

Project Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Project manager interviews mix questions about how you actually run a project (planning, budgeting, governance) with behavioural questions that test how you handle conflict, risk and pressure. For construction or IT-heavy roles, expect at least one scenario question that checks judgement when a project is going off track.

- **Process:** How you approach core PM tasks: scoping, scheduling, budgeting and reporting.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of managing stakeholders, resolving conflict or recovering a troubled project.
- **Scenario:** A hypothetical delivery problem to test judgement and prioritisation under pressure.
- **Governance:** How you run steering committees and keep sponsors informed without overwhelming them.

Most PM interviews open with a walk-through of your project management approach and certifications, move into two or three behavioural questions with a panel member probing for specifics, then close with a scenario question and a chance for you to ask about the project pipeline and team structure.

1. Walk me through how you'd set up a new project from initial scope to an approved plan.

Why they ask

Tests whether you have a repeatable, structured planning process rather than an ad hoc approach.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: describe each stage in order (scope definition, stakeholder identification, schedule and budget development, risk planning, sign-off) and note the tools you'd use at each step.

Example answer

"I'd start by confirming scope and success criteria with the sponsor, then identify stakeholders and set up a RAID log early so risks are captured from day one. I'd build the schedule in MS Project, working backwards from the required delivery date to identify the critical path, then develop the budget against that schedule. Once I have a draft plan I'd run it past the steering committee for sign-off before baselining it, so everyone agrees on scope, schedule and budget before work starts."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a stakeholder who disagreed with your project's direction.

Why they ask

Stakeholder management is one of the core general skills for this role and conflict is common on multi-party projects.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result, focused on how you moved the stakeholder from disagreement to alignment.

Example answer

"On one project a department head disputed the priority I'd given his team's deliverable, arguing it should come earlier in the schedule. I set up a one-on-one to understand his reasoning, then modelled the schedule impact of moving his item earlier and shared it with him directly rather than debating in the group forum. He accepted the trade-off once he could see the flow-on effect on other workstreams, and we kept the original sequencing without the disagreement resurfacing at steering committee."

3. A key vendor tells you, two weeks before a milestone, that they can't deliver on time. What do you do?

Why they ask

Scenario question checking how you prioritise, communicate and protect the schedule when a dependency fails.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state your immediate priority, the actions you'd take in order, and how you'd communicate the impact to stakeholders.

Example answer

"My first step is understanding the real cause and revised timeline from the vendor, not just accepting the delay at face value. I'd then check the critical path to see if the milestone slip actually threatens the end date or if there's float to absorb it. If it does threaten the date, I'd look at options: reallocating internal resources to cover part of the gap, resequencing non-dependent tasks, or negotiating a partial delivery. I'd update the risk register immediately and brief the sponsor before the steering committee meeting rather than waiting for the scheduled update, so there are no surprises."

4. How do you decide what goes into a steering committee report and what stays at the working level?

Why they ask

Governance is a named task for this role, and sponsors need signal, not noise.

How to structure your answer

Process explanation: describe your filtering criteria and give a concrete example of something you escalated versus something you handled at team level.

Example answer

"I keep steering committee reporting focused on scope, schedule, budget and risks that need a decision from the sponsor, using a simple RAG status against each. Day-to-day issues that the team can resolve, like a minor task resequencing, stay in the weekly team stand-up. For example, when a vendor delay threatened a milestone, I escalated that immediately because it needed a resourcing decision only the sponsor could make, but I didn't escalate the internal task reshuffling I used to absorb a smaller two-day slip."

5. Tell me about a project that went over budget or behind schedule. What happened and what did you learn?

Why they ask

Tests honesty about setbacks and whether you can extract a genuine lesson rather than deflect blame.

How to structure your answer

STAR with an explicit reflection step at the end: situation, task, action, result, then what you changed in your approach afterwards.

Example answer

"On one project the budget blew out because I'd underestimated the effort required for a specialist integration task, having relied on the vendor's early estimate without independently checking it. Once I identified the gap I renegotiated scope with the sponsor to protect the delivery date rather than the budget, since the date mattered more to the business. We delivered on time but over the original budget, and the lesson I took from it was to build in a contingency line for any task with a single external estimate, which I've done on every project since."

6. How do you keep a project on track when you're managing multiple competing priorities across several workstreams?

Why they ask

Time and deadline management is core to the role, and larger programs often run several workstreams in parallel.

How to structure your answer

Process explanation with a specific example: outline your prioritisation method, then illustrate it with a real instance of trade-offs you made.

Example answer

"I keep a single master schedule so I can see dependencies across workstreams rather than managing each one in isolation, and I review the critical path weekly to spot where slippage in one stream will actually affect the others. On a recent project two workstreams both needed the same specialist resource in the same week. I looked at which task sat on the critical path and reassigned the resource there first, then negotiated a short deferral on the other task with its owner, which kept the overall delivery date intact."