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THE CHARTER WORKSHOP 25

How to Write a One-Page Project Charter



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Start with authorisation

A useful charter tells people why the project exists and what has actually been approved.

Define the purpose

The charter records the project at a high level, including objectives, boundaries and relevant authority. Use the organisation's actual approval process and terminology.

Library case

A library wants an online room-booking pilot. Staff currently handle many booking calls. The charter should authorise a defined change rather than promise every possible booking feature.

Keep one page useful

Prioritise the facts needed for the authorisation decision. Link detailed evidence instead of shrinking a full delivery plan into unreadable text.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write the decision the sponsor should be able to make from the page.

Choose a practical page structure

Group the information so a reader can follow the decision trail.

Top of the page

Use project name, sponsor, project manager, version and status. State the business need and the objective clearly enough to guide later trade-offs.

Middle of the page

Summarise the main deliverables, in-scope and out-of-scope work, high-level milestones and the funding or estimate basis.

Bottom of the page

Record major assumptions, risks, constraints and authority boundaries, then the approval decision and next review. Tailor required fields to the organisation.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Sketch three page zones before drafting sentences.

Describe the business need

A feature request becomes more useful when its underlying problem is visible.

Use evidence

Describe who is affected, the current situation and why a change matters. State the period and source for any baseline measure.

Library case

The illustrative baseline is 120 room-booking calls per week across three rooms. Staff report that manual confirmation and cancellations take time and create errors.

Avoid unsupported promises

The charter can state an intended improvement and its assumptions. It should not present an untested benefit as an established fact.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write a two-sentence need with a measure and source to verify.

Write a measurable objective

An objective should describe a result the sponsor can assess.

Make the target meaningful

State the intended change, measure, target, timing and relevant conditions. Agree the baseline and ownership of measurement before treating the target as settled.

Library case

The proposed pilot aims to reduce booking calls from 120 to 80 or fewer weekly during a four-week review after rollout, while preserving an assisted booking route.

Check the trade-off

A lower call count could conceal users abandoning the service. Include a relevant service-quality check so the measure supports the intended benefit.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write one objective and the evidence that would demonstrate it.

Set the scope boundary

The charter should make a useful commitment without pretending every detail is known.

Name the included work

Describe the main result and the work areas needed for it. Identify exclusions that readers might otherwise assume are included.

Library case

The pilot includes online booking and cancellation for three rooms, staff training and support handover. It excludes payment collection and expansion to other branches.

Test a request

When someone asks for paid event tickets, compare the idea with the authorised boundary and use the proper decision process before adding it.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

List one inclusion and one important exclusion.

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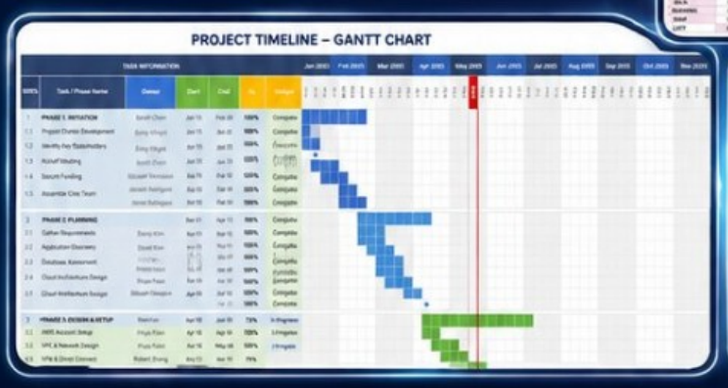
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Name deliverables and acceptance

A clear result gives planning a better starting point.

Describe outputs

Name the major deliverables in terms that can be verified. Identify who will accept them and the high-level evidence required.

Library case

The configured service must support room availability, booking confirmation and cancellation. Staff complete agreed scenarios, including a failed confirmation, before the pilot is accepted.

Keep detail proportionate

Link a detailed acceptance record if needed. The charter's job is to establish the expected result and its authority, not to contain every test step.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Pair one deliverable with an acceptance owner and evidence.

Show a credible funding basis

An early amount needs context about what it covers and how certain it is.

State the basis

Distinguish an estimate, authorised budget and funding limit. Include relevant implementation, training and transition costs, and identify material assumptions.

Library case

The illustrative pilot has an $18,000 authorisation cap based on current supplier information and internal support. An estimate that omits training would understate the planned commitment.

Define the decision rule

Record who approves spending and what happens if the forecast exceeds the limit. An attractive charter cannot replace financial authority.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write the amount, basis and approval boundary in one sentence.

Choose high-level milestones

Milestones should identify useful readiness or decision points.

Use a few important points

Include the major approvals, delivery and acceptance milestones that help readers understand the intended path. Detailed dependencies belong in the delivery plan.

Library case

Proposed points are authorisation, agreed requirements, pilot readiness and four-week benefit review. Readiness is targeted six weeks after authorisation, subject to the stated access assumptions.

Check the basis

Ask whether supplier lead time, data and staff availability can support the dates. Label an uncertain target honestly and assign its validation.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Name one milestone and the evidence needed to reach it.

Clarify roles and authority

The charter should help the project manager know which decisions they can make.

Name the owners

Identify the sponsor, project manager, key operational owner and acceptance authority as relevant. Define the delegated authority and escalation route.

Library case

The library manager sponsors the pilot. The coordinator manages delivery. The service lead accepts operating readiness. A scope or funding expansion needs the designated sponsor decision.

Confirm the arrangement

People need to agree their responsibilities and have the actual authority and capacity to fulfil them. A name on the page is only the starting record.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write an escalation rule for a proposed scope increase.

Record the critical unknowns

A few significant assumptions and risks are more useful than vague confidence.

Choose the material items

State the assumptions, constraints and uncertainties that affect feasibility or authorisation. Assign a validation or response owner and next check.

Library case

The plan assumes the existing room calendar can export reliable data. A sample export must be checked before configuration. The assisted-booking route remains a required constraint.

Use the decision

If the sample is unusable, the team needs options and impact assessment. The charter should make that dependency visible rather than bury it in a footnote.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Identify the unknown most likely to change the approval decision.

Include the people affected

An authorised project still needs relevant users and operating teams involved.

Identify key groups

Name important affected stakeholders and the planned way to involve them in requirements, verification or transition. Keep the list focused on the authorisation decision.

Library case

Reception staff, room users, accessibility representatives, IT support and the booking supplier all affect readiness. Assign early conversations before finalising the workflow.

Connect to acceptance

A technically working form can still fail users or staff. Include their operating needs in the planned evidence of a ready pilot.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Choose one group whose involvement could change your scope.

A filled one-page charter

Use this compact illustrative example as a structure to adapt.

Purpose and result

Northbridge Library Room-Booking Pilot. Sponsor: library manager. PM: project coordinator. Need: reduce manual handling. Objective: from an illustrative 120 calls weekly to 80 or fewer during the four-week review, maintaining an assisted route.

Boundary and plan

Deliver booking, cancellation, staff training and support handover for three rooms. Exclude payments and other branches. Target readiness six weeks after authorisation. Funding cap: $18,000, subject to the stated estimate basis.

Authority and evidence

Validate a calendar export before configuration. Service lead accepts agreed scenarios and readiness. Sponsor authorises scope or funding expansion. Record approval status, date, version and benefit-review owner before use.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Replace every illustrative field with an agreed fact from your own project.

Review the draft with its readers

Test the charter as a decision document.

Ask the sponsor

Does it explain the need, expected result, proposed commitment and major uncertainty? Is the authority and funding request clear enough to approve or challenge?

Ask the team and operations

Can they identify the included work, required handoffs, acceptance route and the owner after delivery? Resolve different interpretations before the project accumulates assumptions.

Revise for clarity

Remove unsupported claims and duplicate detail. Use plain language and consistent measures. Keep essential evidence accessible through controlled references.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Ask a reader to explain the project back to you in one minute.

Record the approval decision

A draft becomes an authorisation record through the actual governance process.

Prepare the decision

Provide the charter and relevant supporting evidence to the designated authority. Capture approved, rejected or deferred, with conditions and required follow-up.

Library case

The sponsor approves the pilot subject to confirming supplier access and the sample calendar data. Assign those conditions and communicate what may start before they are resolved.

Maintain the record

Record decision date, approver, version and effective authority. Keep a clear current copy so the team does not rely on an obsolete draft.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Identify what is authorised now and what remains conditional.

Use the charter during change

The charter should remain a reference for the project's purpose and boundary.

Test a proposal

Compare new work with the authorised objective, scope, costs and authority. Assess its effects and use the relevant change process.

Library case

A second branch asks to join the pilot. The team prepares benefits, cost, resource and risk impacts rather than treating the request as another small task.

Update appropriately

A material approved change may require a revised authorisation record under the organisation's process. Keep the charter, plan and business justification coherent.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Trace one requested addition to its required decision.



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Your blank-page drafting check

Use the fields as prompts, then verify the finished page with the right people.

Why and what

Project name; problem and baseline; intended objective and measure; main deliverables; scope exclusions; acceptance owner and evidence.

How much and who

Funding basis and limit; major milestones; sponsor and project manager; operational owner; delegated authority and escalation route.

What could change the decision?

Critical assumptions, constraints and risks; conditions of approval; decision date and version; next review. Replace labels with specific agreed facts before seeking authorisation.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Draft the charter, then test whether each sentence supports an approval or a boundary.