



Infrastructure
and Projects
Authority

Principles for project success



Foreword

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This Government has declared its bold ambition to deliver a revolutionary step change in the delivery of major projects. This is essential for rebuilding the economy and creating resilience in our public services. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot afford to waste the opportunity to do things smarter, faster and ultimately more productively.

For this ambition to succeed, we need to make the most of the world class project expertise we have in this country. The success or failure of a project is often determined in its early stages. Whilst successful project initiation can take more time at the start, this will be repaid many times over later on in delivery - so we must get it right from the start.

This document sets out the core principles that underpin successful project delivery in government, recognising the complex environment that we operate in. They are designed as a short accessible guide for everyone delivering projects and programmes across government, to help ensure that we get the basics right, consistently.

These principles are part of our wider work to create a consistent culture of world class project performance. One where projects are consistently set up for success and deliver real benefits for people and communities across the UK.

Our aim is nothing less than world class delivery. We hope these principles help everyone working in project delivery to thrive, grow and feel valued for their part in their project.



Introduction

About the principles

The principles for project success are intended as core propositions or ‘**basic truths**’, to be used to guide thinking and behaviour in project delivery.

They are designed as short, memorable headlines unpacked by supporting bullets and further resources: a quick guide for practitioners on things to get right for any project to succeed.

They are deliberately short and action-focused: the aim is for them to be easy to understand, no matter what kind of project you are working on.

The eight principles for project success were developed following widespread consultation with project professionals across government and beyond. They draw on a broad range of review findings and guidance, both in government and across professional bodies, and should align with accepted good practice nationally and internationally.

Above all, we hope project delivery professionals find the principles accessible and useful - and that they will be used to help deliver government projects successfully.

Key components of success

Setting up for success

Execution

Entry into service

Focus on outcomes

Plan realistically

Prioritise people

Tell it like it is

Control scope

Manage complexity & risk

Be an intelligent client

Project Lifecycle

Project Lifecycle

Project Lifecycle

Learn from experience

Eight principles for project success

Principle 1: Focus on outcomes

Principle 2: Plan realistically

Principle 3: Prioritise people and behaviour

Principle 4: Tell it like it is

Principle 5: Control scope

Principle 6: Manage complexity and risk

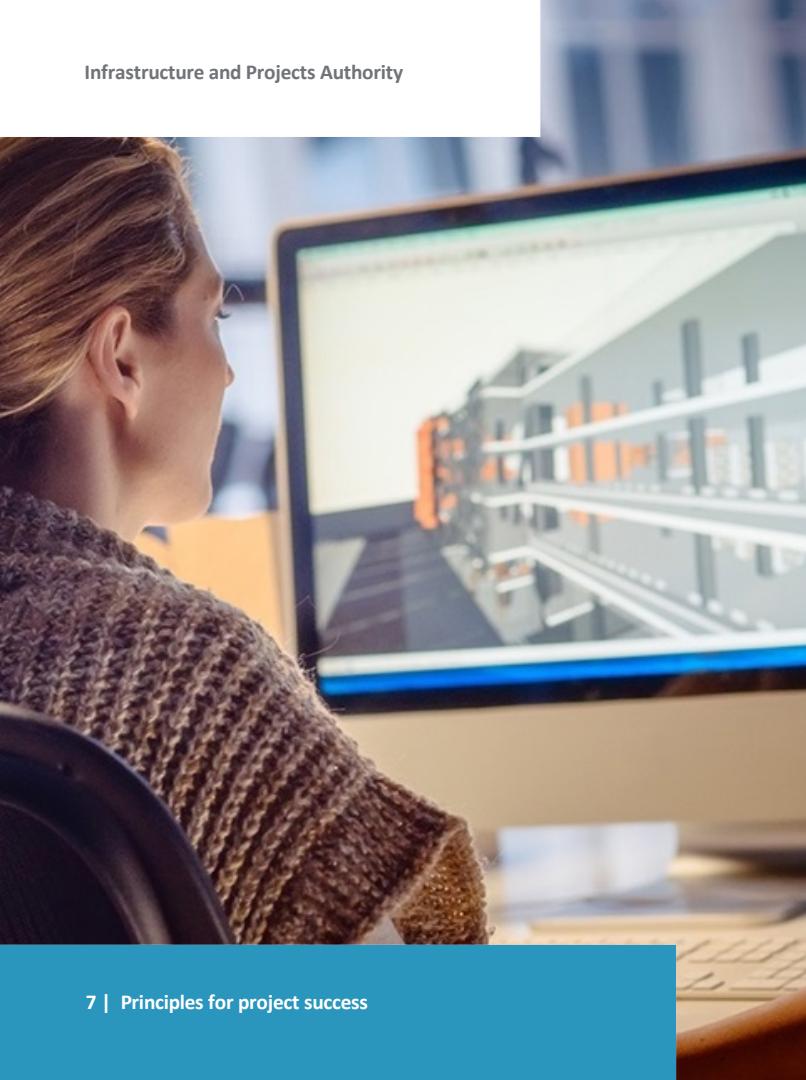
Principle 7: Be an intelligent client

Principle 8: Learn from experience

1. Focus on outcomes

- Be clear about the **outcomes** to be achieved before starting the project, and who commissioned them.
- Translate outcomes into tangible **deliverables** and realistic measurable **benefits** and use these to steer decisions on project scope, time, cost, risk and design priorities.
- Set out a clear project **business case** for investment of funding and other resources, needed to deliver these benefits and outcomes in the most efficient and effective way.
- Be clear how **success** will be measured, and focus on delivery of **benefits and outcomes** throughout the project. If these no longer appear deliverable or affordable, the project should be stopped.





2. Plan realistically

- Invest time in **thorough up-front planning** to ensure the project is deliverable and affordable before commitments are given.
- Use expert, **evidence-based cost estimation**, using benchmarking and reference class forecasting to identify the range of possible scenarios, and increasing accuracy between each stage gate.
- Use **ranges** for costs, benefits and delivery dates, adjusted as certainty increases through the life of the project. Plan for contingencies and be aware of optimism bias.
- **Maintain the plan** throughout the project and **track progress** against it, taking decisive action quickly if things go off track.

3. Prioritise people and behaviour

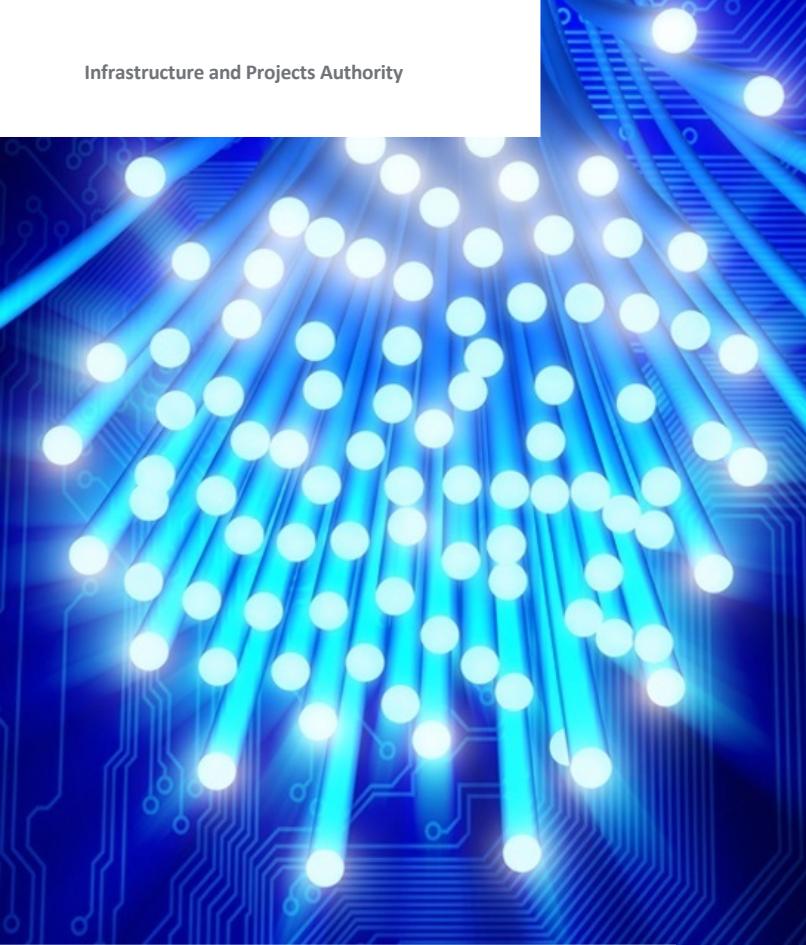
- Plan ahead for the **diversity of people, skills and experience** needed to deliver the project and build a **strong, properly resourced and competent team**, evolving as necessary through the project lifecycle.
- Agree the **delivery structures**, internal and external, needed to deliver the project, and how these will be established, managed and governed as the project evolves.
- Be clear on individual **accountabilities and responsibilities** across project delivery structures, and check that they are working as expected. Consider **organisational capabilities** and take action where improvements are needed.
- Agree clear expectations on **behaviours** and make the project a great place to work, where **everyone in the team can thrive, grow and feel valued** for their part in the project.



4. Tell it like it is

- Foster **an open project culture**, where people feel safe to challenge and raise risks and issues, and where assurance is valued as a key element of successful delivery.
- Agree standards for **realistic performance reporting** and challenge optimistic assumptions and inaccurate data.
- Encourage **honest conversations** within the project team, with sponsors, stakeholders and suppliers, and as a fundamental principle for assurance.
- If something isn't right, isn't ready or isn't working, **say so, and take action accordingly**.





5. Control scope

- Agree project scope from the start and stick to it at each stage. For evolving agile and transformation projects, agree clear scope for each stage, within an overall envelope.
- Exercise strict change control, and test unavoidable changes in scope or design for impact against the plan, business case, benefits and outcomes before decisions are taken.
- Work in manageable project stages, with **gated decision points**, pausing to assess delivery and ensure continuing viability at each stage of the project.
- **Track progress to plan**, in terms of cost, schedule, deliverables, risks and opportunities, always assessing impact on benefits and outcomes.

6. Manage complexity

- **Reduce complexity and risk** where possible; where not, plan for them and manage them.
- **Take a system-wide view** of what it will take to deliver the project, including operating context, boundaries with partners and operational change, and plan for it, with a detailed project execution plan in place before moving to delivery.
- **Minimise internal and external dependencies** where possible at the design and planning phase: manage those remaining actively through the life of the project.
- **Pay attention to integration:** ensure a single point of accountability. Plan how to bring elements together, testing that they work together at each stage and that the outcome works for users.



7. Be an intelligent client

- Build a clear understanding of **user needs** and design the project accordingly.
- Consider the **whole supply chain** in terms of market appetite, capacity and capability, and whether it can deliver what is needed, as part of planning. Involve the supply chain early and have firm bids for scope before full business case.
- Establish **channels for dialogue** with users and stakeholders to ensure their voice is heard throughout the project.
- Build **trust-based relationships** with the supply chain and partner organisations: contract collaboratively to ensure a viable contract and incentivise successful delivery where everyone benefits.





8. Learn from experience

- Seek out relevant **experience from other projects** and use it in planning and delivering the project.
- Value **experience and learning in the project team** and build a culture of continuing professional development.
- Maintain an '**outside view**' of the project: bring in independent perspectives and integrated assurance, and learn from them.
- **Capture lessons** throughout the life of the project, and share them as feedback, stories and case studies to improve project delivery for wider public benefit.

Further resources

- [Infrastructure and Projects Authority annual report, Cabinet Office, 2020](#)
- [Lessons from transport for the sponsorship of major projects, Cabinet Office and Department for Transport, 2019](#)
- [The role of the senior responsible owner, Cabinet Office, 2019](#)
- [The art of brilliance: A handbook for SROs of transformation programmes, Cabinet Office, 2019](#)
- [Best Practice in Benchmarking, Cabinet Office, 2019](#)
- [Government functional standard for project delivery, Cabinet Office, 2018](#)
- [Accounting officer assessments: guidance, HM Treasury, 2017](#)
- [Project delivery capability framework, Cabinet Office, 2017](#)
- [Management of Risk in Government: framework, Cabinet Office, 2017](#)
- [Assurance review toolkit: SRO briefing note, Cabinet Office, 2016](#)
- [Parliamentary scrutiny of public spending: guidance for accounting officers, HM Treasury, 2015](#)
- [Managing public money, HM Treasury, 2015](#)
- [Project Initiation Routemap, Cabinet Office, 2015](#)
- [Osmotherly rules: Giving evidence to select committees, guidance for civil servants, Cabinet Office, 2014](#)
- [The Green Book: appraisal and evaluation in central government, HM Treasury, 2013](#)
- [The Orange Book: management of risk - principles and concepts, HM Treasury, 2013](#)