

Geospatial Professional Network

GIS Leadership: Projects and Priorities

Summary

Setting priorities brings the inherent challenge of putting one project in front of or behind another. Whether discussing competing priorities, resource limitations, stakeholder expectations, or organizational change, leaders must be able to communicate honestly while preserving trust and relationships. This fact sheet summarizes the strategies for managing projects, priorities, and expectations. These tips come from a May 2026 webinar.

Key Message

If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. Be clear about what is critical and make a plan.

Core Leadership Concepts

Project, prioritization, and scoping conversations are challenging

- Geospatial professionals often struggle to explain the value of GIS because they focus on the tools rather than the outcomes.
- Stakeholders generally care less about maps and applications than they do about improving operations, reducing risk, saving time, or making better decisions.
- Many organizations operate in environments where every project is considered urgent.
- Transparent prioritization helps reduce conflict and provides teams with a clear path forward.

Consider:

- Which project creates the greatest organizational value?
- Which aligns most closely with strategic goals?
- What can realistically be delivered with current resources?

Be honest about:

- Capacity limitations
- Resource constraints
- Risks and tradeoffs
- Project timelines
- Organizational priorities

Management Checklist

- ☐ Use clear communication. Avoid acronyms and jargon of any type
- ☐ Listen before proposing solutions
- ☐ Assess available capacity
- ☐ Align request with strategic goals
- ☐ Position GIS as part of the solution
- ☐ Gain leadership support for decisions

Expectations Checklist

Instead of saying "no," try:

- ☐ Clarifying the true need
- ☐ Offer phased solutions
- ☐ Deliver the minimum viable product
- ☐ Provide options and alternatives

Memorable Insights

1. Clear communication is kind and builds confidence, trust, and stronger working relationships.
2. Geospatial professionals often struggle to explain the value of GIS because they focus on the tools rather than the outcomes. Stakeholders generally care less about maps and applications than they do about improving operations, reducing risk, saving time, or making better decisions.

Focus Areas: Strategic Planning • Organizational Capacity • Workforce Development • Governance • Visual Management • AI Readiness

Participants: Dena Cross, Liz Parrish, Megan Compton, Tim Nolan, and Matt Gerike