Category

Data & AI

Data Governance & Stewardship Playbook (Policies, Roles, Processes)

A practical model for standing up real data governance with named roles and decision authority, starting from your most disputed data domains.

- Practitioner
- Intermediate
- Template Included
- Workshop Ready

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- 27 September 2023
- 7 minute(s)

Overview

Stop governance from being a policy PDF nobody reads. Assign real owners, stewards, and custodians to your ten most-disputed data domains and give the council authority to actually resolve conflicts.

What's the real difference between a Data Owner and a Data Steward?

The Owner is accountable — usually a senior business leader whose name is on the outcome if the domain's data is wrong — while the Steward is responsible for the day-to-day work of maintaining the definition, chasing quality issues, and representing the domain in council discussions. One person can occasionally hold both roles for a small domain, but they shouldn't be conflated for anything business-critical.

We already have a data governance committee — how is this different?

Most existing committees meet, discuss, and adjourn without documented authority to actually resolve a dispute. The difference here is the charter explicitly grants the council decision-making power, with a defined escalation path if it can't reach agreement — that authority is what turns a meeting into governance.

How much time does the steward role really take?

Budget roughly 10-15% of a role's time for an active domain — enough to review incoming issues, maintain the definition document, and represent the domain at council meetings. Treating it as unpaid extra work on top of a full workload is the most common reason

steward assignments quietly fail.

Do we need a dedicated governance tool or platform to run this?

No — a shared document, a simple intake form, and a regularly scheduled council meeting are enough to start. A dedicated governance platform becomes useful once you're managing dozens of domains with complex lineage, but it's not a prerequisite for the first ten.

How do we handle a data domain that spans multiple business units?

Assign the Owner to whichever business unit depends on the domain most heavily or bears the most risk if it's wrong, and give the other affected units a seat on the council as Consumers with a voice in the definition — but only one accountable Owner, to avoid the same conflict this playbook is meant to resolve.

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Talk to our data governance team

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