

KONTENT.AI®

Ebook



The global enterprise guide to improving content governance

by Kontent.ai Team

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1 Introduction



During the past year, our content operations (processes and technologies for strategically planning, producing, distributing, and analyzing content) needed to change.”

— Agreed or strongly agreed by 84% of over 1,000 content professionals surveyed
Source: Kontent.ai's State of Content Strategy 2021 report

Enterprises must adapt to constantly changing circumstances, and their content needs to adapt as well.

While the need for change is obvious, the means to effect change isn't.

Content strategy is about driving change. This ebook provides a guide to **introducing change in your organization**.

We'll introduce you to a framework for bringing change to your organization: content governance. For many, it may be an unfamiliar topic. But whether you are just learning about governance or you've been working with it for a while, it's a topic that offers many opportunities to improve the results you achieve with content.

We at Kontent have created this guide to help you understand how governance influences content operations and how to implement—and sustain—governance.

Improving governance can help you drive excellence and agility in your content operations.

The goal of this guide is to provide you with a map of five essential components of content governance:

1. Policies
2. Processes
3. Content administration
4. A governance model
5. An implementation approach

We'll cover what each of these involves in some detail.

An important thing to know about governance is that it must be tailored to your firm's organization, goals, and culture. You can't "cut-and-paste" governance developed by another organization and expect it will work in yours.

After reading this guide, you'll know about the tools of governance and be able to design a model for developing and adopting governance that's right for your organization.

2 Are you ready to govern your content?

Global enterprises face an execution challenge. They have a growing need to align their diverse and complex content operations. But for many, it's becoming increasingly difficult to do that—they need ways to bridge this gap.

Content governance offers a solution for improving execution. But it's not sufficient to proclaim content governance as the answer. Content teams and executives need to fully understand the nature of their problem and the factors that can make fixing the situation tricky.

The growing need to align content operations

Enterprise content operations exhibit some common problems. Disparate teams are creating, managing, and delivering content independently of each other. They approach their work in different ways and rarely coordinate their activities. They aren't aligned with one another.

Even when various teams are producing great content, they can lack a common focus in how they approach their work. Some work is duplicated, and content produced by individual teams is inconsistent. Content teams in separate business units are focused on distinct products, services, brands, and geographic regions and tend to follow different practices. It's difficult for the enterprise to manage all this content when it lacks common standards.

Enterprise content coordination is often overlooked. When it's missing, the problem can be more severe than many realize. Enterprises can't afford to ignore these issues. They can be a significant impediment to realizing the strategic objectives of the enterprise.

Enterprises in diverse sectors are discovering that they can't become digital-centric organizations if their content operations aren't aligned. Digital success is not only about buying technology but also about implementing it effectively to support corporate goals. It requires change management.

As business operations have become digital, enterprises need to change how they work with content. Their content needs to:

- > Operate at a global scale.
- > Service a growing range of different channels.
- > Provide a unified experience for customers.

Achieving these goals depends on having sound content governance.

The need to operate at a global scale

Digital transformation presumes that different business functions and divisions can work together seamlessly. Work has shifted online, away from conference rooms. It should now be easier for individual parts of the organization to collaborate. Enterprise data is more unified, making it easier to see how decisions by various parts of the business influence each other.

Digital capabilities have enabled greater integration in enterprise functions. Information and services can be instantly available, and online content has become indispensable in business operations, relied on by both employees and customers alike. Enterprises should think about their content as a common resource, what content strategists Carrie Hane and Mike Atherton refer to as "connected content". When enterprise content is connected, it can be available anywhere it's needed. Different teams produce content that everyone in the enterprise can use. Silos are eliminated.

The growth of channels

Most enterprises are now dealing with more channels than in the past. Even if your organization doesn't yet support voice bots or augmented reality, you'll be managing a lot of channels. You have multiple websites, customer and employee portals, various social media channels, and a range of smartphone apps for customers and employees. Everyone touched by this content, whether creating it or using it, needs a common understanding of what content belongs in which channel.

The importance of coherent customer experiences

In the web-centric era, different divisions would debate about whose content appeared on the home page. Today, the home page is rarely the first place that customers visit. Headless content management enables content to be delivered anywhere it's needed, and the context. The context in which it gets used is increasingly important. Customers need to access content on many channels. As they access it, they are switching devices, moving physically between different locations, and building an understanding of topics over time. Their needs are no longer defined in terms of a single web page. They expect a range of content that together provides a coherent experience. Providing that to customers requires enterprises to ensure their content fits together. Content that's developed in silos can't do that.

Problems in alignment

Your digital business strategy depends on having content operations that scale, channels that are coordinated, and customer experiences that are seamless. But content operations are rarely able to support that alignment.

Teams are organized to produce content that supports particular goals and specific websites. They focus on their immediate responsibilities. The broader needs of the enterprise don't factor much in how teams do their work.

Thanks to headless content management, content is now more modular and flexible. The same content can support the needs of many business stakeholders, not just a single team. It can be reused in different contexts, delivered to many channels, and customized and personalized to a greater degree than has been possible before. Teams can share content they've developed to the benefit of other groups in the enterprise. But that's only possible if this output is "ready" for use by anyone. Various groups within an enterprise need to agree about standards for content that will be used widely or involves input from different parts of the organization.

Getting clear about the need for governance

Content governance is widely considered a best practice. Content experts have promoted governance for many years. The consultant Seth Earley wrote a decade ago: “Information and content governance is frequently a missing piece of a content management plan.” Lisa Welchman, the author of the book Managing Chaos, has been an advocate for the governance of content for two decades.

Within enterprises, governance too often is viewed as desirable but not essential. It’s not a controversial idea— many executives and staff agree it is useful in principle. But in practice, big organizations can fail to make content governance a priority. Governance never takes root. That’s in stark contrast to other best practices that become well established over time.

Content governance involves changing habits. And much like committing to a New Year’s resolution, it can be hard to adopt a new routine.

Content governance can be held back by a lack of clarity about who should be responsible for standards and what are the consequences of not having them. When the organization is foggy about what’s involved, it dampens enthusiasm.

Governance is a collective responsibility. It is not a product that has a single owner. It touches on all parts of an organization, making it more challenging to launch and guide. The absence of governance creates problems diffused across the organization that can be difficult to notice. The friction caused by missing governance shows up everywhere but takes different forms, which can make it hard to monitor and assess.

Though governance has remained below the threshold of attention in some enterprises, the heightened emphasis on digital transformation is now putting it in the spotlight. A lack of governance blocks progress on enterprise digital transformation. Enterprises need to take a fresh look at content governance and why it can’t be deferred.

3 How content governance solves the problem of misaligned content operations

The core idea of content governance is simple: standards make coordination easier. Enterprises develop and adopt common standards for how they work with content when this work affects more than one team. Common standards will reduce effort and improve quality.

For example, a well-known hotel chain had to rethink content roles and responsibilities as the organization shifted to omnichannel content. No longer was the web the dominant channel. Different digital products needed to seamlessly come together to support the customer experience. They needed a company-wide approach to thinking about their digital content.

Standards bring both change and consistency to content operations. They provide a bridge between the intentions of the enterprise as a whole and the work of teams.

First, governance elevates quality across different teams. By adopting a common standard, various teams will improve their practices, becoming more efficient and impactful.

Second, governance ensures quality over time. By following common standards, all teams will do their work in a consistent way, and everyone is confident that the content is ready for their purposes.

Launching governance: The cold start problem

The need for governance seems self-evident. Across the enterprise, the scope of content activities keeps getting broader: more topics, formats, channels, and audience segments. The inconsistencies in how various activities are done are becoming more noticeable. The need for coordination is urgent. Time to get the engine of governance fired up.

But getting governance started can be challenging. Organizations often find they face a “cold start” problem. It’s similar to when, in extremely cold weather, a driver tries to start a car engine that hasn’t run recently. The engine doesn’t start immediately.

Despite the benefits that governance can offer, efforts to get it going can get stuck. Widespread interest that’s needed to launch governance fails to build momentum. The promise of governance can seem elusive or unachievable.

This inertia shouldn’t be surprising. After all, it’s just another symptom of the root problem: the enterprise’s content operations aren’t aligned. One shouldn’t expect a consensus about the objectives for governance instantly.

Three common hurdles get in the way of starting governance:

1. Agreeing on the scope and scale of what needs governing
2. Having a common time frame—how long an effort is required
3. Politics and the question of who should be in charge

Some stakeholders may question the need for a comprehensive governance program. They may view specific problems in isolation rather than as a web of interrelated issues. Not everyone will at first see governance as needing to address a wide range of activities that shape enterprise content. This perspective can result in dealing with governance problems in a piecemeal manner.

Stakeholders may also differ on the effort required to resolve governance problems. Some may view governance problems as one-off issues that can be fixed with a quick project. They won't at first see governance as involving a long-term commitment.

And stakeholders may have divergent ideas about who should be in charge. Some will want to dictate everything by themselves; others will prefer to have no one telling them what to do. When there's no defined process for discussing practices and standards, decisions can be driven by the clout of individuals or organizational divisions. If governance is viewed as a power contest, perspectives tend to be about control or autonomy instead of based on the requirements for the enterprise as a whole.

Enterprises should foster a dialog about the purpose of content governance. When launching governance, agreeing on why governance matters is more important than deciding everything about how it is done and what it covers. Fortunately, not every detail about governance needs to be decided at the start. The scope of governance can be open-ended, and it can evolve as the organization collectively understands its requirements and priorities and becomes comfortable with developing decisions that work for everyone.

Indeed, the diversity of perspectives highlights one of the governance's key benefits. Governance helps enterprises to sort out poorly defined or ambiguous decision-making authority. Governance can take politics out of decisions. It offers a framework to answer questions such as:

- > Who's in charge?
- > Who decides?
- > How do disagreements get resolved?

By providing a forum to discuss requirements and options, governance allows for different stakeholders to provide input on their perspectives. It does this by providing a repeatable and predictable process for discussing, deciding, and implementing enterprise content standards.

Fostering governance

Governance is a long-term program, not a short-term project. It takes root over time rather than happening as a big bang event. As a result, the discussion about implementing content governance shouldn't be considered as an all-or-nothing proposition. Governance can launch with a focus on a few core areas that everyone agrees are priorities for the whole organization. As stakeholders gain experience with content governance and how it works, they will feel more comfortable with expanding the scope of governance. Early successes will sustain the program.

It helps to break down governance into three ingredients:

1. The standards that will support governance
2. The development of standards
3. The implementation of standards

The first ingredient is the standards that support governance—tools that everyone in the enterprise uses. Standards specify how teams and systems should perform various operations. These standards take different forms:

- › Policies and guidelines
- › Processes and procedures
- › Content administration settings for the CMS and other IT systems

The next ingredient is the framework that supports the development of these specific standards. This is sometimes referred to as the “governance model.” It specifies who needs to be involved with standards development, how these people will be organized to support that work, and how standards get input and get adopted.

The final ingredient is planning how adopted standards need to be rolled out across the enterprise. There needs to be an implementation effort to inform, educate, and get feedback from users of the standards.

While launching a governance program may seem daunting at first, the good news is that you already have some governance in select areas. For example, you probably have certain legal policies relevant to enterprise content, covering areas such as privacy, disclosures, terms and conditions, allowable statements and claims, non-discrimination statements, or how to ask for consent. Similarly, your organization likely has enterprise-wide security and IT standards that influence content such as data protection and retention. These standards show that your organization already recognizes that governance is important. **You are ready to take your content governance to the next level with a comprehensive range of standards** that align how teams produce and manage content across the enterprise.



4 How policies support content governance

Well-crafted policies and guidelines will improve your content governance—they give content teams a common understanding of general requirements and criteria relating to their content.

What policies and guidelines do

Policies and guidelines are standards for your content. Standards are often characterized according to their state of approval. They may be either “normative” (an official standard must be always followed) or “not normative” (a draft standard that is provisional but whose adoption is recommended).

Policies and guidelines improve the quality and consistency of content by telling you what you need to do when working with content. They define specific practices, indicating what things:

- › Must be done (are required).
- › Should be done (are recommended if feasible to implement).
- › May be done (are optional and depend on the context).
- › Must not be done (are prohibited).

A helpful standard won't be overly formal, however. It's a good idea to translate these formalities into an easy-to-understand framework that's clear and quick to use. Use concise, plain language and graphic aids such as colors and icons to clarify the guidance.

Take an inventory of what you have

Enterprises need a range of policies and guidelines relating to their content. They should know which policies and guidelines are already in place. To do this, they should conduct a policy audit, which will answer such questions as:

- › What policies exist?
- › Who is responsible for them?
- › Are they being followed throughout the organization?
- › Are they up to date?
- › Are they clear and complete?
- › Is there any overlap in coverage in different documents, or are there any conflicting directions?

The distinction between policies and guidelines is not clear-cut, but policies often tend to be more formal, involving more intensive administrative review by different parts of the organization, higher-level executive oversight or approval, and stricter change control. Policies may spell out legal obligations or the expected responsibilities and performance standards for different parts of the enterprise. While guidelines are also subject to an approval process, the process for making changes to them may be more streamlined, involving a smaller group that has clear ownership of the area of focus. In some cases, guidelines are living documents that are revised continuously.

What kinds of policies might you need?

The next step is to consider what policies and guidelines you need that you don't currently have. In these cases, you will need to develop policies for these areas. It's also an opportunity to look at whether existing policies can be developed further to provide complete guidance.

Enterprises can implement an array of standards to influence how content is created and used:

1. Accessibility policy
2. AI-generated content policy
3. Brand guidelines
4. Compliance policies
5. Email guidelines
6. Guidelines for domain names and URLs
7. Guidelines for user-generated content
8. Image use guidelines
9. Privacy policies
10. Social media policy
11. Style guide
12. Voice and Tone guidelines

Accessibility policy

Across the globe, private organizations are required to make their content accessible by law. Some regional and national laws mandating that private organizations make content accessible include:

- › Americans with Disabilities Act
- › Disability Discrimination Act 1992 of Australia
- › Equality Act 2010 of the United Kingdom
- › European Accessibility Act

Accessibility is especially important for organizations that receive government funding, which may include educational and health organizations. Such institutions often have additional legal requirements above and beyond those imposed on private organizations.

Accessibility is good business practice: it helps customers use your content fully. People have differing visual, auditory, motor, and cognitive abilities that affect their use of content. Content should be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust on whatever platform it appears. The major global technical standard for accessibility known as the WCAG provides three levels of conformance: A, AA, AAA. Your accessibility policy should indicate the conformance level expected. The policy can address:

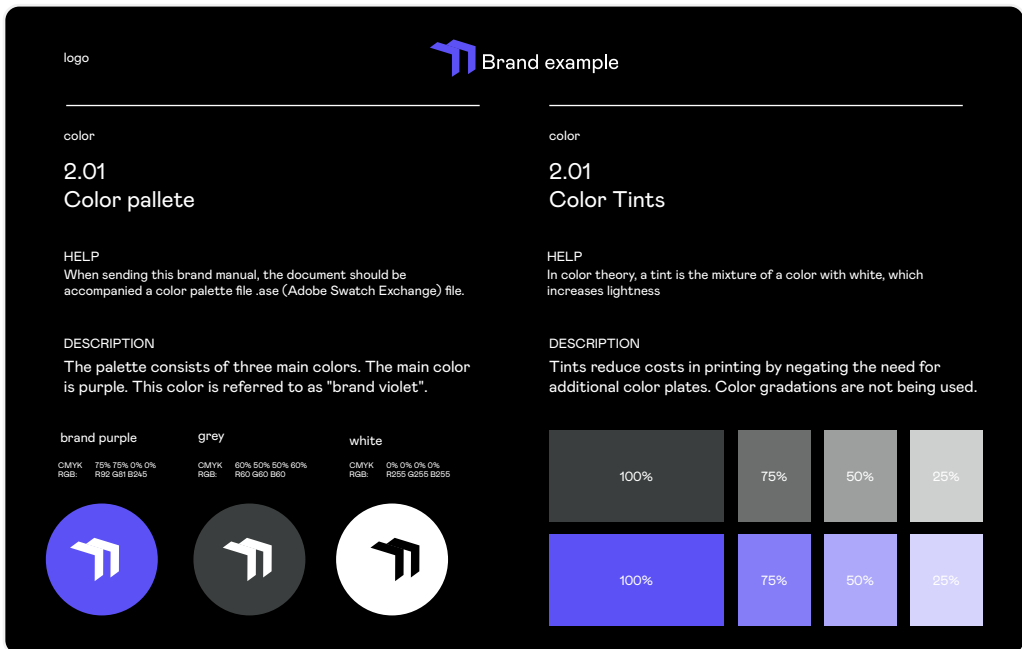
- › Responsibilities of content creators to ensure that the content is accessible
- › Tools to check accessibility compliance
- › How to make live and recorded video content accessible
- › Visual communication guidelines, such as contrast, text size, color perception, and the use of text within images
- › How to provide alt text for various kinds of images
- › Requirements for time-based and interactive media
- › Providing access to screen labels and button text
- › How to present jargon and abbreviations
- › How to accommodate differences in reading level

AI-generated content

More organizations are using chatbots, voice bots, or robo-advisors. Because of its unique characteristics, AI-generated content benefits from having its own guidelines instead of being a part of general-purpose guidelines intended for human writers. Even when a specialized team is responsible for developing AI-generated content, the guidelines may be relevant to other staff interested in knowing how bots can support their business priorities. The guidelines can include:

- › Conforming to social norms: handling anger, interruptions, or not understanding
- › How to indicate that the message is machine-generated
- › Setting appropriate expectations about what the bot can do
- › When bots should refer customers to other channels for assistance
- › Example of brand guidelines





Example of brand guidelines

Brand guidelines

A brand style guide is used both internally and by outside agencies when designing digital content or advertising. It presents the brand's values and the brand's promise that all content needs to reflect. It provides specific rules about the use of visual elements used in different media and platforms such as:

- > Color pallet
- > Layout grids
- > Logos, including their proper use and any accepted variations
- > Typography, which may include the presentation of languages other than English

It also describes how to use and indicate branded text, including:

- > Proprietary words or phrase such as taglines
- > Service marks for services
- > Trademarks for brand and product names
- > Regional or national variations for standard conventions for branded text

Compliance policies

All sectors are subject to nondiscrimination requirements that will influence content related to employee hiring and customer eligibility for services. In certain sectors, enterprises must adhere to special legal or regulatory requirements relating to health or safety or consumer rights, which will influence the content's presentation. Examples of compliance issues include:

- › Disclaimers that must be made as a matter of law
- › The disclosure of mandatory information that must be presented due to a transparency requirement
- › The scope of claims that may be made about products or services mentioned in the content

Email guidelines

Email is a very important channel of communication for most enterprises. While email content will often be the same as is used in web channels, content delivered by email also has certain unique requirements. Email guidelines explain how to handle specific issues such as:

Footer requirements, including legal notices about the sender and possibly a link to allow people to opt out of future emails

- › How to handle forms within an email
- › The writing of preheaders and subject lines
- › When and how to embed video

Guidelines for domain names and URLs

Domain names and URLs influence a range of issues:

- › Brand recognition and memorability
- › Ease of entering website addresses
- › Trademark protection
- › Search authority

A lot of enterprises use numerous domain names but don't have clear governance around their use. In some cases, they have failed to maintain control over the various web properties that are registered by the brand—many domains were set up to host specialized or temporary content that doesn't have long-term value. When domain names aren't clear, customers can be confused about from whom they are getting content. Guidance on domain names should consider decisions relating to:

- › Appropriate use of a non-standard URL, such as when a microsite can have its own URL
- › Country code Top Level Domains (TDLs) for subsidiaries and country-specific URLs
- › Generic TDLs (.com and .org)
- › Standards for page paths
- › Use of subdomains
- › Vanity URLs
- › What kinds of content must be published on the main URL of the brand
- › Who in the organization is authorized to purchase a URL on behalf of the organization

Guidelines for user-generated content

User-generated content is an important source of information for customers. Customers leave reviews of products or services and provide advice or make suggestions in user forums about resolving problems. The quality and detail of this content can vary widely and sometimes may be inaccurate or misleading. Enterprises need rules for how to moderate user discussions and how to maintain user-contributed content so that it stays fresh and relevant. If the user-generated content might be useful elsewhere, the policy should indicate appropriate ways to utilize it for other purposes.

Image use guidelines

Guidelines for images explain the proper use and handling of images. They will go into more detail than would typically be included in the Brand style guidelines, dealing with technical, contractual, and editorial considerations. Some image use practices will be specific to an enterprise. For example, some organizations do not want people featured in their product imagery, while other organizations use product imagery with people in everyday situations. Image use guidelines may cover:

- › Acceptable backgrounds within images, the placement of subject of images in context, and required contrast of foreground and background objects
- › Authorized sources of images
- › Commissioning specialized graphics or photography
- › Focus, lighting, and legibility of imagery
- › How to use stock images
- › Image size and resolution
- › Images of text, such as photos of product packaging
- › Tinting and cropping of photographs
- › Release requirements for photos of people
- › Rights and restrictions when using licensed images (copyright obligations, restrictions on editing or modification of images)
- › Use of decorative images
- › What content should and should not appear in images
- › When and how to indicate credits and copyright

Privacy policies

Privacy requirements are becoming more complex. As the range of data that enterprises collect about customers grows, privacy requirements are affecting more kinds of content. Many enterprises will need to conform to privacy laws in multiple jurisdictions. Privacy policies will affect marketing content and customer service content in particular. In some cases, customers explicitly contribute personal information about themselves, such as their names, addresses, phone numbers, payment information, and email addresses. In other cases, identifiable information such as IP addresses or access dates and time is collected by tracking customer behavior. Customers must be informed of what information is collected and why, and they must give their consent for the data to be collected and retained. Privacy policies should also address:

- › How customers can contact the organization if they have questions or concerns
- › What has changed since the customer last consented
- › What measures the organization takes to protect personal information

The content relating to many customer tasks will have privacy implications:

- › Account settings and information
- › Analytics tracking notices (website cookies, performance monitoring)
- › App setting preferences that involve personally identifying details, especially relating to the sharing data with other apps
- › Contests and sweepstakes
- › Customer surveys
- › Disclosures in Terms of Service agreements and other contracts
- › Event registration
- › Forms customers use to submit feedback that isn't anonymous
- › Newsletter sign-ups
- › Orders for purchases
- › Sign up and onboarding content

Social media policies

Social media is a major channel used to promote and distribute content. The content in social media may be among the most visible for an organization—sometimes generating press coverage. Social media can amplify your content or become the story. Social media policies should indicate what can be said and who can say these things. Topics may include:

- › Which social channels to use to reach specific audiences
- › What kinds of topics and content are best for specific social media platforms
- › When certain kinds of topics are appropriate to promote in social media
- › How to address customer complaints on social media
- › How to comment on unfolding events such as future plans or widespread service issues
- › How to use hashtags
- › When and how to refer customers to other channels

Social media accounts can sometimes generate confusion about who is behind a statement. Policies can clarify the appropriate roles for:

- › Brand mascots accounts
- › Corporate marketing accounts
- › Corporate press or investor relations accounts
- › Corporate service or support accounts
- › Staff accounts

Style guide

A style guide provides guidance on writing standards such as:

- › Grammar advice
- › Punctuation
- › Terminology
- › Word usage

It often includes an A-Z listing of words and abbreviations with their preferred spelling and usage notes. It may include preferred language for discussing emotionally sensitive topics such as health or financial hardships by indicating which words or phrases to use and not use. Diversity and inclusion guidance is an area of growing importance, such as how to avoid:

- › Age bias
- › Culture bias
- › Gender bias
- › Gender-specific language
- › Language offensive to ethnic groups
- › Racial bias
- › Sexual orientation bias

Voice and Tone guidelines

Voice is a brand's personality in its written communications. Tone reflects how messages are presented in different situations. When an enterprise has several brands, guidelines should show where they are similar and distinct from one another. Voice and tone guidelines can cover:

- › How to address the customer
- › How to deliver bad news, such as error messages
- › Message patterns, including structural elements to include
- › Product value pillars
- › The formality or informality of various messages
- › Themes to express in feature descriptions and feature value propositions

5 Defining processes and procedures to support content operations

Processes and procedures spell out how content teams should do content-related activities, which enables enterprises to coordinate their content operations effectively.

Enterprises must be able to translate their content governance goals into practice. Their policies outline what needs to happen. Their processes and procedures specify how their work should be done.

A process helps an organization standardize how they perform an activity. It delineates the intended flow of activities and how these activities change the content. It indicates what happens, by whom, where, and when. **Processes will indicate decision points and different pathways.** Because these pathways can diverge depending on circumstances, processes are good for showing the inter-relationship between activities.

Procedures articulate in more detail how a process is done. They stipulate the steps to take. Each step can provide instructions that show the correct way to complete specific tasks.

Successful governance depends on having consistent content operations. If different teams and individuals perform their work idiosyncratically, their results will vary, which can produce commercial, reputational, or legal risks to the enterprise.

Processes and procedures not only reduce risks but also support efficiency. Employees don't want to figure out how to do things each time they need doing. But unless an established procedure is in place, they'll be inclined to copy examples they see, whether or not these examples are done well.

While processes and procedures should reflect policies and guidelines, they don't need to be limited to them. Process standards can cover aspects of content operations that do not have formal policy standards. For creative and design activities, in particular, it can be more important how the work is done rather than what the final output looks like. By specifying the important tasks and who needs to be involved with them, process standards ensure consistency in the quality of outcomes.

By documenting processes and procedures, enterprises can:

- › Provide all team members and stakeholders with a better view of what needs to happen and how they fit in.
- › Support the onboarding of employees and contractors who are either new or have been assigned temporarily to support a project.

Processes and procedures support quality by documenting common approaches that are embraced by all involved with content operations. Common approaches will yield consistency.

Like any form of content, procedures need to be tailored to the audience using them.

Less expert users, especially those whose primary responsibilities don't relate to content, may not need to consult detailed procedures, which might cover many tasks they won't ever be involved with. Instead, they will benefit from having instructions that guide how to do specific tasks.

Staff with more expertise will likely be involved with coordinating several interrelated tasks. They will want documented processes to help them understand the relationships and procedures to manage the details.

Scope and details

Processes, procedures, and instructions vary in the scope and details they address.

Processes can specify:

- › What team or group is the owner of the activity?
- › What role is responsible for doing the activity?
- › What systems are used (work templates, tools, IT systems)?
- › What are typical entry points for starting an activity?
- › What are the major steps associated with the activity?
- › What is the expected order of these steps?
- › What are key decision points that affect the flow of tasks?
- › What alternative flows might there be?
- › What are the different end states of a process?
- › How is the activity connected to other processes?

How to remove content

Step 1: Get approval to remove

How to explain to content owners why their content should be removed.



Step 2: Create a removal plan

This is for a major removal of content. It involves people, time and responsibilities.



Step 3: Archive and record content

This is evidence of government business and is a Commonwealth record.



Step 4: Remove content from the web

After archiving, follow these steps when you take content off your website.



Step 5: Decommission a website

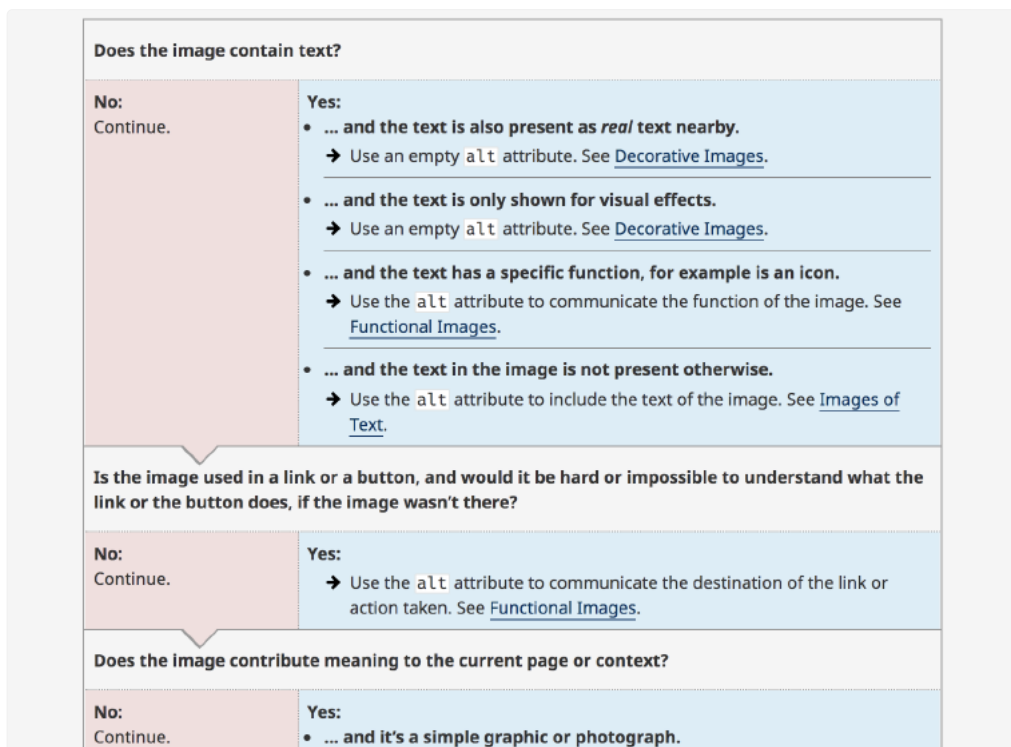
To decommission a website means to remove it from service.



*Example of procedures for removing content
(source: Australian Government digital guide)*

Procedures can articulate:

- > Purpose of the procedure
- > Expected frequency of the activity
- > How a procedure relates to other procedures
- > What resources are needed to do the procedure (tools, assets, data, approvals)
- > How activities must be done
- > What shouldn't be done
- > Criteria determining when the activity is completed
- > What happens if the procedure can't be completed as intended
- > Examples, if helpful



Example of part of a decision tree relating to adding alt text (source: W3C)

Instructions can indicate:

- > Dos and don'ts: tips to avoid mistakes
- > Recommended most-efficient order
- > What to track when doing the activity, such as dates, metrics, comments, or contributions from colleagues
- > Quickstart templates
- > Decision trees/tables to aid choices
- > Checklists to track tasks and completeness of work
- > Other resources to read for help

How to develop processes, procedures, and instructions

Your documentation should include both broad and specific activities. If your team follows an agile approach, you can identify your content-related activities, user tasks, and user stories to discover those activities that would benefit from having formal processes, procedures, and instructions.

Map the big picture of the current state of your content activities that need to be managed. Various teams may be following different processes. Decide where you want to change or harmonize the differences in how your process happens. Identify processes where quality and efficiency are issues. Look at examples from other organizations to find inspiration and to borrow effective practices.

Your process standards should be tailored to the unique needs of your organization. Encourage employees to share how they do activities so others can learn from them and add their ideas. In large organizations, teams can compare procedures and map their similarities and differences to develop a common approach.

Processes and standards are for everyone, including those who oversee them. When creating content procedures, establish a process to manage them. Don't just prepare documentation and expect it will stay relevant. Set expectations for how frequently these will be reviewed. Provide channels where people can ask for clarifications, or request additions, exceptions, or changes.

Targets of opportunity

Procedures and processes demonstrate value when they capture the collective expertise across the enterprise. They have the greatest impact when they relate to complex functional areas, require specialized knowledge, or involve the coordination of multiple roles.

Start by looking at high-frequency activities with noticeable quality problems or that seem to take too long. By having documented procedures, many of the issues will improve.

Some common processes and procedures that are complex, involving several decisions or multiple team roles, include:

- Accessibility markup procedures
- Channel coordination procedures: cross-channel planning, distribution, and analysis

- › Competitive benchmarking process: deciding direct and indirect competitors to audit, assessing customer channel and experience expectations, rating strengths and weaknesses, determining gaps
- › Content design process: coordination between customer research, writers, visual design, and front-end development
- › Content maintenance procedures: when content is reviewed to check its relevance and whether it's up to date, when to remove content, when to archive it
- › Content planning process: capturing requirements and rationale for new content, prioritization, assignment of related tasks, and scheduling
- › Customer feedback process: primary and secondary research, content testing, surveys, search logs, customer comments, and requests
- › Localization procedures
- › Measurement and analytics process: identifying indicators, setting up parameters, measuring performance, reporting trends, developing insights
- › Optimization process: how to tweak published content so that it performs better
- › Process for conducting content inventories and content audits
- › Process for discovering audience needs: audience questions, terminology, attitudes, knowledge, differences
- › Quality assurance processes: prepublication checks and post-publication monitoring and remediation
- › SEO procedures: search query research, markup, and testing to support content headlines, descriptions, metadata, links
- › Taxonomy process and procedures: applying taxonomy terms, requesting additions or deletions

What process standards are right for your organization will depend on your business priorities and operational maturity. Your goal should be to make sure that the processes and procedures you adopt are followed consistently. If teams aren't ready to do that yet, consider creating other kinds of documentation that will be helpful but not obligatory. As these resources get used and mature, they may eventually become the basis for more formal procedures.

6 The role of content administration in governance

Content administration is an important dimension of content governance. It offers powerful capabilities, but its benefits are not always fully appreciated.

Policies and processes support governance by guiding how people make decisions in a consistent way. Yet some routine decisions can be built into the systems that people use so they don't need to specify these choices repeatedly. That's the role of content administration: to set enterprise-wide standards for the CMS and related systems to promote consistent governance.

What content administration does

Content administration is the aspect of governance that shapes the systems your enterprise uses to support its content operations, especially those parts that are employee-facing. Content administration governance is broader than simply implementing the functionality of a content management system. It influences the organizational design of enterprise content operations. Too often, content administration decisions are made in isolation by individual teams, without consideration for how to structure them optimally to support the wider goals of the enterprise.

Governance should address how systems will support operations so that they function coherently and seamlessly, taking into account how your enterprise is structured.

Like policies and processes, content administration requires enterprise-wide decision making and agreement. But where policies and processes largely focus on what people need to do, content administration is more focused on what systems need to do. It involves deciding how to standardize:

- › The platforms that everyone across the enterprise uses
- › The processes that rely on those platforms

Content administration decisions embrace aspects of both system design and organizational design. It reflects agreements about how to manage and share enterprise content. Different business units must be willing to adopt common specifications and standards for content systems.

Benefits of administrative governance

Enterprise-wide content administration provides unified governance for many foundational decisions influencing content operations.

A common problem in large enterprises is that different parts of the organization develop content in isolation. They may not know what is being done elsewhere or may feel left behind. They may be unable to use something they need or have to wait to get access to it.

By having content administration as part of the governance framework, implementation decisions are considered at the enterprise level, which ensures they work cohesively for everyone.

Content administration supports governance in three broad areas. It allows the enterprise to:

1. Prevent errors and conflicts in how content resources are managed.
2. Enhance the agility of the enterprise's content operations.
3. Promote greater maturity in working with content.

Both individual staff and the enterprise benefit—when done correctly, content administration maximizes enterprise capabilities while reducing the complexity that individual staff have to work with. Staff only see features and choices they need, instead of all options that are available across the enterprise. Essential decisions are preset, so staff don't have to deal with them constantly.

Enterprise-wide content administration improves operational capabilities by allowing different central teams and divisions to:

1. Share content resources and avoid duplication.
2. Scale initiatives by making it easier to deploy new capabilities and resources.
3. Streamline operations by reducing the manual coordination between different groups.

These capabilities promote consistency by different groups and across different channels.

Consider a common problem facing large enterprises: duplication. Different business units duplicate the work of other units because their content operations are managed separately. Either they recreate existing content or duplicate that content, having multiple copies in different places. When content is duplicated in many places, it makes it harder to retire old content.

When duplication is a habitual pattern—necessitating the recreation of the operational setup in multiple places—enterprises have a harder time implementing global changes. Central teams don't want to replicate changes across different systems, as it slows down agility. To realize the benefits of scale, they want to implement one change that's available globally throughout the enterprise.

Topics and decisions for administrative governance

While often simple on a small scale, content administration becomes more intricate when addressed at a larger scale. Enterprise-wide content administration delivers more sophisticated capabilities, but it has to take into account the diverse range of needs that various stakeholders have.

Enterprise content administration coordinates the activities managed by central teams with those managed by teams in independent business units. One of the major considerations is how to balance the discretion granted to local projects with the need for central control. For example, how should local, regional websites align with or differ from the main website?

Content administration focuses on architectural decisions that influence the organization of content operations, such as:

1. Enterprise content model
2. Content collections
3. User groups
4. Access and permissions
5. Standard workflows

The enterprise content model provides a commonly defined structure for content that allows interoperability of content created by different parts of the enterprise.

The delineation of content collections allows teams to group items of content that have a similar thematic or business focus, so they are managed in the same way. For example, it can define the focus of specific projects such as a marketing campaign. Collections also enable the sharing of content between different teams. All the content related to the campaign can be included within that collection so that any team that needs access to that content can use it.

The specification of user groups such as teams will govern the contributions and collaboration by different roles to support the production of content.

The designation of access and permission settings define what roles can do what tasks. For example, role-based access would define what content or tasks translators have access to.

Content administration also specifies baseline workflows for a user group or content type: the basic work patterns that are accommodated. For example, the workflow standards will answer when and how translation fits into the workflow.

As mentioned earlier, content administration influences the organizational design of content operations. It requires balancing the benefits of standardization with the desire for flexibility, clearly distinguishing options that are widely useful from those that might be necessary for a few. For example, it must weigh the advantages of following a uniform standardized content model versus allowing a more flexible model. It will assess the value of universal workflows compared to more customizable ones. And it will consider the utility of having all content centrally managed compared to allowing separate projects that are somewhat autonomous.

Successful content administration must be able to support varied circumstances. It will consider:

- › The sensitivity of the content and the need to control access to it
- › The mix of roles supporting different teams
- › The maturity of different teams

Ultimately, the choices made should enable better coordination between different roles, resources, and organizational units.

Contributors to content administration decision making

Content administration entails technical decisions that have a broad impact on everyone in the enterprise who works with content. Both technical and non-technical perspectives should be represented when developing content administration governance.

Technically oriented staff such as content managers and IT architects have the knowledge to evaluate and explain the available settings and their benefits—details that may seem arcane to non-technical employees. But non-technical employees are essential to provide the user perspective on what procedural choices they want preset. Users don't want to make routine decisions; they want the settings to take care of that. But because these settings become fixed when standardized, it's crucial that they don't create any unintended barriers to operations.

A governance working group with a specialized focus on content administration can invite input on relevant business and user requirements. Content administration standards won't generally require much governance committee involvement, except when big changes are introduced to how work is done. But the working group must have balanced representation so that different parts of the enterprise are aligned around the choices made.

7 Enterprise content governance model for decision making

Enterprises need a decision-making process to develop their standards for working with content. Getting the right participation in developing these standards is crucial to their success.

We've already looked at different kinds of content standards: policies, processes, and content administration. Now let's talk about how to develop and implement those standards.

Enterprise content governance plays two different but complementary roles:

1. Maintaining consistency in enterprise content operations
2. Managing change by introducing new practices and promoting their adoption

Aligning various stakeholders around common priorities is essential to achieve consistency and promote change. Everyone concerned must agree to the same goals and follow the same practices.

The formal approach to governance decision-making goes by different names: the governance model, the governance framework, or the governance structure.

How governance differs from operations

Stakeholders should understand how enterprise content governance differs from day-to-day operations management, especially as they sometimes get confused.

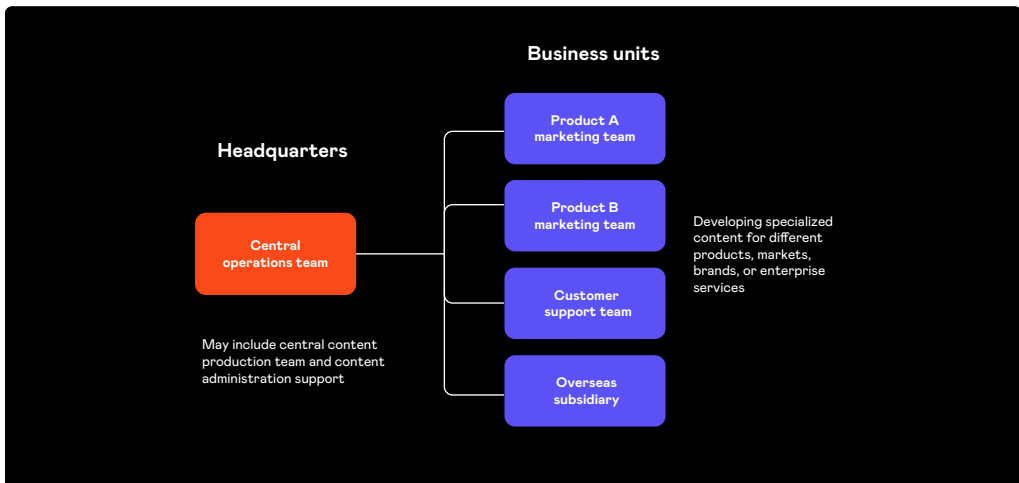
A content operations team will often have one person who is in charge of the team's work. But enterprise content governance is a collective responsibility: no single person is in charge. It requires the collaboration of peers working together to develop and agree to common standards.

Governance provides high-level direction for the content operations of many teams.

Content operations can vary widely in how they are structured. The tasks performed in content operations could be allocated where:

- › One central team does everything related to creating and publishing content (centralized operations)
- › Multiple teams independently manage their content (decentralized operations)
- › A central team handles specialized tasks only while other teams develop the bulk of the content (hybrid operations)

Centralized operations are appealing to smaller organizations because all tasks are done by a single team, which can be easier to coordinate. But for global enterprises, having a single team do everything isn't a viable approach due to the volume and diversity of content they produce.



Hybrid content operations in a large enterprise with multiple business units

Large enterprises typically have a central team that will handle “shared services” relating to content administration support. Some large enterprises also have a central editorial team (or an “in-house agency”) that provides content creation services or a central team of UX writers who work with UX and development teams to support enterprise-wide apps. But these content teams will normally be just one of several groups producing content within the organization. While the central team(s) play an outsized role, the bulk of the content production is done by teams within different divisions of the organization.

Big enterprises most often choose a hybrid content operations model, having both a central team and many “local” content teams that belong to different business units (lines of business, functions, or subsidiaries). Because accountability for business outcomes is distributed among different units, the production of content supporting those outcomes needs to be as well. Various business units and functions will have their own responsibilities and goals and are accountable for specific outcomes. For example, different marketing groups may produce similar content but work independently and are accountable only for their work.

Hybrid operations are common because it’s not effective to have those creating content to be separated from the business teams who depend on the content to realize their business objectives.

Hybrid content operations rely on hub-and-spoke coordination between a central team and local teams within business units. Local teams often do certain tasks differently. They will follow their own workflows, track their own KPIs, and decide their own content calendars.

The enterprise should allow local teams to make the choices that are particular to their situation while at the same time promote the adoption of common approaches where they make sense. They need to strike the right balance. **Content governance should account for the diverse needs and circumstances of local teams when developing enterprise standards.**

The operations documentation each local team uses will reflect their specific practices. The enterprise standards, in contrast, are used by all content teams. They provide the basic set of instructions relating to content, upon which each team can add its own operational documentation. The relationship between enterprise standards and local operation documentation is summarized in the table below.

Enterprise governance standards	Local content operations documentation
A unified set of standards for the entire enterprise	Assorted set of practices for a specific team or business unit
Uniform everywhere in the enterprise	Can vary according to the requirements of different groups
Decided by a central governance committee	Decided by various team leads
Specifies formally-approved enterprise operational standards	Procedures and practices aren't endorsed by the governance committee
Reflects market-leading practices that must be adopted by everyone or minimal thresholds that must be met	Reflects decisions by team or business unit on what works best for them
Only covers areas where the same standards will be followed by everyone	Can document a broader range of practices, advice, and tactics
Applicable for shared processes (handled centrally) and common processes (handled identically)	Applicable for unique processes

Defining what should be common

The governance program will develop common principles, standard processes, and generic procedures that should be used uniformly across the enterprise.

The purpose of governance is not to make all operations uniform, however. Governance doesn't define all aspects of content operations since individual teams will sometimes have different requirements and goals. Different groups within the enterprise can and should define their own procedures and practices for work that's unique to them. As noted earlier, different business units may adopt their own KPIs to measure their content. At times, these local team practices may resemble governance. But they don't have the wide scope of application or formal authority associated with enterprise-wide governance.

Enterprise governance focuses on the “non-negotiables”: standards that are required for internal or external reasons or the practices that are considered best-in-class and that should be followed by everyone. Content administration settings, such as enterprise content models and user groups, are also centrally defined and implemented.

Team operational practices, in contrast, can be tailored to specific situations and will affect a smaller number of people than governance standards. Content operations documentation may be revised continuously as specific teams experiment and learn, unlike governance standards, which are generally stable and revised only after extensive discussion. Yet sometimes the practices of individual teams can become more widely applicable. Governance development can learn from the choices that different teams make on how they do their work.

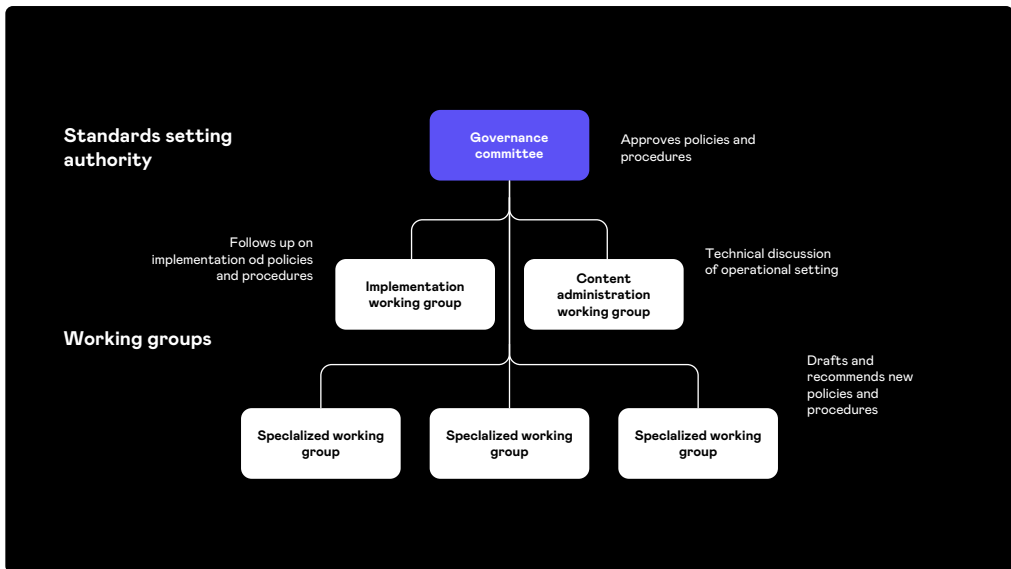
Governance discussions foster coordination among teams belonging to different business units. In hybrid content operations, these local teams interact with a central team for specific tasks already. A governance program offers a platform for these different local teams so they can collaborate directly with each other to define common standards all can benefit from. Different business units can discuss common needs in how they manage content. They can offload the burden of deciding on their own how to optimally do certain tasks. Having common standards helps streamline their work and makes each team more autonomous by removing the need to coordinate routine decisions with central teams.

Enterprise governance provides high-level oversight of content operations across the enterprise. It shouldn't address overly complex details that aren't widely relevant. If the solution can't be generalized easily, then it's probably not yet a good candidate for becoming a governance standard.

Your governance model

Everyone who works with content is affected by content standards. But governance doesn't specify everything in your content operations, and not everyone in your content operations needs to be involved with defining governance standards—only a select group of representatives should participate in establishing these standards.

Governance standards are decided by an executive committee, which is supported by specialized working groups.



A governance committee is supported by specialized working groups.

Executive steering committee

The group that's responsible for deciding governance standards is called the governance committee or board. It determines the standards the enterprise needs and ensures they are being followed.

The committee meets regularly (perhaps quarterly) to decide priorities and endorse standards. It's commonly composed of around ten representatives from different roles and business units in the enterprise, who will review and vote on all official governance decisions. These participants should represent the range of concerns that different areas of the enterprise will have relating to content.

Working groups

The governance committee is supported by working groups, each of which will focus on a specific policy and process. The working groups will meet according to what needs to be done. When drafting a new policy or substantially revising one, a group might meet biweekly. Otherwise, it might have a semiannual check-in.

Unlike the governance committee with its comprehensive focus, **each working group will be composed of a handful of specialists (perhaps three to six)**, some of whom may not need to participate in every meeting. Most working group contributors will be involved because of their expertise in a particular area. They may work within the content team of a specific business unit or work in a non-content role such as IT or UX that collaborates with content teams. In some cases, a member of the governance committee will participate in a working group, and some knowledgeable people might serve on more than one working group.

One of the working groups should focus on governance implementation issues. This implementation working group will do some of the staff-level legwork that's necessary to support the governance committee. It can:

- › Follow up on how policies and procedures are being understood and used within the organization, perhaps by conducting surveys.
- › Provide publicity to governance activities and oversee the development of educational resources.
- › Look at gaps and opportunities in governance to propose to the committee, possibly by doing feasibility and comparative research.

Another working group should be dedicated to content administration, which influences content operations in wide-ranging ways. Some content administration settings can support the person-to-person coordination associated with governance-defined processes and procedures.

Who to include on the governance committee and working groups

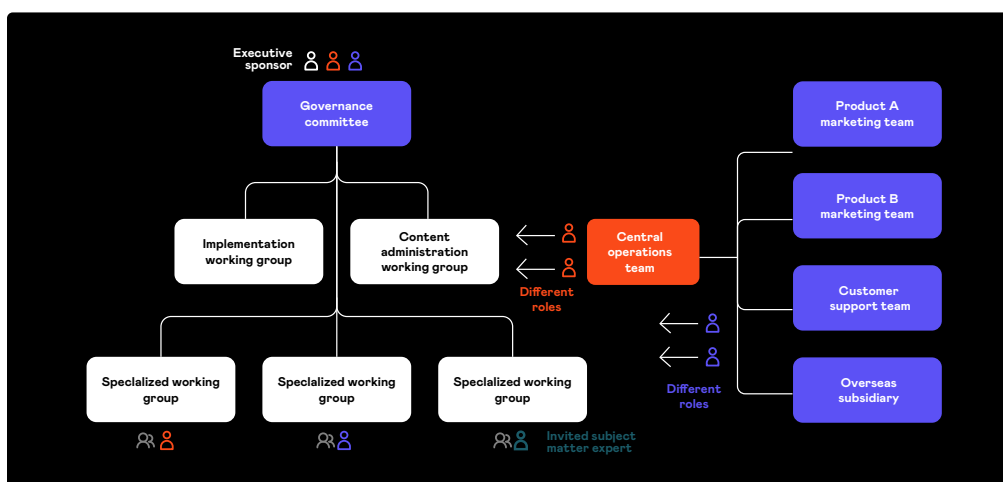
As the authority for setting enterprise standards relating to content, the governance committee needs to reflect a range of stakeholder perspectives to develop the most robust standards possible and gain buy-in from the whole organization.

Representatives participating in the governance process should be chosen based on:

1. Their affiliation: the business unit they belong to
2. Their job role: the expertise and responsibilities they have

First, consider the affiliation of representatives. If the enterprise's content product is distributed across different locations, the members of the governance committee should not all work at corporate headquarters. The membership shouldn't duplicate the representation of the central content team who won't have direct knowledge of frontline operational demands or business concerns.

Aim for a blended representation that taps into expertise from outside of the central team. Valuable expertise is often distributed throughout the organization. Subject matter experts who normally support specific business unit initiatives may be able to contribute some of their time to enterprise-wide work. Get a mix of representatives from your central content team and content teams from business units for both your governance committee and working groups.



Governance participants should include representatives from different roles and units of the enterprise.

Next, think about the mix of roles participating in governance. Your committee will need representation from three broad categories of stakeholders:

- › Functional executives who are accountable for business objectives that depend on content
- › Operational managers who have oversight of content tasks that will be affected by governance
- › Invited advisors such as legal or compliance officer who have specialized expertise or responsibilities but aren't concerned with all governance topics but should be consulted for certain issues

The executive sponsor should work in a senior role that extensively depends on content to realize their business objectives. While they are not a content specialist, they have a strong interest in the success of content operations. They interact with other executives in the enterprise to evangelize on behalf of content governance initiatives. They, or their designee, will be chair of the committee.

The participants in both the committee and working groups should include functional roles that are responsible for products and services using content. Such representatives will come from business units such as customer service, marketing, or product management. Depending on the enterprise's scope of content, participants might include representatives from partnerships, human resources, or retail operations.

Representatives working in functional roles will be informed about larger issues facing the enterprise that are useful to consider when setting governance priorities:

- › Corporate responsibilities as they relate to governance
- › Business challenges and corporate priorities
- › Forthcoming industry changes

For working groups especially, include participants from operational roles that are directly working with content (content managers, editors, content strategists, content designers) as well as non-content roles involved with content such as IT, social media, SEO, UX, or brand.

Another useful role is a designated legal representative that will review compliance-related standards. Having and following precise governance standards will reduce legal review time.

Governance committee responsibilities

The governance committee is accountable for how well enterprise content is governed and for ensuring that all published content supports the reputation and business priorities of the enterprise as a whole. It acts as an arbiter in any disagreements about what content standards the enterprise should follow.

The committee provides oversight of the working groups that will handle much of the specific work. It also reports to executive stakeholders on their progress and will advocate for the governance program to secure required resources and cooperation.

The committee is responsible for:

- › Deciding on thematic focus areas to develop standards
- › Approving governance proposals
- › Monitoring governance progress
- › Reporting on governance outcomes

The committee will ratify decisions either by voting or by consensus. But for some decisions, certain members may have the final say about the policies or processes directly related to their area of responsibility. Different committee members may have specific accountabilities, for example, acting as liaisons with other enterprise functions or units to get input or concurrence. How decisions and responsibilities are decided will depend on the enterprise's existing organizational culture and process.

Governance isn't a once-and-done project. It needs to be a permanent program that's ongoing and that will evolve. Some organizations draft a charter for the governance committee that formalizes its purpose, authority, and functions. This way, the existence of the governance committee is independent of the person currently serving as executive sponsor. The committee should continue functioning without interruption regardless of organizational or personal changes.

The committee should designate an individual responsible for organizational support for meetings, including minutes, announcements, schedule coordination, and invitations.

Governance requires an organizational structure to happen. We've outlined a generic model that draws on common practices in large enterprises. **Adapt it to meet your enterprise's specific situation.**

8 Making content governance stick

To benefit from a governance program, you need to ensure that people adhere to your policies and procedures. How can you make sure everyone is following your policies and processes correctly?

Your governance might veer off course for many reasons, such as people losing focus, staff turnover, or the emergence of new initiatives that don't get integrated into existing processes. Organizational changes, such as reorganizations or acquisitions, can also disrupt governance practices.

Making governance stick involves knowing how your governance program can drift off course and how to get it back on. You can apply oversight in three main areas:

1. Managing potential risks
2. Preventing errors before they happen
3. Troubleshooting problems

Identifying and managing the risks

What factors might derail your governance program? You need to know what might get in the way of your governance goals. If you don't set up your governance correctly, it will be hard for staff to follow.

Identify sources of risks such as:

- › Poor training relating to governance
- › Uneven oversight of governance
- › Unnecessary complexity in governance policies or procedures
- › Weak executive commitment to governance as a priority

Evaluate each risk and decide how best to remove it. For example, unnecessary complexity can arise when presenting authors with open-ended directions, such as "Provide a good description of your images", or asking questions that rely on subjective judgment, for example, "Will the audience understand this?" Instead, change the instructions so they are easier for authors to follow. Ask simple, closed questions with a verifiable yes/no answer about the action to take.

Everyone who works with content should understand the consequences of not following standards. They should recognize the legal, reputational, and financial risks that can arise when governance isn't followed. Those leading content operations have a responsibility to communicate these risks clearly. Provide specific examples, citing the costs, bad publicity, or the jeopardy posed to important initiatives. Stories about past mistakes made can be a powerful tool to make the consequences tangible.

For example, a failure to follow content maintenance procedures could spark multiple risks. Out-of-date content could be mistakenly republished, which could cause confusion for customers and even trigger formal complaints from regulators that could result in a fine or other sanction. In a different scenario, the failure to archive previously published content could create a legal liability if there's a need to retain previous content for a specified period.

To build support for governance, the content leadership team should routinely communicate the goals and benefits of the governance program, emphasizing the efficiency that's possible when everyone follows consistent practices.

Controls: preventing errors

An essential step to improve governance is making sure the right people with the right understanding and authority are working on the right tasks.

Carefully define which staff can access content or perform tasks. Organize the content into collections based on who needs to use it and set permissions appropriately.

Make access conditional on appropriate training relating to governance. Employees shouldn't be given access or expected to do activities if they haven't received training that provides a clear explanation of what their responsibilities are.

In addition to access controls, enterprises can institute policy and process checks in their operations.

Policy checks will ensure that policies are followed correctly. Some of these checks can be automated. Tools can check if the copy complies with the style guide, accessibility markup is missing, or whether links are broken. Automated tools can flag many errors that might otherwise be overlooked.

When policy checks can't be automated, checklists can support the consistent review of activities. **Your content operations can learn from the work practices of pilots and surgeons, two occupations requiring extensive technical expertise.** Both these professions rely on checklists to remove the risks of errors in their work. Pilots, for example, use a segmented "preflight checklist" to remind themselves of essential checks that must be performed. Checklists may seem pedestrian, but they've proven to increase operational reliability in many domains.

Process checkpoints provide guardrails that can prevent errors from happening. Setting up the right review workflows will ensure that necessary checks happen. These checkpoints should specify:

- › Who to involve, based on their responsibilities and expertise
- › What they need to check
- › What criteria to apply when reviewing activities

For situations that require closer scrutiny, you can include more than one reviewer, inviting comments and suggestions from several perspectives.

Another good practice is to have people cross-check each other's work.

Finally, when using external contractors, you should have adequate oversight in place to ensure outsourced activities are done correctly.

Troubleshooting problems

Content leaders responsible for the governance program should know if their policies and procedures are being followed consistently. If you don't monitor your governance, a big problem could build up. Check in to see how governance is being received in different parts of the organization. Ask how things are going on other teams.

Leaders in charge of governance should be prepared to remedy problems once they're discovered.

When people aren't following governance policies or procedures, it's important to diagnose the underlying causes. In many cases, lapses will be unintentional, such as a lack of awareness or readiness by certain teams. But in some cases, a lack of adherence may signify resistance to governance, such as not considering it a priority or disagreeing with a policy or procedure.

Unintentional problems can be straightforward to fix once the source of the problem is understood. **Focus on any resource gaps that may be blocking adherence.** Some suggested tactics are:

- Doing usability testing of your governance documentation to verify that staff understands it clearly and finds it easy to use.
- Offering different forms of training to increase awareness and understanding, such as videos, lunch-and-learn sessions, or governance-focused roadshows.
- Providing channels where staff can ask questions and get answers.

If you encounter pushback to your governance program, it may indicate that a crucial enterprise stakeholder has not signed on to the goals or obligations of governance. Those responsible for the governance program will need to understand why that is. For example, a group within the enterprise may not have felt adequately represented in the governance development process.

Such problems highlight the value of getting everyone affected by governance to participate in the decision-making process. Various organizational stakeholders have constructive perspectives to contribute. And they should understand how they depend on the content leadership team to provide them with a sound foundation for publishing content.



9 The role of governance in preventing content debt

Content debt is a common problem in large organizations that often goes unrecognized. The presence of content debt reflects the absence of governance.

We've seen how content governance addresses many specific problems and issues relating to content coordination, quality, and effectiveness. Let's look at the broader impact of governance on content operations and why enterprise executives should care about it.

Every organization understands the importance of financial health. They need cash reserves to deal with contingencies quickly and be able to invest in future initiatives. Any debt they have must be manageable with a path to paying it off.

A similar principle applies to content. Organizations need to prioritize their content health by monitoring and managing their content debt.

What is content debt?

In recent years, the content strategy community began focusing on the issue of content debt. The problem they've identified is similar to the technical debt that developers have wrestled with for many years. In the words of the user experience professional Suzanne Chapman, "[web content debt is the new technical debt.](#)" She notes, "the big problem with technical & content debt is that they hold us back from doing new and better things."

Debt demands attention. It's an obligation you owe, which you'll need to pay back in the future. You are operating on borrowed time, and the future eventually catches up with you. And if unmanaged, the burden of debt can become so great that it prevents you from moving forward. The longer it's around, the harder it is to pay off. You can't postpone dealing with it.

"Content debt is the hidden cost of not managing the creation, maintenance, utility, and usability of digital content," says Meridel Walkington, Senior UX Content Strategist at Mozilla, makers of a well-known web browser.

A basic symptom of content debt is when teams feel like they are always behind. They can't dig out. They are weighed down.

- > An array of problems can arise because of content debt:
- > Bottlenecks
- > Compliance failures
- > Conflicts
- > Delays
- > Duplication
- > Inconsistency
- > Quality problems
- > Rework

Yet not all of these problems will be immediately apparent to everyone. Melody Kramer, a communications expert formerly at 18F, the US Government's in-house technology and design consultancy, says that the "buildup of content debt may not be as apparent as technical debt, because it's unlikely to initially cause software to break."

Despite its stealthy profile, the symptoms of content debt are recognizable when you look for them. In the case of one Mozilla product, the "content debt included issues of quality (missed opportunities to communicate value and respond to user questions), governance (varying content quality with limited organizational oversight), and structure (the need for new content types to evolve site design and improve social shares and search descriptions)."

To summarize the dynamics:

- › Content debt is generated when content is produced to meet a momentary need rather than long-term ones.
- › Content debt accumulates because enterprise content isn't developed and maintained with a sound process.
- › The poorly developed content becomes a drag on content operations.

The consequences of content debt can be pronounced and worsen over time. Melody Kramer cautions that “a failure to plan for content-related debt can cause major headaches down the road.”

Some discussions of content debt emphasize the role of individual contributors: their attitudes (such as being in a rush) or abilities (such as not understanding long-term consequences). But **the root source of the problem is the absence of content governance**. When content standards are lacking, content debt is inevitable. Kramer talks about the problems that arise when “no one in the organization thinks documenting processes is in their job description.”

How does governance curb content debt?

Content debt is a by-product of misaligned operations. As we've discussed previously, governance provides direction to enterprise content operations. That helps with two overarching problems.

First, it improves the quality of content, increasing its longevity and making it easier to maintain. Meridel Walkington at Mozilla argues that standards are needed to support content creators. “The quality of that content is dependent in part on how the content system supports those authors in their endeavor... we can make it easier for them to do so with more actionable guidelines, tools, and governance.”

Second, governance promotes the harmonization of different content activities. It encourages teams to think about content as a whole so that it works well together. For example, Mozilla's goal was to “create better content that could be used not only on their product page but across the content ecosystem.”

Governance enables content operations to be aligned at scale. The enterprise isn't reliant on the expertise of a few individuals who know how things should be done. Common standards, developed with wide stakeholder input, guide important tasks. Policies, processes, and content administration provide the tools for enterprises to control content debt.

Policies: No more subjective decisions

Having documented policies and guidelines will preempt staff from making consequential decisions about content based on their personal opinion or by copying a past practice they noticed without knowing if it's right.

Policy standards clarify the basis of decisions, so they are uniform over time and among various teams. By consulting a policy or guidelines, different people will make decisions that are consistent.

For Mozilla, guidelines give authors "clearer requirements, explain why each content field mattered and where that content showed up, and provide them with examples."

Process and procedures: No more winging it

When common processes are lacking, the coordination and reliability of content operations suffer. Having standard processes and procedures removes the tendency to do work in an ad hoc, poorly managed way.

Without a standard process, the US Government's 18F consultancy found that "tasks might be completed by staff without any kind of written documentation. Others might over-rely on the institutional memory of individuals."

Relying on the institutional memory of individuals ("Do you remember how we did this last time?") is not a viable way to curb content debt. Enterprises need agreed and documented processes and procedures.

Content administration: No more siloed systems

Enterprise content debt is also a consequence of content teams relying on separate systems that aren't connected. Assorted tools and systems operate in silos, making content operations fragmented. Various teams will adopt different practices, and it's hard for teams to coordinate activities with one another.

Adopting common enterprise settings for the systems supporting content operations will boost efficiency and consistency. One critical element in this setup is the enterprise content model, which provides a common structure for content that allows pieces created by different teams to work together. Mozilla's Meridel Walkington observes: "Creating a content model takes quite a bit of information and input upfront, but it pays dividends in the long-term, especially when it comes to addressing and preventing content debt."

Governance as a path toward content maturity

Content debt can build up over many years, holding back the maturity of your content operations.

A governance program provides a systematic approach to overcome accumulated debt. Enterprises can prioritize the problems that hold them back and develop standards to address them. The more extensive the scope of enterprise content governance and the more widely it is followed, the more mature content operations will become.

Enterprises can use governance to transform their sometimes-sprawling content operations, so they no longer are an obstacle in the way of their ambitions. Governance strengthens operational capabilities, enabling enterprises to achieve more with their content.

10 Additional resources

Books

Kristina Podnar

The Power of Digital Policy: a Practical Guide to Minimizing Risk and Maximizing Opportunity for Your Organization (2019)

Lisa Welchman

Managing Chaos: Digital Governance by Design (2015)

Tool

[Kontent.ai](#)

About Kontent.ai

Kontent.ai's mission is to help the world's leading organizations achieve an unparalleled return on their content. In the industry's first AI-powered CMS, content teams plan, create, and optimize content and deliver it to any channel—quickly, securely, and flexibly. Kontent.ai is designed to support organizations with exacting governance requirements, often in highly regulated industries and with complex content value chains.

Tight permissions control all operations; enterprise-grade security and privacy keep content safe. With a demonstrated ROI of 320%, Kontent.ai customers, including PPG, Elanco, Zurich Insurance, Cadbury, and Oxford University, benefit from a measurable step change in how their teams operate, increasing content velocity, mitigating risk, and maximizing yield. Kontent.ai is a Microsoft partner, MACH Alliance member, and recognized vendor by Gartner and Forrester. Learn more at: kontent.ai.

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