

A Quick Guide to Project Management

In this factsheet, Mark Brown, editor of [One in Four](#) and Open Up Initiative lead for the One in Four conference, takes you through the key principles of good project management.

In this factsheet...

1. Work out what you want to happen
2. Work out what you need to make it happen
3. Work out what you already have and work out what you need to get hold of
4. Work out what the steps are and work out when they need to happen
5. Work out your strengths and weaknesses
6. Work out how you will make decisions
7. Work out what might go wrong
8. Get things moving
9. Keep everything on track
10. Be prepared to change how you do things

The golden rule: Your project management should never be more complicated than your project!

Step 1: Work out what you want to happen

Set goals (for example: say how you want your project to raise awareness, such as through organizing an event, or writing a report) and identify possibilities. Every project needs to know exactly what change it wants to make happen and how it will know if that change has been achieved.

Step 2: Work out what you need to make it happen

Move from an idea to practicalities. If you don't know how something will happen, the chances are that it won't happen. If you are organising an event, for example, think about all the different things you will need to arrange – such as raising funds, finding and booking a venue, making a flyer, booking speakers, arranging catering etc.

Step 3: Work out what you already have and work out what you need to get hold of

Every project needs resources. Resources can be people, time, money, knowledge, management or contacts. A project that doesn't have a realistic idea of what is needed will find it far harder to meet its goals. Overestimating what you need is just as problematic as underestimating.

Try making a list of what you need and what you have: be as realistic as you can. You may be able to get some things that you need through contacts and local organisations without the need for cash.

Step 4: Work out what the steps are and work out when they need to happen

A project that isn't broken down into tasks and stages is a project that won't get done in time. Work out what the main areas of work are and the main events that need to happen. Then work out what needs to happen first.

People often worry about deadlines and avoid them – but this is the worst thing you can do. You need to work towards a fixed endpoint – work back through the project to identify key stages and when they need to be done by. It can help to draw up a timeline. Then, if you find you don't have enough time to achieve everything in the time available, you can change the endpoint straight away.

Step 5: Work out your strengths and weaknesses

Being honest about what you and your team are good and bad at helps you to see where your project may have difficulties. Being honest about how well you are and what you might need help with (and when) is extremely important.

Work out where your gaps are and see how you can fill them. In this way you can be prepared for any upcoming challenges and your own challenges. For example, you may have no experience of working with the media: how will you get hold of this expertise? You may be able to tap into another project or organisation for help with this or find some training for a member of your group.

Some people work best at certain times of the year or have regular periods of distress. Being honest about this can help your planning. One of the risks to a project of this kind is that someone could become unwell, causing the whole project to fall apart. Hopefully some early planning and honesty with each other will help you all to avoid this happening.

Step 6: Work out how you will make decisions

Some meetings are great – but too many meetings can make a project impossible. It's important to work out how a decision will be made when you need to make it. Often the real world doesn't wait for you to organise a meeting. It is important for you to know when you need to get everyone together and how you will communicate when you don't meet.

One of the key points is managing your meetings well: list your action points and who is going to do what, and then review them at the next meeting. In this way, it is clear who is responsible for different actions and it is also clear when a problem arises.

Step 7: Work out what might go wrong

Most of us can't see the future, but we can make sure that we have some idea of the challenges our project might face and how we might overcome them (see Step 5). If your project involves organising an event, this means having back-up ideas for a venue and speakers in case your first choices don't work out.

In your meeting, you can try asking the question 'what if?' against each action point to identify potential problems. One of the advantages of doing this is that it might avoid having to arrange another meeting if you come up against a problem.

Step 8: Get things moving

Changing your plan into action can be frightening, especially when it comes to working out who will do what and by when. It begins to become more real! One of the most important things you

can do is to make sure the right person is doing the right job. This can be difficult and may involve some sensitive decisions, but is important if you want to achieve your goal.

Step 9: Keep everything on track

Meetings should help you do two things. They should help you to see what has been done and to see what needs to be done next. Remember, anything in a meeting that isn't followed by a series of actions remains an idea.

Remember that your project is both the thing that you are doing and the people who are doing it. Conversations are different from meetings but are no less important. Communicating well with people between meetings is vital to the success of your project. Some people prefer emails, some prefer the phone and some prefer face to face contact.

Step 10: Be prepared to change how you do things

Even the best planned project will encounter unexpected problems – and also unexpected opportunities. The best plans are flexible and respond to events as they happen. Your plan should be the scaffold that helps you build something, not a cage that traps you.

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