Information Technology Projects: Proposal, Review, and Approval Process

Introduction

There is always an abundance of requests for new and improved technologies and a variety of interesting ideas to explore. Since staff, time, and money are not unlimited, we must be selective in which efforts are undertaken. Management identifies and prioritizes requests and assigns funding to ensure that staff resources are focused on those areas that will return the greatest value.

The following sections define the characteristics of an I.S. project and how it is distinguished from non-project work undertaken by the IS Department as well as the steps taken for project approval. After projects are approved they move to the process described in "Project Management Process." It contains information on project sponsor, project manager, project tracking, project reporting requirements, and what must occur before a project is considered completed.

Characteristics of a Project

Staff time spent on information technology spans several broad categories. Work that includes maintenance, support and consulting activities is scheduled and assigned by a supervisor. These types of IS activities tend to be fairly consistent and recurring and can be reasonably predictable which allows for a certain level of planning. Unplanned activities are another category of work that often occurs due to system failures and must be responded to without notice.

Projects differ in that they have a discreet beginning and end with a defined set of resources. Other characteristics of projects include the involvement of several people and sometimes several city departments working ad hoc, sequencing activities, with a single point of responsibility. Pre-project work, up to the point of approval, is considered support tasks. Those proposals are not projects until officially approved.

Major Steps in Proposing a Project

Idea

Ideas for IT projects come from many sources: observing our daily work, formal process studies, news reports, professional societies, other cities, and software companies' presentations. Too often these ideas remain in our heads or as oral discussions with a few co-workers. Using the process in this document will help to capture these ideas so that they can be considered, with other ideas, for implementation.

Project Proposal

Each idea is to be submitted to the Information Systems Department on *a Proposed Project Form*. A blank form is included at the end of this document. It is not necessary to have all the facts or design a program to accomplish the improvements you describe—just submit as much as you know about your idea. The originator's supervisor is responsible for seeing that the form is completed. If you are a supervisor, you may submit a form on your own.

The following header information will be used to identify the proposal, who is involved, and whom to ask for more information:

- Project Name: Give your project a short descriptive name
- Originator: The name of the person advancing the project idea
- Department: The department the form is sent from
- Supervisor Sponsor: The originator's supervisor or, if the proposal primarily affects another supervisor's area of responsibility, it may be that supervisor.
- Project Department Owner: The Department Head, Deputy, Division Director, or other designee who will

Approval

A proposed project must go through four or sometimes five steps before it is approved as a project. Staffing assignments and funding support will not be approved prior to final approval.

1. A project proposal must be sponsored by a department supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for the steps leading to approval.

2. A Proposed Project form must be completed and submitted to the Deputy I.S. Director for review at the weekly Project Review meeting. The Deputy Director or assignee will determine if the proposed project passes review.

3. The Proposed Project form will be submitted to the CIO for final approval. The form will include signatures of the sponsoring Supervisor and the Deputy Director.

4. Once approved within the City departments, the CIO will present the Proposed Project Form to the Information Technology Steering Committee. This committee, composed of senior City management, will evaluate the proposal for technical feasibility, benefits, cost, risk, and fit to City long-range plans. If I.T. Steering Committee approval is sufficient the project will enter the project management process described in the document titled *Project Management Process*.

5. The I.T. Steering Committee's recommendation, if positive, may be forwarded to City management or the City Council depending on whether the project's cost and scope require that level of approval. If the proposal is approved at that level, it will enter the project management process described in the document titled *Project Management Process*.