

# **IT Governance Framework**

**Western Illinois University**

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**Developed by:**  
Subcommittee on IT Governance of the  
University Technology Advisory Group

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## Background

Governance “is the single most important factor in generating...value from IT,” and it is a critical success factor for the University. It engages the entire University community as a full-fledged partner in IT decision making. Through the governance process, major IT decisions are made in light of all technology needs throughout the University. Properly implemented, it cohesively serves all colleges and business units (eliminating technology silos) and has the authority to make decisions for IT projects that are above a certain spending threshold or that meet other established and published criteria. Given limited resources and the current economic landscape, significant technology investments need to be thoroughly vetted against the backdrop of the IT priorities of all the colleges and University business units. The final recommendations are made to the IT Governance Council, which has the final decision regarding implementation. If this Council accepts a proposal, University Technology is responsible for its implementation (Weill and Ross, p. vii).

Governance separates the decision making process from the implementation process. It can be defined as “Specifying the decision rights and accountability framework to encourage desirable behavior in the use of IT” throughout the organization (Weill and Ross, p. vii).

The COBIT and VAL IT framework states that the “purpose of IT governance is to direct IT endeavors, to ensure that IT’s performance meets the following objectives:

- Alignment of IT with the enterprise and realization of the promised benefits
- Use of IT to enable the enterprise by exploiting opportunities and maximizing benefits
- Responsible use of IT resources
- Appropriate management of IT-related risks” (IT Governance Institute, p. 3)

At the time that IT Governance was implemented at Western Illinois University, existing IT committees, such as the University Technology Advisory Group (UTAG) and the Technology Cabinet, had helped to increase communication about and visibility of IT initiatives. These committees, however, were not charged nor structured to implement true governance. We did not want to inhibit the implementation of IT governance at WIU based on currently implemented structures.

Throughout the spring, summer and into the fall semester of 2013, a subcommittee of UTAG and others worked on an IT governance framework that included elements of other universities’ implementations, adapted for implementation at Western Illinois University. The UTAG subcommittee on IT Governance envisioned that all segments of the University would be represented in the governance process. All meetings would be open, and each IT governance group would publish minutes of their meetings so that the process of decision-making would be transparent. After implementation, this UTAG subcommittee morphed into the IT Governance

Committee, which is open to all members of the University community, and provides oversight to the IT Governance processes.

While the UTAG subcommittee had specified the positions that would eventually serve on the different IT governance groups (called Alliances), senior administration determined who would be on the Council (the decision making IT governance group). The subcommittee recommended that either the President or the CIO assume the ownership role of the IT Governance process. The senior administration decided that the President's Leadership Team (consisting of the President and the VPs) along with the CIO and the Budget Officer would comprise the IT Governance Council.

Implementation of this governance plan required the Board of Trustee's approval of the new 2013-2018 IT Strategic Plan, which called for the creation of IT governance. Prior to that final approval, IT Governance processes and forms were developed and refined. An IT Governance website was established ([www.wiu.edu/itgov](http://www.wiu.edu/itgov)) and the Governance Proposal System (an online database called the GPS) was developed using Redmine (an open source product). The GPS provided the University community with a mechanism to submit proposals and where the IT Governance entities could assign, track and comment on the proposal submissions. Members of the IT Governance Alliances (or working groups) were recruited with assistance from the President's Cabinet, the Faculty Senate and the Student Government Association in Macomb and the Quad Cities. The President then introduced the new IT Governance in an email to the University community on March 3, 2014. The first meetings of the IT Governance groups took place shortly after that during the Spring 2014 semester.

## Goals

The original framework document sought to establish an IT governance model at Western Illinois University to improve consistency in how IT decisions were being made across the University while fostering communication and transparency. The proposed structure was designed to promote efficiency and flexibility across all University constituencies. The framework, however, did not specify all aspects of the proposed governance process; those needed to be vetted prior to implementation. It was also anticipated that the plan would evolve as the University gained experience with IT governance and improved its processes.

Prior to its implementation at WIU, most members of the University community had little insight into the operations of IT, and therefore they may have questioned the return value of the University's investments in technology. It was hoped that IT Governance would provide transparency as well as efficiencies in software licensing and the acquisition of hardware through streamlining and standardization. As noted above, the need for risk assessment and compliance were also driving factors for the implementation of IT governance. Given fiscally challenging times, competing IT priorities across the University needed to be vetted and prioritized. This would be accomplished by involving the campus community in the process of IT decision making.

The IT governance model outlined in the original framework was developed under the auspices of UTAG. The subcommittee gratefully acknowledged George Kahkedjian, Vice Chancellor of IT, for sharing how Maricopa Community College had implemented their IT Governance model.

## Framework Model/Proposal Workflow

WIU's IT Governance model, graphically depicted in Figure 1, has similarities to the Faculty Senate's governance at many universities. It consists of one overarching IT Governance Council (Council) with a few subcommittees called Alliances. The Council has authority to make recommendations, accept or accept pending funding, reject proposals, and identify funding. Proposals that are accepted by the Council are assigned to University Technology for implementation.

The Alliances are working groups representing different major interests within the University as they relate to information technology. Each Alliance chooses whether to reject or accept requests for technology-related improvements (also called proposals) that it receives from the University community via the Executive Committee. Upon accepting a request, the Alliance may collaborate with the college, department or individual that submitted the request to develop it into a formal proposal for eventual consideration by the Council. Each Alliance may work on more than one request or pre-proposal at a time and call upon other resources as determined necessary.

Each Alliance elects two members to serve as co-chairs. In addition to chairing the Alliance, one of the co-chairs represents the Alliance on the Executive Committee. The other co-chair serves as an alternate. Alliances are relatively small in size and may form subcommittees (composed of Alliance and non-alliance members) as needed to help make informed decisions and help ensure invested groups are involved in the process. Individuals serving in an advisory capacity may also be invited to attend their meetings. Each Alliance determines its own schedule for meetings. All meetings are open to the University community and published in an online calendar.

The Executive Committee is the coordinating body that schematically sits between the Council and the Alliances. It serves as a single point of contact for the University community to submit requests and screens these pre-proposals for required information. The members of the Executive Committee elect one of its members as a chair.

The Executive Committee does not make decisions regarding any pre-proposal but serves to channel them to the appropriate Alliance or the Reviewers. It also accepts completed proposals from the Alliances; ensures the form(s) are complete; and after receiving input from Reviewers regarding IT security, capacity, support or legal/regulatory issues forwards them to the Council for final consideration. The Executive Committee may also create temporary Alliances as necessary. It can also make recommendations to improve IT governance processes.

All University constituencies have representation in one of the Alliances or the Council. IT staff members in any capacity (including those in University Technology) work with the Alliances or Council in advisory capacities and they may not serve as appointed members.

## Principles

WIU's IT Governance is based on the following founding principles.

- There must only be one IT Governance Council for both academic and administrative processes.
- The President must sanction IT governance in order for it to be effective.
- This governance must cut across all University areas and address major IT needs that affect the University.
- Some aggregation of IT funding across the VP divisions may be required in order to achieve efficiencies depending on which IT Governance model is accepted by the President.

## What Must Be Vetted Through IT Governance?

Requests from the University community for technology-related improvements that meet at least one of the following criteria must be vetted through IT governance.

- It impacts the University significantly from a directional, policy, services, systems, security, financial process, operational or strategic perspective.
- It requires significant funding. IT expenditures exceeding a designated threshold of \$15,000 will be vetted through the IT governance process.
- It integrates with one or more existing systems. (Example: A new system requires interfaces with an existing financial module.)

## Diagram of Process Flow and Membership

The following diagram depicts the flow of a request/pre-proposal through the IT governance groups as well as specifying the membership of the Executive Committee and the Alliances. Recommendations for the membership of the IT Governance Council are presented beginning on page 9 of this framework document.

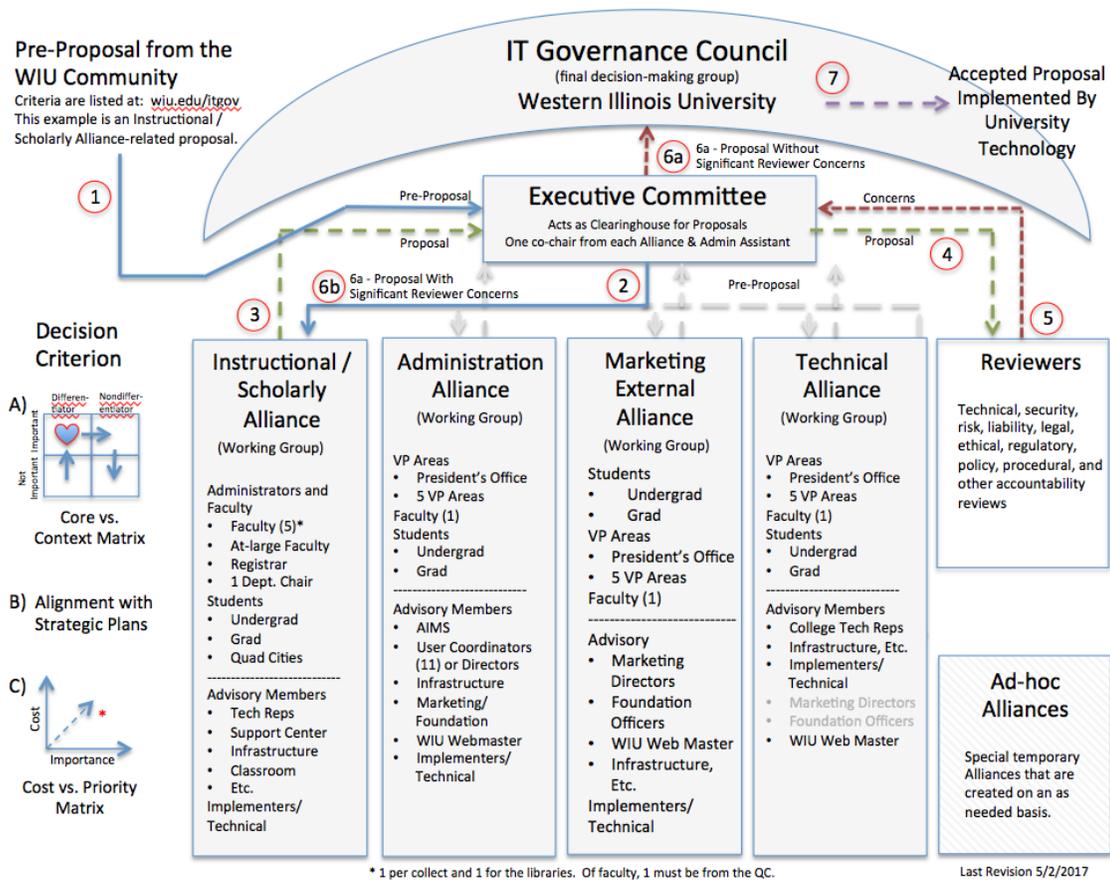


Figure 1

## Process Flow

The following steps outline the flow of requests/pre-proposals through the IT governance framework as depicted in Figure 1. The numbers in the following explanation correspond to the numbers in the figure.

1. Requests from the University community for technology-related improvements are injected into the IT governance process by submitting them to the Executive Committee. Requestors may submit requests (also called pre-proposals) online at [wiu.edu/itgov](http://wiu.edu/itgov). The request is received by the Executive Committee, which serves as a single point of contact and acts as a clearinghouse to ensure that requests flow through the governance process from start to finish. The Executive Council also ensures that the request meets the criteria delineated on page 6 of this framework document and that the same request is not being worked on by more than one Alliance.

The Executive Committee, comprised of one of the co-chairs from each of the Alliances, determines which Alliance is best suited to consider and work on the new request. The committee decides which of these working groups the request is to be assigned (i.e.,

Instructional/Scholarly, Administration, Technical, or an Ad-hoc Alliance (but not more than one Alliance).

The Executive Committee assigned and tracks requests and therefore can avoid duplicate efforts among the Alliances. Before submitting the request to the appropriate Alliance, the Executive Committee also verifies that all required information is codified in the proper format.

2. The Alliance receives a request from the Executive Committee (in the figure above, it is being routed to the Instructional Scholarly Alliance). The Alliance's decision on whether to develop the request into a proposal is based on the following decision criterion:
  - core versus context
  - importance versus cost
  - alignment with the University and the IT strategic plans

If the Alliance elects to develop it into a proposal, members may ask additional information from the original submitter and/or conduct its own research in collaboration with its advisory resources and other interested parties.

Although not depicted in Figure 1, the requestor may appeal to the CIO if the Alliance rejects the request. The CIO may ask the Alliance to do research and make a proposal. On the other hand, if the CIO denies the request, the decision is final.

3. When the Alliance has developed a proposal, it submits the completed proposal to the Executive Committee.
4. The Executive Committee sends the proposal to technical, capacity, security, risk, liability, legal, ethical, regulatory, policy, procedural, and other accountability reviewers. These Reviewers are asked only to consider potential risks and issues but not to weigh in on whether they feel the proposal should be pursued.
5. Each Reviewer provides his/her comments in the GPS regarding issues or concerns about the proposal. If he/she has no concerns, he/she so notes it. As mentioned above, concerns may be related to IT security, capacity, support or legal/regulatory issues. These comments become a formal part of the proposal as it moves forward through the process.
6. The Executive Committee submits the completed proposal to the IT Governance Council (6a). The proposal contains a complete history of what has transpired and all associated comments. However, (6b) the Executive Committee has the option to send the proposal back to the Alliance for additional work if they feel that issues and concerns identified by the Reviewers warrant such action. If the Alliance is unable to resolve issues, the Alliance may elect to reject the proposal (it cannot be rejected by the Executive Committee).

The IT Governance Council typically meets once or twice a semester in open sessions to listen as each proposal is presented by the Alliances. The Council members may ask questions. Members of the University are also invited to comment. The IT Governance

Council subsequently meets in a closed-door session to discuss proposals and determine whether funding is available.

7. The accepted proposals are assigned to University Technology for implementation.

## IT Governance Leadership and the Council

The individual responsible for overseeing and providing leadership to IT governance is the person who is responsible for technology on campus. He/she may co-chair the Council and helps make the final decision regarding whether proposals are approved. This individual, designated by the President, is responsible for implementing any project that the IT Governance Council approves. This individual also may co-chair the IT Governance Oversight Committee,

The original recommendation of the UTAG subcommittee on IT Governance to the University was that "if the University hired a CIO, then that individual should be utilized and held accountable as reflected in governance. Therefore, the CIO should own or take responsibility for the IT Governance process and have the appropriate authority, responsibility, and budget to do his/her job." The committee also noted that in lieu of the decision to designate the CIO as the Owner, the President should assume this role.

As a university, the subcommittee also recommended that "we should carry forward those cultural aspects that strengthen the campus and we should use governance as an opportunity to change cultural aspects that lead to improvement. The role of the CIO in this IT governance process must be clear and well defined. Otherwise, governance becomes a question of "Who is truly responsible for technology?"

Senior administration decided that the IT Governance Council membership consists of the President's Cabinet (five Vice Presidents and the President), the CIO, the Budget Director and legal counsel. Other options that were presented included 1) One designee from each of the 5 VP areas and the President's area, the CIO, the Budget Director, and legal counsel (this group would need budget authority) and 2) the President's Cabinet, one designee from each of the 5 VP areas and the President's area, the CIO, Budget Director, and legal counsel (approximately 14 people).

The CIO serves on the IT Governance Council as a participating member and works with the IT Governance Oversight Committee to resolve issues, improve processes, and advance IT Governance. Legal counsel and the Budget Director also serve in ex officio capacity on the Council. As noted above, the IT Governance Council meets at least once a semester. For some meeting discussions, they may choose to invite to their closed door sessions a student and/or faculty member in an ex officio capacity when issues impact their respective constituencies.

IT Governance Council meetings are open to the campus community and publicized in advance. After proposals have been presented in open sessions of the IT Governance

Council and the University community has had an opportunity to comment, however, the Council needs to discuss and deliberate in a closed session. The outcomes of that meeting are publicized.

The CIO or President may call the Council into session whenever it is deemed necessary. Alliances need to meet more frequently, however. Because the CIO does not abdicate the responsibility for IT decision making, the Executive Committee may request that CIO make a decision regarding a proposal if it is not possible to convene the Council before a time-critical deadline (this process, which is known as Expedite As Exception, was established by the Oversight Committee and it also is used for IT contract and license renewals).

## Membership of the Alliances

People serving on each of the Alliances do not need to have a technology background (the advisory resources people for each Alliance serve as technical consultants). It is deemed more important that the members understand the business, teaching, learning and research processes and needs of the institution.

A person may serve in one Alliance only. Term limits may vary as determined by the appointer but a staggered time approach is recommended when to ensure continuity during member transitions. Technical advisors may consult with any or all Alliances, however.

Each of the Alliances are responsible for developing their own charters. The charters are published to the IT Governance website.

There are four main Alliances, which are depicted in Figure 1. The membership of these is also delineated in Figure 1. The Alliances are as follows:

- Instructional/Scholarly
- Marketing/External
- Administration
- Technical

### Instructional/Scholarly Alliance

The Instructional/Scholarly Alliance's membership includes five faculty members representing each of the colleges and the University Libraries. They are to be appointed from CIT by the Faculty Senate. In addition, one at-large faculty member who is not serving on CIT is to be appointed by the Faculty Senate. At least one of these six faculty members must be from the QC campus. A representative from the Registrar's Office (the Registrar or her designee) and a Department Chair (appointed by the Chairs' Council) also serve on this Alliance. The student government associations will collaborate to appoint a graduate and undergraduate student.

At least one of the co-chairs of the Instructional/Scholarly Alliance must be a faculty member. A

faculty member co-chair must represent the Alliance on the Executive Committee. Students may not serve as a co-chair. IT staff members may not serve as appointed members. However, they are expected to work with the Alliances in advisory capacities upon request.

### **Marketing/External and Administration Alliances**

Each of the other Alliances has two student positions (a graduate and undergraduate) appointed by the student government associations collaboratively. In addition, each of these Alliances has a representative from the President's Office (Appointed by the President), one member from each of the five VP Areas (appointed by their respective VPs) and one faculty member (appointed by the Faculty Senate). As is the case with the Instructional/Scholarly Alliance, students may not serve as a co-chair on these Alliances. IT staff members may not serve as appointed members. However, they are expected to work with the Alliances in advisory capacities upon request.

### **Technical Alliance**

The Technical Alliance has two student positions appointed by the student government associations collaboratively. In addition, each of these alliances has a representative from the President's office (appointed by the President), one member appointed by each of the five vice presidents, up to two faculty members (one CIT member and one at-large member appointed by Faculty Senate), and one member from each of the colleges and one member from the libraries (appointed by deans). The intent is for each of the areas to appoint technically-inclined representatives. As is the case with the other alliances, students may not serve as a co-chair on this alliance. The CIO will appoint up to two uTech directors to serve on the alliance as non-voting members.

COAP and CSEC should be updated periodically on proposals that affect members of their respective council.

### **Transparency**

Transparency is critical to the success of IT Governance. The IT Governance Council, the Executive Committee and each of the Alliances keep notes or minutes of their meetings, which are published to the IT Governance website for the University community to view. In addition, any member of the University community (faculty, staff and students) may attend any of the meetings of any of the IT governance groups. As noted above, the IT Governance Council holds an open session but also later meetings in a closed-door session to discuss proposals and determine whether funding is available. The outcomes of the closed-door sessions are recorded and published.

### **Oversight Committee**

After creating the framework and implementing IT governance, the UTAG subcommittee on IT Governance was charged with providing ongoing oversight and became known as the IT Governance Oversight Committee. The CIO serves as a co-chair with another faculty or staff member elected by the committee. It meets bi-monthly or monthly to discuss issues and make changes to the IT governance process. Membership is open to the campus community and representatives from each Alliance are encouraged to participate. The main charge of this committee is to revise the IT Governance processes as needed and to help coordinate activities associated with the IT Governance Council meetings.

## Purchasing

The Purchasing Department requires confirmation that IT-related acquisitions meet the criteria on [wiu.edu/itgov](http://wiu.edu/itgov) and have been vetted and approved through the IT Governance process before initiating the procurement process. When the IT Governance Council approves a proposal or the CIO approves a proposal through the Expedite process, the Purchasing department receives a report via a distribution list informing them of the approval. The requestor is also notified. The individual submitting the purchase order should put the proposal number on the PO and attach a printed copy of the email that shows that the proposal was accepted.

## Works Cited

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