

Defining Exit Criteria

What actually proves a deal has moved



Six stages. Four of them are pipeline.

**Our stages tell us where a deal sits.
They don't tell us whether it's real.**

Our six stages, and the gates as written today

1	Discovery & Scoping	GATE 1 · Requirements gathered with end user stakeholders
2	Proposal / Quote	GATE 2 · Solution defined and vendor quotes confirmed
3	Present Proposal	GATE 3 · Executable quote received & reviewed by client
4	Approval Pending	GATE 4 · All legal & contract items resolved
5	Approval Received	GATE 5 · User Acceptance Testing complete
6	System in Production	GATE 6

Every one of these gates is a label. None of them is a test. That's what today is for.

Four stages of pipeline in a six-stage costume

1 - 4

Still at risk

The deal is being won or lost. Nothing is decided. This is where our time goes today.

5

Won

Signed. Now a delivery question: UAT, acceptance, install.

6

Delivered

In production. A support and expansion question, not a sales one.

Why it matters

- Our forecast is built on four stages, not six, so coverage, slippage and accuracy all live in 1 through 4.
- There is no qualification stage. Every deal is born in Discovery, which means unqualified deals count as pipeline from day one.
- Stages 5 and 6 still need gates, but they're delivery gates. We'll name them and take them offline.

A label describes. A test decides.

"Requirements gathered with end user stakeholders"



Gathered by whom? Verified how? I could claim this right now on every deal I own.

"Solution defined and vendor quotes confirmed"



Defined to whose satisfaction? Confirmed, and valid until when?

"All legal & contract items resolved"



Which items? Owned by whom? Due when?

A criterion a rep can talk their way past isn't a criterion. It's a suggestion.

Every criterion we write today passes all three

1

VERIFIABLE

Is the evidence outside the rep's head?

An artifact. A named person. A calendar entry. A date. If the only proof is “yeah, we did that,” it isn't a criterion.

2

BINARY

Can you half-pass it?

“Budget discussed” is a mood. “Budget confirmed at \$X from [source], available [when]” is a fact. If two of us can disagree, it isn't written yet.

3

PREDICTIVE

Does passing it make the deal more likely to close?

Activity is not evidence. “Demo delivered” predicts nothing. Criteria that measure our effort instead of their commitment are how pipelines get fat.

Three tests. Five criteria per stage, maximum. More than five and we triage silently, which means we each pick our own bar, which is where we started.

GATE 1 “Requirements gathered with end user stakeholders”

✗ VERIFIABLE? No. There is no artifact. The rep is the only witness.

✗ BINARY? No. One requirement or twenty? One stakeholder or the room?

✗ PREDICTIVE? No. You can gather perfect requirements from someone with no budget and no authority all day long.



STAGE 1

Discovery & Scoping

The gate today

“Requirements gathered with end user stakeholders”

Discovery & Scoping

20 minutes, together and then in breakout rooms

What evidence proves Discovery is actually done? It has to exist outside your own head.

6 min

Main room. Open discussion.

What does “done” actually look like on a Discovery call? First ideas go up on screen together.

9 min

Breakout rooms. Three or four each.

Land on your top three. Name a scribe and a reporter before anyone starts talking.

5 min

Back together. Argue.

Rooms report. Every candidate goes against the three tests. We land on five.

Everything lands in the shared doc, not the chat. Breakout chat does not come back with you.

Which version would we actually enforce?

TOO LOOSE

“Discovery call completed and notes logged in Salesforce. Client says the current system is painful.”

REALISTIC

“Economic buyer and technical owner named in SFDC. Pain quantified in their numbers. Compelling event with a date. Budget status confirmed. SA engaged and has confirmed the deal is scorable.”

TOO RIGID

“Signed requirements document, a CFO-validated ROI model, and executive sponsor sign-off before any solution work begins.”

The rigid one is the trap. It isn't wrong, it's unenforceable. So it gets ignored. And one ignored gate teaches the room that gates are optional.

The realistic bar: mandatory to exit

✓	Two names, two roles	The technical owner (Dir. Engineering, Post Supervisor, CTO) and the person who releases the money. In our world these are never the same human.
✓	Pain, and what doing nothing costs	Their number, not ours. Operator hours lost hunting for assets. Missed delivery windows. Extended support fees on EOL gear. An archive nobody can monetize.
✓	A dateable compelling event	EOL/EOS on storage or MAM. Facility build or move. Season start. Standards migration. Archive refresh. ATO deadline. Federal FY close.
✓	Budget source and status	Do we have the amount? The status. Capex allocated this FY? In a bid cycle? Aspirational? Federal: is there a vehicle?
✓	SA engaged, says it's scorable	A second signature the rep can't forge. It also makes SA time a gated resource rather than a free good.
INTERNAL CLOCK Date SA requested → date SA engaged.		

If nobody can name a date, there is no deal

**“They want to modernize” is not a compelling event.
“Their MAM goes end-of-support on March 14” is.**

Our clients live on calendars. Use them.

Storage array or MAM version hits EOL / EOS

Facility build, move, or consolidation

Season start (sports has the hardest dates in our book)

Show or title delivery deadline

Standards migration (SDI → IP, HD → UHD/HDR)

Archive / LTO tape refresh cycle

Security accreditation or audit deadline

Federal fiscal year close, September 30

No forcing function, no forecast date. A deal without a date floats, then slips, and we call it execution.

Stages 2, 3 and 4. Fifteen minutes.

ROOM 1

Stage 2

Proposal / Quote

ROOM 2

Stage 3

Present Proposal

ROOM 3

Stage 4

Approval Pending

The rules

- One AE and one SA in every room. If you agree instantly, one of you isn't talking!
- Scribe and reporter named in the first thirty seconds. Your five criteria go in the shared doc, in your room's section.
- Five criteria maximum. Every one of them passes verifiable, binary, predictive. At least one puts a clock on us, not on the client.
- Test it backwards: would this gate have failed on a deal we closed last quarter? Then it's wrong.

Report out: the other two rooms' job is to break your gate. "I could pass that on a dead deal. Here's how."



2

STAGE 2

Proposal / Quote

The gate today

“Solution defined and vendor quotes confirmed”

Which version would we actually enforce?

TOO LOOSE

“Quote built and sent to the client.”

REALISTIC

“Client confirmed scope in writing. BOM reviewed. All vendor quotes in hand and valid past target close. Deal reg approved. Margin approved. Delivery confirmed capacity.”

TOO RIGID

“Full engineering design, rack elevations and integration test plan complete before pricing.”

This is the closest of our six gates to workable, and it's still the one where most of our slippage lives. “Defined” has no owner. “Confirmed” has no expiry date.

The realistic bar: mandatory to exit

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ✓ | Client confirmed scope in writing | An email is fine. Cheapest rework prevention we have. It kills the “we quoted the wrong thing” loop that costs two weeks. |
| ✓ | BOM reviewed, not just drafted | Reviewed by a named second person. Drafted is a verb about us; reviewed is a checkpoint. |
| ✓ | Vendor quotes valid past target close | Not “received.” Valid through a date later than the day we plan to close. Expired quote = re-quote = two weeks = slipped quarter. |
| ✓ | Deal reg + margin approved | Both before the number goes to the client. Approval after the fact is how a deal gets re-priced in Stage 3 and loses a month. |
| ✓ | Delivery confirmed capacity + lead time | If we're promising an install window, someone who owns installs has to have said yes to it. Long-lead items flagged with real dates. |

INTERNAL CLOCK

Quote requested → quote delivered. Two fields. Nothing else here will tell us more.

Two date fields settle an argument we've been having for a year

QUOTE REQUESTED

The day the AE asks



QUOTE DELIVERED

The day it lands

Whatever the gap turns out to be, we win

If it's eleven days

and we're promising clients three, then this was never an execution problem, and no amount of forecast discipline was ever going to fix it. We fix the process instead.

If it's two days

then the slippage genuinely is downstream of the quote, and we've retired the excuse permanently. Which is worth just as much.

We are not measuring people. We're measuring the gap. Right now nobody in this room can prove which answer is true.



STAGE 3

Present Proposal

The gate today

“Executable quote received & reviewed by client”

Which version would we actually enforce?

TOO LOOSE

“Proposal delivered to the client.”

REALISTIC

“Walked through live with the economic buyer present. Client confirmed fit. Price reaction captured. Procurement path documented. MAP agreed. Next meeting on the calendar.”

TOO RIGID

“Written confirmation of shortlist position and competitive standing.”

“Presented” is something we do. A proposal emailed into a void satisfies this gate and predicts nothing. This is the stage where deals go to sit.

The realistic bar: mandatory to exit

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| ✓ | Walked through live | Sent ≠ presented. With the economic buyer in the room. If it was emailed, the gate isn't met until the review has happened, not until it's booked. |
| ✓ | Client confirmed the fit | Their words, captured. Not our read of the room. |
| ✓ | Price reaction captured | Either within budget, or a documented objection with a named path. Silence on price is not acceptance. It's usually a competitor. |
| ✓ | Procurement path documented | Who cuts the PO. What it needs (W-9, insurance cert, vendor onboarding, sole-source memo, three-bid). How long it takes at this account. |
| ✓ | Next meeting on the calendar | With a date. With the buyer. This is the single highest-leverage anti-slip criterion that exists. |

INTERNAL CLOCK Days since last buyer-side interaction. Over 14 in this stage → the deal auto-flags for review.

No scheduled next step, no forward stage

A deal in this stage with no next meeting on the calendar isn't stalled. It's lost and hasn't told you yet.

Worth arguing about

Should this be an exit criterion, or a survival criterion?

If a deal can't hold a next meeting, does it belong in the stage at all, let alone move forward out of it?

Where does the MAP land?

The gate isn't "we built a MAP." It's "they engaged with it and pushed back on one of our dates." A MAP the client never argued with is a document we wrote to ourselves.



4

STAGE 4

Approval Pending

The gate today

“All legal & contract items resolved”

This gate governs the exit. Nothing governs the entry.

Right now, “Approval Pending” accepts deals we haven't won yet.

The fix is one sentence

ENTRY CRITERION · The client has selected CHESA.

- “Approval Pending” means we won the decision and are processing paper.
- It does not mean we are waiting to hear. If we're still competing, we're in Stage 3. Full stop.
- This one move probably fixes a meaningful share of our forecast accuracy on its own, because a still-competitive deal sitting in a late stage is exactly what a bad forecast looks like.

Which version would we actually enforce?

TOO LOOSE

“In legal. Waiting on paperwork.”

REALISTIC

“Client has selected CHESA. Every remaining step has an owner and a date. The approval body's meeting date is known. Redlines with named counsel. Close date tied to that calendar.”

TOO RIGID

“Signed LOI or written commitment letter before the deal may enter the stage.”

“Waiting on legal” is not a status. Whose legal? Which redline? By when? A stage full of deals nobody can date is a forecast built on hope.

The realistic bar: mandatory to exit

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| ✓ | Client has selected CHESA | Entry criterion, not exit. We are processing paper, not waiting to hear. |
| ✓ | Every step has an owner and a date | Legal review, security review, exec approval, procurement cycle, funding release. Not “waiting on legal.” |
| ✓ | The approval body's meeting date | If their capital committee meets the third Tuesday monthly, the close date is a function of that calendar, not of our quarter-end. |
| ✓ | Redlines with named counsel | Both sides named. Or confirmation that no redlines are coming. |
| ✓ | Close date derived from an event | Not from a quarter. Federal: vehicle confirmed and required documentation submitted. |

INTERNAL CLOCK Date sent to CHESA legal → date returned. If “legal takes forever” is true, it belongs in the data, not the anecdotes.

Delivery gates: named today, built offline

5

Approval Received

- ENTER: signed agreement or PO in hand, countersigned, booked.
- EXIT: UAT signed off by the client against acceptance criteria, which were written back in Stage 2, not invented during UAT.

6

System in Production

- As-builts delivered. Support / managed services handoff complete. Warranty start date set.
- Commercially: expansion conversation logged, referral asked for. This is the only pipeline lane nobody in this room resists.

One question we have to settle offline

Where does “Closed Won” actually sit: PO receipt, countersignature, or booking? If Finance and Sales answer that differently, the forecast is broken in a way no exit criteria can fix.

This one goes both directions, or it doesn't go

AEs commit to

- Evidence, not assertion. Every gate backed by something outside our own heads.
- Discovery at the depth the SAs actually need to scope without a second call.
- A compelling event with a date, or the deal doesn't count as pipeline.
- Close dates derived from the client's calendar, not from ours.

SAs and TSM commit to

- Scoping turnaround: ____ days from request.
- Quote turnaround: ____ days from complete request.
- Margin approval turnaround: ____ days.
- And to saying no early when a deal isn't scopable, rather than slowly.

Numbers, not intentions. Blanks get filled in this room, today.

A one-directional standard is a compliance exercise, and we will all treat it as one. A two-directional standard is an agreement.

What we leave with

1

Five criteria per stage

Mandatory, not aspirational. Anything beyond five gets triaged silently, and then we each pick our own bar again.

2

Two new date fields

Quote requested. Quote delivered. These two alone justify the ninety minutes.

3

The turnaround numbers

Filled in, by the people who own them, out loud.

4

One owner and one date

Who builds this into Salesforce, and by when.

Criteria that live in a deck are a workshop. Criteria that live in required fields are a process.

ACTIVITY

Same three tests, one level up

Stage tells us where the deal is. Forecast category tells us what we're willing to promise. Two different judgments. Right now we use one to do the work of the other.

1

What would the right criteria be for putting a deal in PTF outside the quarter?

2

When do you put a deal in best case or commit after PTF?

Same rules. Verifiable, binary, predictive. If a rep can argue their way into commit, it isn't a category. It's an opinion.

We are writing tests, not descriptions.

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