor	[name] - Roles
Project manager	[name] - Roles
Project team members	[name], [name], [name], [name]. - Roles for each team member

Project Milestones

[Identify the significant project milestones: start date, end date]

Project Budget

[Describe the main project expenses: non-recurring & monthly recurring.]

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Constraints, Assumptions, Risks and Dependencies

Constraints	[Describe here potential factors that will impact the delivery of the project]
Assumptions	[Describe here conditions or situations that you are relying on in order to achieve project goals]
Risks and Dependencies	[What are the most significant risks? What things must happen before the project is delivered?]

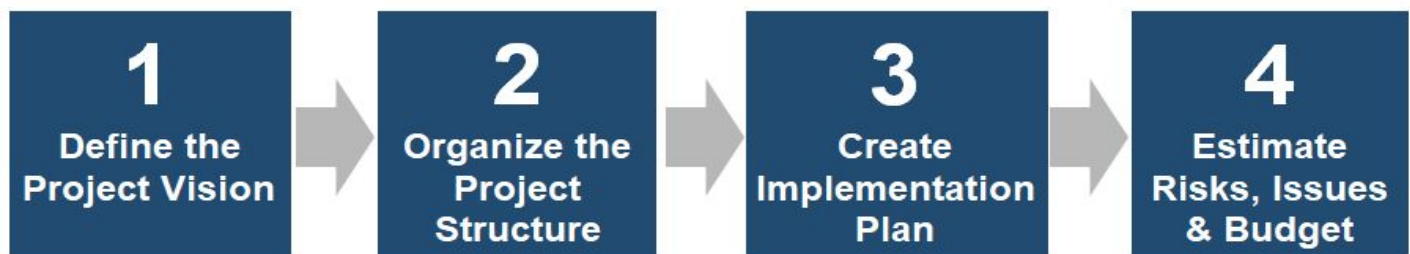
Approval Signatures

[Name], Project Sponsor

[Name], Project Manager

Know How to Draft a Charter

The process for writing a good project charter starts with knowing the vision of the project. That vision should be specific, capture the purpose of your project, and define the end goal for the project team. The graphic below illustrates this charter development process:





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Step 1: Vision

Once you have the vision clear, then you can break it down into more practical bits.

Objective. List three to five objectives of the project, be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound.

Scope. Now outline the formal boundaries of the project by describing how the organization may change by delivery of your project. Also note what's relevant to the project and what is not. This is how you maintain better control of the project scope.

Deliverables. Describe each of the deliverables the project should produce. Once you've gotten all of them down, you've got a foothold on your charter and are ready to move on to the next step.

Step 2: Structure

When you're building a structure for your charter there are four subsets you're going to need to identify. This is done by listing the following:

Customers/End Users. To complete this list, ask yourself: What is a customer and/or end user in the context of this project? Who are the project customers? Is there a specific individual or entity responsible for accepting the deliverables of the project?

Stakeholders. As noted earlier, identifying the stakeholders of the project is crucial. These are the persons or entities within or outside of the project with a specific key interest in that project.

Roles. You need to assign the key roles and responsibilities to those involved in delivering the project, including the project sponsor, project manager, and team members. After each entry write a short summary defining their role and what their responsibilities are in the project.

Structure. Now you need to define the lines of reporting between these various roles in the project. Use a project organization chart to do this. It diagrams the structure of an organization and the relationships and roles of those involved in the project.



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Step 3: Implementation

You have a vision and have organized the various parts of your project. Now you need a plan to implement them. There are four parts to this step:

Plan. Creating an implementation plan is an iterative process where you'll deep dive into the details of the project delivery. This is a way to develop an atmosphere of confidence for your customers and stakeholders by listing the phases, activities and timeframes of the project's life cycle.

Milestones. Milestones mark major phases in the project and collect smaller tasks into bigger chunks of work. The project charter should only have a few of them, that's why they're milestones, but they are an important way to acknowledge the completion of a key deliverable.

Dependencies. List all key dependencies and what their importance is to the project. These are tasks or activities that are linked to one another, as they will impact the project during its life cycle.

Resource Plan. What resources are involved in the project? This is how you'll know what you need before you need it, and you'll be able to estimate your budget more accurately.

Step 4: Risks, Issues & Budget

No charter is complete without identifying the potential risks and issues that can derail a project. This includes identifying assumptions and constraints related to the project. A risk is a potential issue that may or may not happen in a project. Risk is not always negative, as there is such a thing as positive risk, and you should prepare for that as well. An issue is something that has already occurred in the project. Basically, a risk is future tense and an issue is present tense, but you have to be prepared for any and all eventualities when creating a charter.

Finally, with all the above information, you can sketch out a rough figure on how much it will cost to deliver the project within the timeframe you're allowed. Then you socialize the charter and refine it with feedback from all key parties involved. Once you get the green light, the real work can begin.

Need Help?

The Performance Improvement Council (PIC) shares best practices and builds capacity across the federal government to set, plan, and achieve priorities for the American Public. The PIC is supported by the Office of Shared Solutions and Performance Improvement (OSSPI) at the General Services Administration (GSA) and can be reached at picstaff@gsa.gov.