Governance First!
Successful projects depend on clear decision-making.

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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.