

Project Kickoff Canvas

Framework: Project Kickoff Canvas

Use for: Aligning a cross-functional team on scope, ownership, risks, and success criteria before substantive work begins. Works for product launches, operational initiatives, internal projects, and cross-team programs.

Time required: 60–90 minutes with the core team (3–8 people). Filling it solo first and reviewing with the team is the most efficient approach.

How to use this template

1. **Fill in Goal and Success Criteria first.** Everything else on this canvas is in service of those two sections. If you can't complete them clearly, you're not ready to kick off.
 2. **Be explicit about what's out of scope.** The most valuable line on any project canvas is often the "What this project is NOT" row. It stops scope creep before it starts.
 3. **Populate Stakeholders before Timeline.** You can't set realistic milestones until you know who has approval authority and who needs to be in the loop.
 4. **Risks before Dependencies.** Risks are things that might go wrong. Dependencies are things outside your control that could block you. They're different and both need owners.
 5. **Decision rights last.** The DACI or RACI row surfaces the conversations most teams avoid — who actually decides — and starting there creates conflict. Resolve scope and ownership first, then lock decision rights.
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Project context

Project name: ____

Project owner: ____

Date of kickoff: ____

Target completion / ship date: ____

Version / iteration: ____

One-sentence project description:

§1 Goal and success criteria

Problem this project solves:

Goal statement (*what changes in the world when this project succeeds?*):

What this project is NOT (*explicit out-of-scope*):

Success criteria (*how will you know it worked? Be specific and measurable*):

Criterion	Measurement method	Target	By when
1.			
2.			
3.			

Minimum viable outcome *(if you had to ship with half the resources, what would you cut?):*

§2 Stakeholders

Who needs to know about this project and at what level?

Name / Role	Involvement	Decision authority	Communication cadence
	Accountable (doing the work)		
	Decision-maker		
	Reviewer / approver		
	Informed only		

Executive sponsor *(who escalation goes to when the team is blocked):*

Key external parties *(vendors, partners, customers involved in the project):*

Stakeholder risks *(who is likely to become an obstacle? What is their concern?):*

§3 Timeline and milestones

Project duration: ____

Milestone	Description	Owner	Target date	Dependencies
Kickoff complete	Canvas signed off, team aligned			—
Discovery / scoping	Key decisions locked			
First deliverable				
Review checkpoint	Stakeholder review + adjust			
Final deliverable				

Milestone	Description	Owner	Target date	Dependencies
Retrospective	What worked, what to change			

Critical path *(which milestones, if delayed, delay everything else?):*

Buffers planned *(what contingency is built in, and where?):*

§4 Risks

Risks are things that might go wrong that are currently inside your control to mitigate. Rate each: Low / Medium / High.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Owner
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Top risk that could kill this project:

Contingency plan if top risk materializes:

§5 Dependencies and blockers

Dependencies are things outside your direct control that this project relies on. They require coordination, not just mitigation.

Dependency	Type	Owner (external)	Required by	Status
1.	Technical / Resource / Decision / Approval			Confirmed / Pending / At risk
2.				
3.				
4.				

Blocker escalation path *(if a dependency goes unresolved, who resolves it and how quickly?):*

§6 Decision rights

Who decides what? Use this row to prevent the most common project failure mode: ambiguity about who has final say.

Decision	Driver	Approver	Consulted	Informed
Scope changes				
Budget changes				
Timeline changes				
Major technical choices				
Stakeholder communication				
Go / no-go at each milestone				

Tie-breaking rule (when the team disagrees and can't resolve it internally, how is it resolved?):

Standing meeting cadence:

Meeting	Attendees	Frequency	Duration
Team standup / sync	Core team		
Stakeholder update	Stakeholders + sponsor		
Risk review	Core team		

Alignment check

Before finalizing this canvas, confirm:

- ☐ Everyone on the core team has read the Goal and Success Criteria sections and agrees with them
- ☐ Out-of-scope items are written down, not assumed
- ☐ Each milestone has a named owner
- ☐ Each risk has a named owner and a mitigation plan
- ☐ The decision rights table has been reviewed (and any disagreements resolved)
- ☐ The executive sponsor is aware of the project and has agreed to the escalation role

Open questions this canvas didn't resolve:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For governance structures referenced in §6, see the DACI, RAPID, and RACI templates in the decision-rights folder. Decision Infrastructure Guide on biztechprimer.com covers the decision-layer vocabulary in depth.

Generated for biztechprimer.com — free to use and adapt.