Project charter: what to put in it, with a template for technical projects

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A project charter is a one- or two-page document that authorises a project and says why it exists. It is the first thing to point at when scope, priority or ownership is questioned later. For technical projects, a good charter also records the constraints engineers will be held to.

TL;DR The short version

- A project charter is a one- or two-page document that authorises a project and says why it exists.
- It states purpose, measurable objectives, scope, sponsor and constraints; technical charters add non-functional requirements and dependencies.
- Revisit it when objectives, sponsor, budget or a fixed date change.

Read online, listen to it, or change the text size: https://blogs.iictp.org/project-charter-template-for-technical-projects

What goes in a charter

1. **Purpose:** the problem and why solving it matters now.
2. **Objectives:** measurable outcomes, for example "checkout p95 latency under 400 ms" rather than "faster checkout".
3. **Scope:** what is in, and just as important, what is out.
4. **Sponsor and owner:** who funds it and who is accountable for it.
5. **Milestones:** key dates, not a full schedule.
6. **Budget and resources:** people, money, infrastructure.
7. **Constraints and assumptions:** fixed deadlines, compliance needs, platforms you must use.
8. **Top risks:** three to five, with owners.
9. **Success criteria:** how everyone will agree the project is finished.

Technical additions

- Non-functional requirements: availability, performance, security and data retention.
- Systems and teams the project depends on.
- Decisions already made, with links to the records.
- What will be retired when the project ends.

Charter vs other documents

The charter says why and roughly what. The requirements or product brief say what in detail. The design document says how. Keep the charter short; if it grows past two pages, details are leaking in from the other documents.

When to revisit it

Revisit the charter when objectives, the sponsor, budget or a fixed date changes. A changed charter is a signal to re-plan. Read scope creep and change control for how to handle requests that fall outside it.

> Related credential: Program Technical Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. IICTP. TPBOK, Engineering Governance & Agile Delivery. iictp.org/standards/tpbok.

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