

Jeff Oltmann on Mastering Projects
Seeking Good Sponsors!

Uninformed Sponsors

“Uninformed sponsors – sponsors in name only – are of little help to project managers when obstacles arise.” – So says Eric Verzuh, one of my favorite authors on projects.

Verzuh continues by citing a study performed within a Fortune 500 corporation. “This study determined that having a known and active sponsor was the number one reason for a project’s success, because problems were given timely attention by a manager who had authority to effect a solution.”



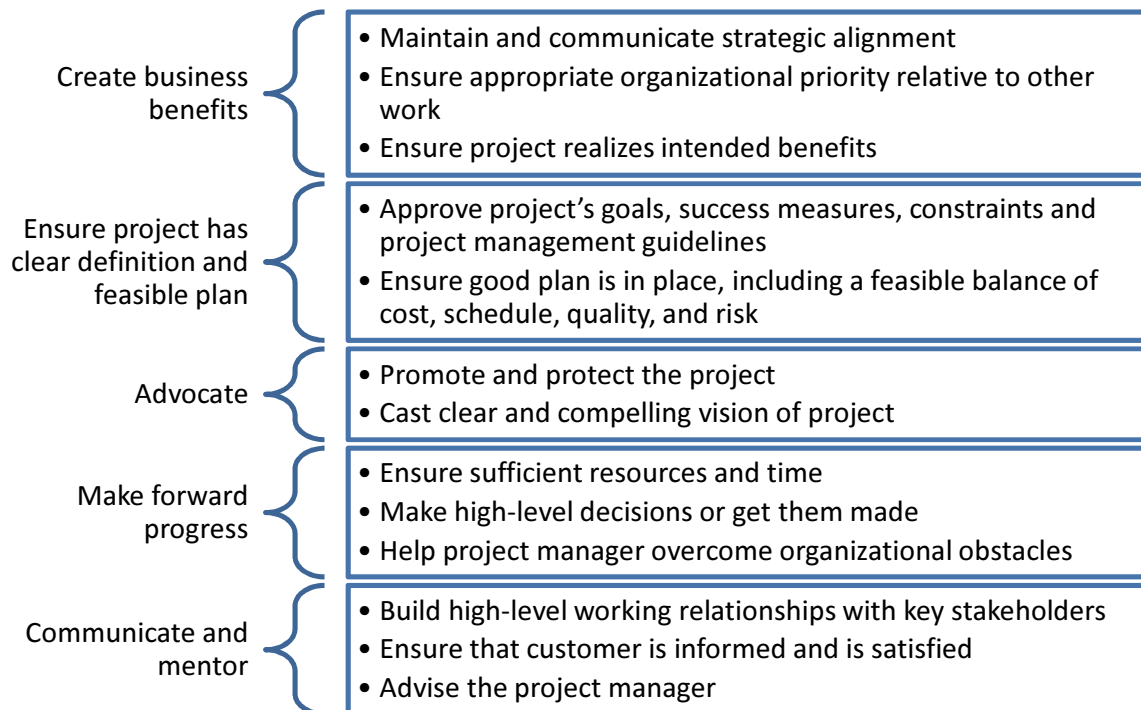
of a project sponsor. According to the PMBOK standard for managing projects, *sponsor* is a defined role - someone who provides resources and support for a project.

However, I believe that an effective sponsor is much more than that. He or she is an advocate for the project and its team. A good sponsor casts a clear and compelling vision for the benefits of the project, gets decisions made and is typically held accountable by the senior management team for project success.

This has been a hot topic recently. Several of my clients independently have asked me to help them increase the effectiveness of project sponsors. As I reviewed some research and reflected on my own experiences with project-based organizations, five major aspects of good sponsorship emerged.

An Advocate

Maybe you’re not familiar with the idea



Call to Action

Unfortunately, many project sponsors don't recognize how important their role is, and no one has ever explained to them what they must do to be a good sponsor. Now that you know the characteristics of good sponsorship, take action to improve it in your organization.

1. If you are sponsoring a project, ensure that you are covering all five aspects listed in the diagram.
2. If you are working on a project that would benefit from an effective sponsor, use the list as a

starting point to discuss what you need.

3. If you are the manager of sponsors, communicate that this is how you want sponsors to act, and then give them the tools and mentoring they need to succeed at it.

Your Sponsor Experiences

In your experience, what makes a good project sponsor? How do you develop a culture of effective sponsorship?

About the Author

Jeff Oltmann is principal consultant at Synergy Professional Services, LLC in Portland, Oregon (www.spspro.com). He is also on the graduate faculty of the Division of Management at Oregon Health and Science University. Jeff welcomes your questions and ideas. You can contact him at jeff@spspro.com or read previous articles at www.spspro.com/resource-center.