

# What's on Your Sponsorship Short List?

What is it with sponsorship? If I had a nickel for every story I heard in the classroom about poor or completely non-existent sponsorship, I'd be writing this article from somewhere more exotic than my cube. Here are just a few complaints that I have heard: Stories about sponsors who aren't available for meetings, Sponsors who don't have time to read reports, Sponsors the project manager never sees...ever. Who is driving the project train here?

Perhaps the first step to improving your chances of establishing a real partnership with your project sponsor starts with an assessment of what you really need and what is reasonable to expect from sponsors. The key word here is reasonable. If regular attendance at team meetings isn't feasible, for example, then let's not set anyone up for failure.

Project managers need to think about their Sponsorship Short List. What are the absolute must haves from *this* sponsor for *this* project? Your short list may differ depending not only on the organization, but also the sponsor and the project.

Some Sponsorship Short List options could include:

1. Articulate business and project vision
2. Define and distribute the Project Charter
3. Obtain funding
4. Define project benefits
5. Facilitate definition of requirements and acceptance criteria

by:

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## What's on Your Sponsorship Short List? *(cont.)*

6. Assist in acquiring resources
7. Approve deliverables
8. Make scope decisions
9. Resolve cross-functional and external conflicts
10. Champion the project
11. Provide guidance and direction as needed

Clearly, unless your sponsor is experienced and familiar with best practices, it's probably not going to serve you well to present an 11-item list and announce that you need all of these things from them. Not only will they insist that they don't have time (which is probably true), but it may be intimidating. If they've never done these things, how are they to know how to do them? No one wants to look incompetent, especially if you're supposed to be the owner of the project.

So it's up to you, project manager, to think about it and *help them do their job*. Create your Sponsorship Short List: Pick three and define what, specifically, they mean.

If you determine that what you need most is a project champion, for example, what does that mean? What do they actually have to *do*? Make a presentation at a meeting? Include project updates on senior management meeting agendas? Come in and be the cheerleader for the team once in a while? Write it down so you understand it. Use small, simple words so you know you understand. (No leveraging synergies!) Then, and only then, present it to them...and set them up for success. When they look good, chances are you will, too.

So if you are feeling like an unsponsored project manager, give some thought as to what you'd really like from a sponsor and come up with your Sponsorship Short List. Remember: Sponsors are sometimes lousy at sponsoring because they don't *know* what's expected of them. Help them understand, and make it palatable. It's likely a learning opportunity for both of you. If you aren't used to sponsorship, then you will have to explore how to use them in whatever capacity you have suggested as well.

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