

Best Practices for Information Governance

Elise S. Oppenheimer
Senior Technical Consultant
Project Performance Corporation

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Abstract

Information Governance provides a mechanism for ensuring reliable, dynamic content. As systems and repositories evolve, roles and policies must also evolve to support overarching governance activities and changing business goals. This paper outlines best practices for Information Governance.

Introduction to Information Governance

Information is one of an organization's most important assets, and the sheer volume of information available has grown exponentially since Alvin Toffler published the book *Future Shock* and coined the phrase "information overload." Although technology has also evolved, the volume of information available and the rate at which it changes means that it is not enough to build large systems and store everything without regard for its value or applicability - there is more raw information than people can process. While technology is an enabling component of information management, it is not the whole solution. To focus exclusively on the technology, without regard for governance and change management, can quickly turn any repository into more of a burden than an asset - full of non-essential, outdated, and irrelevant content.

Governance provides the foundation for policies and procedures that resolve ambiguities, ensure consistent decision-making, and establish a framework for shared goals supporting a long-term vision. Governance is not merely a set of rules defining what cannot be done in a system. A good governance strategy defines the roles and expectations of stakeholders so the information contained within a system can grow sustainably. A robust information governance strategy considers:

- What information belongs in which systems
- How information is graduated to more official repositories
- Who is responsible for regulating each system and to what extent the systems should be regulated

Anticipating the growth of an organization's information and ensuring that it grows sustainably is greatly aided by having a Governance Plan. A Governance Plan that is based on the **four pillars of governance** used by Project Performance Corporation will provide a formalized and transparent process for the governance process. The four pillars of governance include:

- A value statement
- Roles and responsibilities
- Policies and procedures
- Communications, education, and marketing plan

The Governance Plan should begin with a value statement that affirms the overall vision of the organization, end user expectations, and any specific organizational goals relevant to the evolution of its information assets. The plan should also include descriptions of the role and duties of each stakeholder and it should describe in detail the activities involved in governance, mapped to individual roles. Finally, it should describe how the plan will be advertised to stakeholders to ensure everyone is kept up-to-date on expectations and aware of how he or she fits into the governance framework.



The Content of an Effective Governance Plan

An effective Governance Plan should be written as plainly and generally as possible to make it easily understood by a broad audience and it should include the four pillars of governance, as described in the subsections below:

- Value statement
- Roles and responsibilities
- Policies and procedures
- Communications, education, and marketing plan

Pillar One: Value Statement

The value statement in the Governance Plan should clearly show the benefits of following the plan and the potential risks of not following it. For example, without controls and oversight, content management becomes difficult. Users may post content in the wrong places, making important information hard to find. As more content is stored without archival and organizational strategy, important information can quickly become buried under other, often less useful, content. Additionally, without review control, users may accidentally post sensitive or incorrect information and metadata may be incorrect, making search results meaningless.

Pillar Two: Roles and Responsibilities

An effective Governance Plan clearly identifies governance roles and responsibilities and ensures that each person within an organization understands where he or she fits within the governance framework. Governance roles add job responsibilities to the organization’s staff and require consideration of the human and financial resources needed.

Once roles and responsibilities are established, they can be mapped to policies and procedures. Governance best practices recommends the creation and formatting of individual content items by Authors and Publishers, approval of content by a Review Board, oversight of the full body of content by a Content Manager, and strategic direction provided by a Governance Board.

Content evolves through a lifecycle. Before anything is shared with a wider audience, there is a decision to create an item, the draft information is created, and then the information is formatted and potentially tagged so it fits the target environment. There may also be an approval cycle and a review and updating cycle, and eventually the item may be removed, retired, or archived. Project Performance Corporation (PPC) focuses on the resources necessary to maintain and manage enterprise information and we understand that real people have the responsibility and accountability to shepherd information through this lifecycle.

As shown in Figure 2, governance roles cover three major responsibilities: Vision, Maintenance, and Support.

Vision ensures decision-makers understand where the organization is now, where it is going, and how to get there with a high-level strategy. The Governance Board is a group of senior decision-makers responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Governance Plan and ensuring alignment with organizational goals, mission, and vision defined in the plan. A Governance Board is typically made up of six to nine management-level decision makers

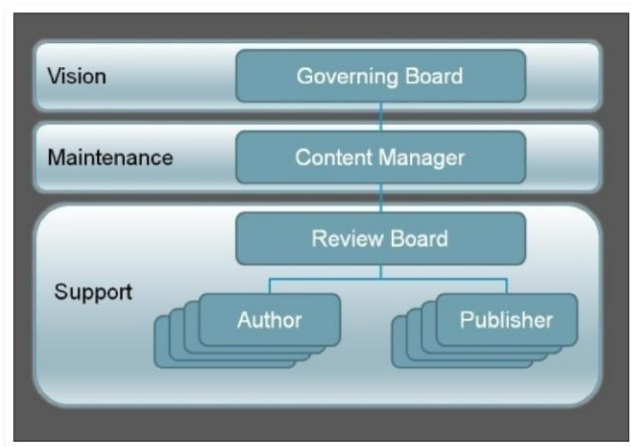


Figure 2: Governance Roles and Responsibilities



representing a cross-section of technical and business units in the organization. When forming a Governance Board, the level of availability and cooperativeness of the members and the corporate organizational and political structure should be considered. This is critical to ensure consistent decision-making will be possible on a regular basis and in a relatively collaborative fashion. The Board meets at least quarterly to discuss maintenance and evolution of the plan and to adjudicate any escalated issues.

Maintenance ensures changes are made when they should be. The Content Manager oversees the full body of information stored in the organization’s systems and is responsible for the administration and maintenance associated with implementing the details of the strategy. The Content Manager also identifies issues requiring escalation and presents them to the Board.

Support ensures content is created and formatted correctly for the target environment. Authors write the individual pieces of information, Publishers format them and add any necessary tags and metadata, and the Review Board, typically chaired by the Content Manager, provides any necessary approval process before the content is published.

Pillar Three: Policies and Procedures

A Governance Plan outlines simple processes to establish policies for content creation, approval, and retirement. As shown in Figure 3, workflow approval processes should be outlined for all aspects of system and information governance. Without this, content management becomes difficult - conflicting, duplicative, and overlapping content begins to spread and can require a major reset effort to restore consistency and uniformity. The policies and procedures in the plan should anticipate stakeholders’ needs and aim to address challenges the organization may face in information management before they become unmanageable.

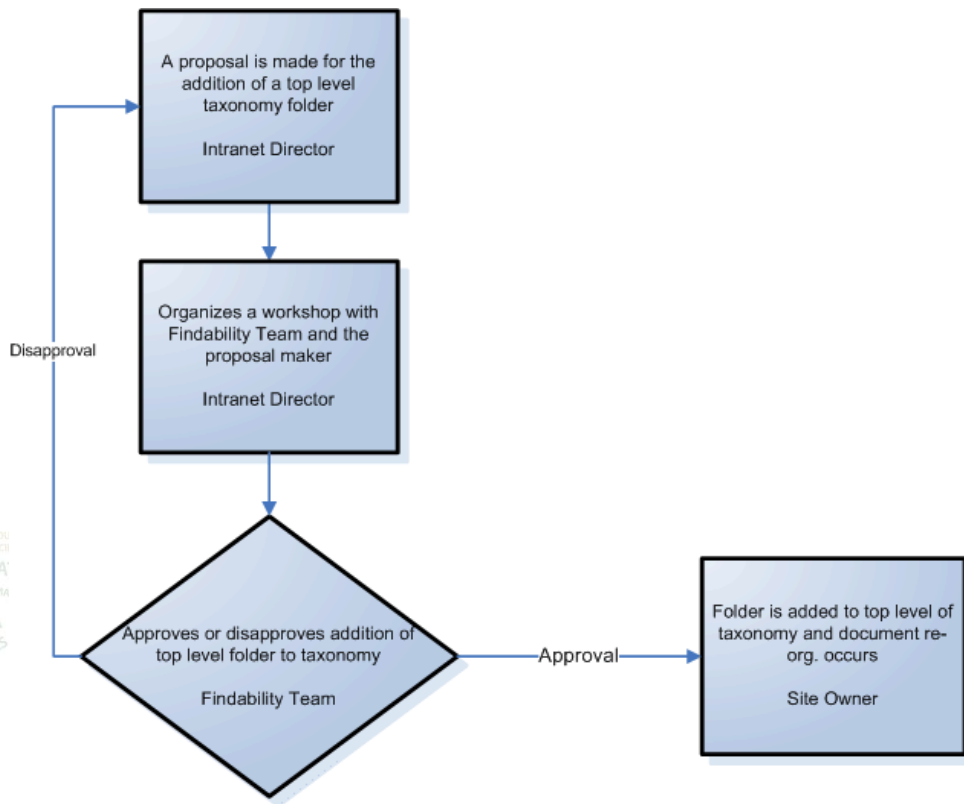


Figure 3: Example of Approval Process Flow



