HM Government

A senior leader's guide to the project delivery standard

Why do we need a standard for project delivery?

The Project Delivery Standard has been created to set expectations for the direction and management of portfolios, programmes and projects, ensuring value for money and successful, timely and cost effective delivery of government policy and business objectives.

As senior leaders, you know that programmes and projects are one of the primary vehicles for delivering government policy. Major government projects are recognised as being amongst the most complex and demanding in the world, and, if they are to succeed, they require the right people, the right resources and the right tools. Understanding, too, that many problems encountered by SROs (senior responsible owners) cannot be solved at a project level is equally critical. SROs and their teams need the right support through you understanding what it takes to deliver projects successfully and providing the right environment.

The principles on which the standard is based

The practices described in the standard support the principles to ensure:

- ✓ delivery objectives are aligned to government policy and organisational objectives;
- ✓ continuing business justification to confirm benefits can be realised and risks managed within the organisation's risk appetite, and that unjustified work is terminated;
- ✓ governance, management frameworks and controls are proportionate and appropriate to the work and the level of prevailing risk;
- ✓ accountabilities and responsibilities are defined, mutually consistent and traceable across all levels of management;
- ✓ experience and lessons are captured, shared and used to promote future performance improvement;
- ✓ work is appropriately defined, planned, monitored and controlled, and quality actively managed to maximise the likelihood of success. Defined working methodologies are tailored for use accordingly;
- ✓ outcomes and enabling outputs will meet the need and be validated by stakeholders;
- ✓ work is undertaken in multi-disciplinary teams and is assigned to people who have the required capability and capacity;
- ✓ the transition of capabilities to operations is planned and programme or project closure managed, with ongoing operational responsibilities agreed and accepted.

In applying the standard, we will be starting to create, not only the best performing project delivery system of any country in the world; we will also be supporting continuous improvement, benefiting both programmes and projects alike, and ensuring value for money for tax-payers.

What is the standard?

The standard describes the "**why**" and the "**what**" but does not describe "**how**" anything should be done. It is for each organization to choose the most appropriate way to use it. Developed by government for government, the standard covers governance, portfolio, programme and project management. The standard fits all types of change and delivery approaches (such as agile methodologies) for any purpose, for example transformation, infrastructure and defence procurements. The standard is not a method, a "self-teach" book nor manual. Think of it as a concise reference to what project delivery entails.

What are the important sections for me?

Accounting officers need to ensure the operations in their organizations meet the expected standards in Managing Public Money, namely regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility. The standard sets out when you need to be involved and the practices you should expect to find when you do an assessment or make a decision on a programme or project. The standard will help you to ask the "right" questions.

Permanent secretaries, directors general and chief executive officers of arm's length bodies and suppliers should ensure an environment exists which promotes delivery success and integrates with their organisation's governance, policies and other activities. In most cases this is likely to mean operating a support office to support you. The standard outlines what such support should be.

Senior leaders should focus on upholding the principles (section 2) and on making sure governance (section 4) and portfolio management (section 5) are set up and working effectively and that those chosen to direct and manage the work have the required skills and competencies.

Project delivery professionals will know the details of the programme and project management practices set out in Sections 6 and 7 of the standard – that is their job and they can advise you on any aspect.

Governance and project delivery

The standard sets out the relationships between assurance, decisions and business cases. The standard requires that a Department's assurance framework covers project delivery assurance and approvals. Life cycles (in section 6.3 of the standard) promote a phased approach to project delivery as rarely can a significant project be planned and costed in its entirety from day one. In a phased approach, you release funds and commit resources a bit at a time until you have the right solution, know what you are delievering, understand the benefits and the risks have been reduced to an acceptable level.

Business planning and project delivery

Portfolio management controls the flow of work for your organization; programmes and projects are sometimes delayed or fail simply because too much is being attempted and risks, at an organisation level aren't managed. The Project Delivery Standard includes a set of practices, which should be part of your business planning and management framework. Portfolio management is a critical aspect to what is now commonly termed as "business agility" as it is value focused, rather than simply budget focussed.

Must my people comply with this standard?

Yes, you are expected to comply in that you and your people are already expected to use practices which are necessary for project success; the standard simply makes it clear what those practices are. Accounting Officers and Senior Responsible Owners for major projects are already accountable to Parliament; the standard does not change this. There are no new "compliance" or audit regimes to support the standard, just the ones that currently exist in HM Treasury's controls and in each Department and the various committees. By using the standard, however, you are more likely to have everything covered.

What else does the standard enable?

Once the standard is established, we can ensure the competencies of our people are enhanced using learning and development interventions which match what is needed in the standard. As each part of government will be working to the same standard, we can develop a common understanding of project delivery and hence be able to share lessons, continuously improve how we work and build our capability in project delivery.