

# Six Questions for IT Projects

- ▶ 1. What is the justification for this project, and how will Vermonters benefit from it financially or operationally?
- ▶ 2. Why is the proposed solution the best one for this project, and has it been proven to be successful elsewhere?
- ▶ 3. Who will lead this project, what in their background qualifies them to do so, and what is their incentive to succeed?
- ▶ 4. How will the organization successfully respond to changes that are likely to occur over the life of the project?
- ▶ 5. What are the funding sources for this project, what are the funding constraints, and to what degree is the availability of funding driving the project?
- ▶ 6. What is the alternative plan of action if the project is not proceeding as planned, and how will the decision to change direction be made?

# 1. What is the justification for this project, and how will Vermonters benefit from it financially or operationally?

## ▶ Background:

- ▶ Large projects should not be undertaken without a clear and compelling reason, including a description of measurable benefits that are expected to result from the project.

## ▶ Follow up questions:

- ▶ Is there a clear definition of success?
- ▶ How will you determine that the project is meeting expectations, both during project execution and after completion?
- ▶ Is there adequate documentation as to what is in scope for the project, and what is not?

## 2. Why is the proposed solution the best one for this project, and has it been proven to be successful elsewhere?

### ▶ Background:

- ▶ A project that is big enough to result in committee visibility is generally bigger than we can handle as a first-of-a-kind effort. For large and complex projects we should rely on proven technologies and solutions. Even with that approach, the staff burden of changing to new technologies and procedures can be overwhelming.

### ▶ Follow up questions:

- ▶ If this is a new/unproven solution, what is the potential price of failure and how will we avoid it?
- ▶ If this is a proven solution, will customization be required before it meets our minimal requirements?
- ▶ What alternatives were considered, and why were they rejected in favor of the proposed solution?

### 3. Who will lead this project, what in their background qualifies them to do so, and what is their incentive to succeed?

- ▶ Background:

- ▶ A large project that is led by groups or committees is susceptible to a lack of focus or urgency. A dedicated leader that is empowered to drive the project forward, and has some stake in the outcome, can be critically important.

- ▶ Follow up questions:

- ▶ How will the project leader be able to overcome possible impediments (multiple organizations with conflicting needs, procurement problems, oversight, etc.)?
- ▶ What is the highest level of organizational support and commitment for this project? (department, agency, governor's office, etc.)?

## 4. How will the organization successfully respond to changes that are likely to occur over the life of the project?

### ▶ Background:

- ▶ A large project, when complete, will frequently result in changes to organizational structure, organizational processes, or personnel tasking. Without a good plan for addressing these situations the project may not achieve the initial goals.

### ▶ Follow up questions:

- ▶ Is there a plan for updating organizational business practices and procedures to support the new solution?
- ▶ Is there a change management plan that addresses how the proposed solution will be introduced to the users in the organization?

## 5. What are the funding sources for this project, what are the funding constraints, and to what degree is the availability of funding driving the project?

### ▶ Background:

- ▶ Uncertainties in funding at the beginning of the project can have adverse affects as the project matures. However, the availability of funding is not in itself a good justification for initiating a project.

### ▶ Follow up questions:

- ▶ What are the costs to develop, operate, and maintain the proposed system?
- ▶ What percentage of the project costs (development and operational) will be borne by the State?
- ▶ Are there deadlines that affect the availability of external funding?
- ▶ Are there conditions that have to be met to receive external funding?

## 6. What is the alternative plan of action if the project is not proceeding as planned, and how will the decision to change direction be made?

### ▶ Background:

- ▶ As a project is executed there may be situations that require adjustment to plans: changes in or loss of funding, lack of technical progress, failure to meet schedules, etc. If this is not recognized from the beginning, and appropriate responses planned, then the project could be at risk.

### ▶ Follow up questions:

- ▶ Will contracts be structured in a way that allows for change or cancellation as needed?
- ▶ Is the project an all-or-nothing proposition, or will it be approached incrementally?
- ▶ If the project is abandoned part way through will there be any residual benefit?