Phase 1: Strategy & Governance (Before Building)

Step 1: Define Goals & Scope

- **Questions:**
  - **Overall Business Goals & Success (Primarily for Management/Leadership):**
    - Why are we doing this? Beyond the business case, what is the single most important outcome you expect from this new SharePoint repository?
    - How does this project directly support our broader company goals, especially regarding the planned expansion?
    - What specific problems mentioned in the business case (e.g., inefficiency, scalability, knowledge loss, compliance risks) are most critical to solve from your perspective?
    - One year after launch, what tangible changes or results will tell you this project was successful?
    - How will we measure success? (e.g., time saved searching, faster onboarding, improved audit results, user satisfaction scores?)
    - What happens if we *don't* do this project, considering the anticipated growth?
  - **Priorities & Trade-offs:**
    - If resources or time become constrained, which goals are non-negotiable, and which could be deferred?
    - What's the acceptable balance between standardization/control and team flexibility?
  - **Current Pain Points & Needs (Primarily for Department Reps / End Users):**
    - **Daily Work:**
      - What are the biggest frustrations you currently face when finding, sharing, or collaborating on documents?
      - How much time do you estimate you/your team spends searching for information?
      - Can you give examples of using outdated information or duplicating work because the correct document couldn't be found?
      - What types of documents are hardest to manage or find right now?
    - **Collaboration:**
      - How do you currently collaborate on documents with colleagues (inside and outside your team)? What works well? What doesn't?
      - Do you need to share documents with external partners, clients, or vendors? How do you do that now, and what challenges exist?
    - **Future Needs:**
      - Thinking about the company's growth, what new types of documents or information will your team need to manage?
      - What tasks related to documents (e.g., approvals, reviews, notifications) take up significant time and could potentially be automated?
  - **Functional Requirements & Scope (Mix of Stakeholders):**
    - **Content Scope:**
      - What specific types of documents *must* be included in this new system from Day 1? (e.g., policies, contracts, project plans, SOPs, financial reports, HR forms)

            - Are there specific documents or data sources that should be explicitly *excluded* from the initial scope? Why? Example: Security, compliance, privacy
            - Where does the content we need to include currently reside? (Network drives, local PCs, existing Teams, etc.)
            - Roughly, what is the volume of documents we're talking about for your department/area?
        - **Organization & Finding:**
            - How do you logically group the documents your team uses? (By project, client, document type, status, date?)
            - If you could wave a magic wand, how would you ideally search for or filter documents? What key pieces of information (metadata) would be most helpful? (e.g., Department, Status, Client, Project ID, Review Date)
        - **Lifecycle & Compliance:**
            - Are there specific rules about how long certain documents must be kept (retention)?
            - Are there documents that require formal review or approval processes? Describe them.
            - Do any documents contain sensitive or confidential information that requires stricter access control?
    - **Technical Considerations (Primarily for Technical Staff/IT):**
        - **Current Systems:**
            - Besides file shares/PCs, what other systems currently store documents that might need integration or migration consideration?
            - Are there technical limitations with current storage we need to be aware of (e.g., file path limits, unsupported file types)?
        - **Integration & Automation:**
            - Are there opportunities to integrate this repository with other systems (e.g., CRM, ERP) either now or in the future?
            - From a technical standpoint, what are the requirements for potential workflow automation (e.g., using Power Automate)?
        - **Security & Access:**
            - How is access to sensitive data currently managed? What are the requirements for the new system?
            - What are the technical requirements or constraints regarding external sharing?
            - Are there specific compliance standards (e.g., data privacy, industry regulations) that dictate technical security controls?
    - **User Experience & Adoption (Mix of Stakeholders):**
        - **Ease of Use:**
            - What would make this new system easy for you/your team to use daily?
            - What concerns do you have about moving to a new system?
        - **Training:**
            - What kind of training or support would be most helpful for learning the new system?

Step 2: Establish Governance

- **1. Roles & Responsibilities**
  - **Questions:**
    - Who will have overall administrative control of the SharePoint Online environment (SharePoint Administrators)? What are their specific responsibilities?
    - Who will be responsible for defining and enforcing these governance policies across the organization? Will there be a cross-functional Governance Committee?
    - How will we handle training and support for Site Owners and end-users regarding their responsibilities?
    - Who within each department or major functional area (like HR, Finance, Projects) should be designated as the primary owner(s) for their respective SharePoint sites (Site Owners)?
    - What responsibilities should Site Owners have (e.g., managing site permissions, organizing content within their site, requesting sub-sites, ensuring content relevance)?
    - Who determines who gets 'Member' (contribute/edit) versus 'Visitor' (read-only) access within a specific site? Should this be the Site Owner?
  - **Industry Standard Suggestions:**
    - **Clearly Defined Roles:** Define and document distinct roles like SharePoint Administrator(s), Governance Committee/Lead, Site Owner(s), Site Members, Site Visitors.
    - **Documentation:** Document these roles and responsibilities clearly in a central governance policy document.
- **2. Site Creation Policy**
  - **Questions:**
    - Should we allow users (or specific groups like Site Owners) to create their own new sites (Team Sites or Communication Sites), or should all site creation requests go through a central approval process (e.g., IT)?
    - If requests are needed, what information should be required in a site request (e.g., purpose, owner, intended audience, data sensitivity)?
    - What criteria determine if a new site should be created versus adding a library to an existing site?
  - **Industry Standard Suggestions:**
    - **Controlled Approach (Recommended):** Often involves a request form and approval workflow managed by IT/Governance to ensure consistency, proper Hub association, and avoid sprawl.
    - **Limited Self-Service (Alternative):** Allow specific trained users to create sites from predefined templates, requiring strong guidelines.
    - **Leverage Hub Sites:** New sites should generally associate with a relevant Hub Site.
    - **Templates:** Utilize site templates for consistency.
- **3. Naming Conventions**
  - **Questions:**
    - Do we need a standard format for naming SharePoint Sites (e.g., `Dept-Purpose`, `Project-CodeName`)? What should it be?

        - Do we need standard naming conventions for Document Libraries within sites? If so, what logic should they follow?
        - Should we establish guidelines or standards for filenames (e.g., using the structure proposed in the "Possible file Naming Structure" document)? How strictly should this be enforced?
        - How will we document and communicate these naming conventions?
    - **Industry Standard Suggestions:**
        - **Sites:** Use short, meaningful names; avoid spaces/special characters in initial name for cleaner URLs. Consider prefixes/suffixes (e.g., `Dept-Purpose`). Consistency is key.
        - **Libraries/Lists:** Names should clearly indicate content (e.g., `Contracts`, `SOPs`). Keep names reasonably concise.
        - **Files:** Consistent filenames can help, but metadata is primary. Avoid special characters and spaces (use `_` or `-`). Keep paths under the 400-character limit.
        - **Documentation:** Document chosen conventions clearly.
- **4. Lifecycle Management (Initial Outline)**
    - **Questions:**
        - Are there any immediate, known requirements for how often certain types of content should be reviewed for accuracy or relevance?
        - Do we have initial ideas about when different types of content become obsolete or can be archived?
        - Are there types of documents that should *never* be deleted, or types that have mandatory deletion timelines?
        - Who is responsible for identifying and acting on outdated content within specific sites?
    - **Industry Standard Suggestions:**
        - **Enable Versioning:** Turn on major/minor versioning for key libraries with reasonable limits (e.g., 10 major/minor).
        - **Start Simple:** Define basic expectations for content review (e.g., annual review by Site Owners).
        - **Plan for Purview:** Acknowledge more formal automation will likely use Microsoft Purview later. Gather initial requirements now.
        - **Define Archival:** Consider dedicated Archive locations for inactive content if needed.
- **5. Permissions Strategy**
    - **Questions:**
        - Will we primarily use Microsoft 365 Groups or SharePoint Groups for managing access?
        - What is our default stance on breaking permission inheritance? Should it be avoided unless absolutely necessary and documented?
        - How strictly do we need to enforce the principle of least privilege?
        - Who should handle access requests for sites where a user doesn't have permission?
        - Do we need different permission levels beyond the standard Owner/Member/Visitor?
    - **Industry Standard Suggestions:**
        - **Use Groups:** *Strongly recommended.* Assign permissions primarily to Groups, not individuals.

        - **Least Privilege:** Grant only the minimum necessary permissions.
        - **Maintain Inheritance:** Leverage permission inheritance where possible; break only when necessary and document why.
        - **Standard Levels:** Use default levels (Owners, Members, Visitors) primarily.
        - **Access Requests:** Configure the Access Request feature, usually directed to Site Owners.
- **6. External Sharing Policies**
    - **Questions:**
        - What is the business need for sharing documents or sites with people outside our organization?
        - Should external sharing be enabled by default, disabled by default, or allowed only for specific sites?
        - What level of sharing should be allowed (e.g., view only, edit)? Should anonymous links be permitted?
        - Should external sharing permissions expire automatically after a certain time?
        - How will we monitor or audit external sharing?
    - **Industry Standard Suggestions:**
        - **Balance Security & Collaboration:** Avoid disabling entirely if needed; configure securely instead.
        - **Tenant & Site Level Controls:** Set tenant level permissively, restrict specific sites as needed.
        - **Prefer Authenticated Sharing:** Favor methods requiring external users to sign in.
        - **Restrict 'Anyone' Links:** Use anonymous links cautiously, enforce expiration/passwords if used. Disable for sensitive sites.
        - **Domain Filtering:** Consider allowing/blocking specific domains.
        - **Default Expiration:** Set a default expiration period for external links.
        - **Regular Review:** Implement processes to review external access.
        - **User Training:** Educate users on safe sharing.

Step 3: Choose Site Topology (Hub & Spoke Model Recommended)

- **1. Identifying Potential Hubs**
    - **Questions:**
        - Looking at our organization's structure, what are the major logical groupings (departments, functions, regions, major programs) where related information/teams could cluster?
        - Which groupings need a shared identity (common navigation, branding)?
        - Are there large initiatives or core functions needing a central 'Hub'?
        - What broad categories make sense as central 'portals' for navigation?
    - **Industry Standard Suggestions & Examples:**
        - **Common Hub Groupings:** Department (HR, Finance), Function (Projects, Legal), Region (NA, EMEA), Major Programs.
        - **Purpose of Hubs:** Provide shared navigation/branding, roll up news/activities, enable cross-site search within the Hub.
        - **Keep it Relatively Flat:** Hubs don't nest. Plan a relatively flat structure of major organizational pillars.

        - **Consider the Home Site:** Your main intranet landing page might be a Hub or sit above them.
- **2. Planning Associated Sites within Hubs**
    - **Questions:**
        - For each potential Hub, what specific, distinct topics, teams, projects, or services need their own dedicated site connected to it?
        - Is the site's primary purpose **broadcasting** information (few creators, wide audience)? (Suggests **Communication Site**)
        - Or is its primary purpose **collaboration** within a group (most members contribute)? (Suggests **Team Site**)
        - Should existing Microsoft Teams sites connect to these Hubs?
        - Within a Hub, do smaller distinct teams need their own private Team Site?
    - **Industry Standard Suggestions & Examples:**
        - **Communication Site (Broadcast):** Use for Department Portals, News centers, Knowledge Bases, Event sites. Typically has few authors, many readers.
        - **Team Site (Collaborate):** Use for Project Teams, Department Working Teams, Committees. Most members contribute. Often connected to M365 Group/Teams.
        - **Modern "Flat" Approach:** Prefer creating separate sites for distinct purposes and connecting to a Hub, rather than deep subsites.
        - **Example (HR Hub):** Might have `HR Portal` (Comm Site for all employees) and `HR Team Collaboration` (Team Site for HR staff).

Phase 2: Information Architecture (IA) Design (The Blueprint)

Step 1: Identify Content Categories

- **Questions:**
    - What are the main categories or types of documents your team works with regularly?
    - How do you currently group or classify these documents?
    - Looking at the suggested Document Type abbreviations, which apply? Any major types missing?
    - Are there documents with very different lifecycles, security needs, or associated information?
- **Industry Standard Suggestions & Examples:**
    - **Think Broadly First:** Brainstorm major categories (Policies, SOPs, Project Plans, Reports, Contracts, Forms, Presentations, etc.).
    - **Use Existing Structures as Clues:** Current folder structures can hint at perceived categories.
    - **User-Centric:** Group content in ways that make sense to users.

Step 2: Map Categories to Sites/Libraries

- **Questions:**
    - Looking at the draft Site Topology and Content Categories, where does each category logically belong? Consider owner, audience, collaboration needs.
    - **Example:** Should "Company-Wide Policies" be central or departmental?

    - **Example:** Where do "Project Status Reports" primarily reside?
    - How to handle categories relevant across multiple departments/Hubs (central store? search?)?
    - Based on sensitivity, should certain categories be restricted to specific sites/libraries?
- **Industry Standard Suggestions & Examples:**
    - **Align with Ownership/Audience:** Content usually lives on the site owned by primary creators or for the primary audience.
    - **Central vs. Decentralized:** Consider if a single authoritative source is needed (e.g., central Policy Center) vs. departmental/team storage.
    - **Leverage Hubs & Search:** Avoid excessive duplication; rely on Hub navigation, search, and links for discovery across related sites.
    - **Dependency:** *Finalizing this mapping requires the Site Topology (Phase 1, Step 3) to be agreed upon.*

Step 3: Design Document Libraries

- **Questions:**
    - Is the default "Documents" library sufficient for a given site, or are additional libraries needed?
    - **Permissions:** Do distinct document groups need fundamentally different access controls within the site?
    - **Metadata/Content Types:** Are the metadata needs for different document types planned for this site so different that separate libraries would simplify management?
    - **Volume:** Is an extremely high volume (>100k files) anticipated for a specific category, suggesting a separate library?
    - **User Experience & Views:** What are the most common ways users need to see documents filtered, sorted, or grouped within key libraries?
    - **Specific Processes:** Does a subset of documents need a dedicated library for a specific workflow, records process, or template storage?
- **Industry Standard Suggestions & Best Practices:**
    - **Start with Default:** The default library might be enough for simple sites if Content Types/Views are used well.
    - **Reasons for Multiple Libraries:** Distinct Security Needs; Significantly Different Content/Metadata; Anticipated High Volume; Specific Functionality/Workflow.
    - **Avoid Over-Splitting:** Don't create too many libraries if metadata/views in fewer libraries achieve the goal.
    - **Design Useful Views:** Plan key Views using metadata for sorting, filtering, grouping. Tailor views to user tasks. Keep the default view clean.
    - **Consider 5k Threshold:** Be aware of the 5,000 item list view threshold for views relying on non-indexed columns, though modern SharePoint handles it better. Filters on indexed columns are key.
    - **Versioning:** Plan to enable versioning.

Step 4: Define Metadata (incl. Site Columns, Content Types, Managed Metadata)

- **Questions:**

    - For each major Content Category, what are the 3-5 most important pieces of information needed to find, filter, sort, or understand it?
    - How do you distinguish between different documents of the same type? (e.g., by Client, Project, Date, Status, Department?)
    - Are specific dates important to track? (e.g., Effective Date, Review Date?)
    - Is there a 'Status' associated? Should it be a standard list?
    - Does the document relate to a specific Department, Project, Client, etc.? Should these be from a predefined list?
    - Which metadata needs to be consistent across multiple libraries or sites?
    - Which fields require a controlled list of options?
    - Do certain sets of metadata fields always go together for a specific document type?
- **Industry Standard Suggestions & Best Practices:**
    - **Be Purposeful:** Define metadata that aids findability or drives processes. Aim for essentials first.
    - **Use Site Columns:** Define reusable fields as Site Columns for consistency.
    - **Use Content Types:** Group related Site Columns into Content Types (e.g., "Contract", "SOP"). Associate document templates. Create a Content Type per major category. Manage centrally if needed.
    - **Use Managed Metadata:** Use the Term Store for standardized, centrally managed taxonomies across sites (Departments, Regions, Statuses). Allows synonyms, hierarchy, easier updates.
    - **(Also relates to Step 5 below) Minimize Folders:** Rely on Metadata and Views for organization, not deep folder structures. Keep folders shallow (1-2 levels max) if used at all.

Step 5: Minimize Folders

- **(Suggestions covered under Step 4: Define Metadata)**
    - Rely on Metadata and Views for organization and retrieval, not deep folder structures.
    - If folders are used, keep them shallow (2-3 levels max) and primarily for broad categorization or unique permissions if absolutely necessary.