

Conducting Successful Kick-Off Meetings

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International projects face special challenges. The project manager or leader who anticipates these challenges and plans from the beginning to address them is much more likely to succeed. One early challenge is designing and conducting a kick-off meeting that creates the right impression, conveys the right information, and sets the stage for a cooperative and productive project.

Kick-off meetings are always important. They create an often lasting impression of the importance of the project, the project manager as a leader, and the role and status of project members. They are critical in international settings, because people have little or no history with each other and because misunderstandings are common, hard to detect, and even harder to correct.

Attached is a brief checklist of items that should be considered when planning and conducting an international kick-off meeting. The list is organized around four major components of successful project kick-offs:

- A vision that communicates an important, demanding, and exciting project
- A delineation of roles and responsibilities that explains position power, task responsibilities, and key integration roles
- An explanation of the project's priorities and ground rules that informs about decision making and encourages active participation
- A communication plan that defines software tools, addresses language and time differences, explains mutual responsibility and strategies for information sharing, and provides for the identification and resolution of issues.

As with so many things around international projects, the exact strategies needed for a successful kick-off meeting have to be determined by the ethnic and organizational culture(s) of the project team members, the history members have in working together, issues related to language and distance, and the requirements of the project.

International Project Kickoff Meeting Planning Tool

1. Vision	
1.1. Exciting/compelling	
1.2. Explains strategic role	
1.3. Communicates a recognizable and repeatable message	
1.4. Inspires task and relationship commitment	
1.5. Addresses language differences	
1.6. Is culturally responsive	
1.7. Builds local ownership	

2. Structure & Responsibilities	
2.1. Explains reporting relationships and major responsibilities	
2.2. Defines major task categories, explains who is responsible, who is kept informed, and who provides support	
2.3. Delineates integration roles and responsibilities	
2.4. Underscores respect for each of the position leaders and for team members	
2.5. Inspires task and relationship commitment	
2.6. Addresses language differences	
2.7. Is culturally responsive	
2.8. Builds local ownership	

3. Priorities and Ground Rules	
3.1. Explains project priorities and rationale	
3.2. Explains what is expected of team members	
3.3. Explains what team members can expect from project manager as a leader	
3.4. Delineates basic trade-offs, provides examples	
3.5. Inspires task and relationship commitment	
3.6. Addresses language differences	
3.7. Is culturally responsive	
3.8. Builds local ownership	

4. Communication Plan	
4.1. Provides specific, detailed plans for information sharing	
4.2. Identifies common software and tools	
4.3. Addresses language and time difference strategies in detail	
4.4. Defines and supports communication risks and requirements	
4.5. Explains & articulates escalation path	
4.6. Inspires task and relationship commitment	
4.7. Addresses language differences	
4.8. Is culturally responsive	
4.9. Builds local ownership	