

What Makes a Good Project Initiation Document (PID)

The Project Initiation Document (PID) – or the Definition Document – is one of the most important items in project management.

It provides a foundation for the project.

It specifies why the project is important,

What will be delivered,

When it will be delivered and how.

The purpose of writing a PID is not to tick a box so that you can say you have done it, but to ensure that everybody understands the basis of the project.

A good PID should answer the following questions:

1. Why are we undertaking the project?

Here briefly state the background of the project, including the motivation for undertaking it and its objectives.

Note: A good consultant is not only interested in delivering desired output (service/resource) or a capability to their client, but interested in the wider context and the benefits that this capability will ultimately bring about.

2. What are we delivering?

Here be exact as possible about what is within scope and what is out of scope of the project,

You can make use of flow diagrams and Product Breakdown Structures to visually illustrate the boundaries.

It should clarify the project's success criteria, i.e. everything that must be done in order for the project to be considered a success.

3. Who is responsible?

You must state who takes the role of project manager, team leader, sponsor, supplier and user representative.

In this section you should also include the main stakeholders – who they are and what is their constitution (if any e.g. a steering committee).

4. How will the project be delivered?

Here talk about the methodology or which approach you will use.

How will you communicate with the stakeholders? How will you test the quality of the products or services you are delivering and how will you keep on top of risks, issues and changes to scope?

5. When will the project be delivered?

Building on your selected result-oriented methodology, you should have an in-depth timeline of what will happen when.

This could include an innovative plan which highlights the main phases and activities of the project.

A visual roadmap is highly recommended. The more graphical you can make the PID the better.

6. What are the risks, issues and constraints?

Using SWOT and PESTLE analytical tool, include the project's likely risks (e.g. top 5 - 10 risks and issues)

You may want to assign identified risks to relevant owners (stakeholders) and suggest mitigating actions.

Please note that constraints and dependencies usually turn out to be risks.

7. How much is it likely to cost?

It is usually a good practice to include a cost estimate in the PID along with any budgetary constraints.

You may want to provide the assumptions your LRA consulting team used when they came up with the estimate as well as details about how often you will review the estimates.

When it comes to completing the PID, ensure that you do not do it in isolation, but that you involve the team as much as possible. It is a TEAMWORK!

Ensure you write the document in plain English and avoid project management terminologies! It alienates your readers.

You may need to produce the PowerPoint version of the PID to highlight the main points.

Useful Materials:

Madsen, S. (2014). "What makes a perfect Project Initiation Document (PID)?" available @: <https://www.susannemadsen.co.uk/blog/what-makes-a-perfect-project-initiation-document-pid>, (accessed 06/06/2020).

Madsen, S. (2017). "Six things you should do when kicking off a project", available @: <https://www.susannemadsen.co.uk/blog/category/project%20initiation>, (accessed 06/06/2020).