This Document provides the framework for IT Governance at Texas A&M University at Qatar.
IT Governance at Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ)

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**Background**

The definitive work on IT governance is *IT Governance: How Top Performers Manage IT Decision Rights for Superior Results* by Peter Weill and Jeanne W. Ross. The book is the product of research conducted on 250 enterprises worldwide including top performers in public and nonprofit sectors. According to the authors, effective IT governance must address three questions:

1. What decisions must be made to ensure effective management and use of IT?
2. Who should make these decisions?
3. How will these decisions be made and monitored?

The goal of this document is to propose a framework for effective IT governance at Texas A&M at Qatar.

**What Decisions Must be Made for Effective IT Governance?**

Weill and Ross identify five areas of decision making drawn from their observations and research. They are:

1. IT Principles
2. IT Architecture
3. IT Infrastructure Strategies
4. Business Application Needs
5. IT Investment

All organizations make decisions in these areas but high performing organizations tend to be more deliberate in their approach to making these decisions. Specifically, they define who provides input to decision makers and who the decision makers are.

**Who Should Make Decisions?**

In the areas identified above, decision makers and input providers vary across institutions. Larger organizations tend to have more elaborate input and decision making bodies, but they can also be smaller depending on the type of enterprise. Smaller organizations have smaller structures to avoid unnecessary obstacles to decision making. Regardless of size, clearly defining input providers and decision makers in the five areas mentioned above is important for effective IT governance.

It is recommended to use existing governing bodies or committees where possible. Examples of governing bodies at TAMUQ include the Deans Council, academic department heads, the IT Advisory Committee, FAC, SAC, IT, etc.
For the purpose of IT Governance at TAMUQ, the following decision making and input bodies are proposed:

**Dean’s Council**  
Business leadership’s role in IT governance is to align IT with the mission, goals, and objectives of the business. Business leadership at TAMUQ consists of the members of the Dean’s Council. The Dean’s Council will typically meet one or two times a year as described below. All decisions should be documented and published.

**IT Advisory Committee**  
Decision making bodies need input from stakeholders. An IT Advisory Committee (ITAC) currently exists at TAMUQ and is well suited to this role. ITAC currently consists of three faculty members, two staff members, and one student member. Minutes are posted online after each monthly meeting.

**IT (Department)**  
Many high performing organizations leverage the knowledge and expertise of the IT Department in some cases by making decisions in cooperation with IT (a “duopoly”) and in some cases by delegating to IT. IT is and should remain a decision making body as defined below. IT is also an input body in some cases.

**Business Operations (Department)**  
The Department of Business Operations is an input body as outlined below.

**Deans Council**  
The Dean’s Council is a decision making body as outlined below.

After reviewing the profiles of high performing organizations and incorporating input from TAMU’s SCIO I propose the following formal decision and input bodies for the five areas identified by Weill and Ross:

**IT Principles**  
Input: Dean’s Council  
Decision: Dean’s Council, IT  
Notes: At TAMUQ this flows from the Strategic Plan. They may be adopted verbatim or adapted at the department level by the CIO.
**IT Architecture**
Input: IT Advisory Committee

Decision: IT

Notes: This primarily involves the establishment of standards and oversight of an exception process. Examples include workstation and printer specifications. Most organizations assign IT architecture decision making to IT because of the technical nature of the decisions. In order to achieve cost savings, the Dean’s Council should create policies that encourage or require adherence to IT Architecture Committee standards.

**IT Infrastructure Strategies**
Input: IT Advisory Committee

Decision: IT

Notes: Infrastructure strategies include cloud and datacenter management, mobile device strategies, wireless, disaster recovery, etc. Most organizations assign IT infrastructure decision making to IT because of the technical nature of the decisions.

**Business Application Needs**
Input: IT Advisory Committee, IT

Decision: Dean’s Council, IT (limited)

Notes: Approve and prioritize business application needs to align with university’s mission, goals, and objectives

**IT Investment**
Input: IT, Business Operations

Decision: Dean’s Council

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**How will decisions be made and monitored?**

**IT Principles**
Organizations that have effective IT governance tend to have well-defined governance structures for other aspects of their business as well. Organizations that have well-defined mission, vision, and values statements define these for the entire organization. TAMUQ has a published strategic plan and IT, like all other business units, receives guidance and direction from them. Additional principle governance, if needed, flows through the already established chain of command.

**IT Architecture**
IT architecture governance primarily involves the creation of standards. Dramatic cost savings can be achieved through standardization. IT currently realizes substantial cost savings for the university through standardization, volume purchasing, and strategic sourcing. However, employees currently can and do purchase computers and information services without collaborating with IT thereby missing out on many of the opportunities for savings that exist in lower acquisition and support costs.
IT should continue to set standards and pursue volume purchasing. Business Operations and IT should work together to create policies and procedures that encourage utilization of standard equipment. At the same time, we want to protect the ability to innovate where needed. The policies and procedures developed should incorporate a formal exception process. Standards compliance should be at 70% or higher. This should be monitored and reported by Business Operations in an annual report or as part of a budget planning process.

The following IT architecture decision process is proposed:

1. IT sets standards for commonly purchased IT equipment.
2. Standard-compliant IT purchases are routed to IT for acquisition.
3. Non-standard purchases are routed through an exception process to be jointly defined by IT and Business Operations

**IT Infrastructure Strategies**

Infrastructure strategies include cloud and datacenter hosting, wireless device support, security, and disaster recovery. IT currently evaluates infrastructure strategies on an ongoing basis. A new internal policy requires IT to explore cost saving opportunities that may exist by leveraging shared services on main campus if possible. The majority of top performers delegate IT Infrastructure Strategies to IT to handle internally because of the technical issues involved and this arrangement is recommended for TAMUQ.

**Business Application Needs**

TAMUQ IT receives several requests per year for custom application development. Past examples include HRIS and a Purchase Request Workflow. Application development is expensive not only in terms of initial development costs, but every application that is developed must be hosted on a suitable platform and supported by the developer indefinitely. For this reason, custom development should be limited to needs that cannot be met more efficiently through other avenues (off the shelf products, shared services, etc.). The Dean’s Council should approve and prioritize every application development request on an annual or bi-annual basis. The IT Advisory Committee can play a role in recommending approvals and priorities, thus providing input from stakeholders. However, an allowance should be made to accommodate simple enhancement requests. IT should be granted discretion to approve and implement requests requiring fewer than 40 hours (5 business days) of development. In addition to ITAC, IT provides input on development cost and application strategy to the Dean’s Council.

The following business application decision process is proposed:

1. IT receives a request to develop or modify a business application.
2. IT collects project requirements and creates an estimate of resources needed and time to complete.
3. ITAC and IT review the request and make separate recommendations on whether or not to approve it and where to prioritize the request if approved. ITAC should prioritize requests according to TAMUQ Strategic Plans.
4. The Dean’s Council reviews the requests, and the recommendations from ITAC and IT. It approves or denies the request and, if approved, decides where to place the project on IT’s list of application development priorities.
**IT Investment**
The IT budget is currently determined by the Business Office with approval of the Dean’s Council. This model should continue with the inclusion of input from IT.

**Conclusion**
Effective IT governance requires organizations to clearly define input providers and decision makers in five key areas common to all organizations. This IT governance proposal identifies five bodies and their role (input/decision) as they pertain to each of the five areas: IT Principles, IT Architecture, IT Infrastructure Strategies, Business Application Needs, and IT Investment.
References


Approved by Dean’s Council on 1-Sep-2016. This framework will be reviewed by the Dean’s Council on an annual basis.

Revised 3-Oct-2016. IT Executive Committee has been replaced with Dean’s Council. IT discretion for business applications increased from 24 to 40 hours.