

Project Management Plan: 5 Steps to Organizing and Managing any Project



A project management plan is a must-have for anyone with project-based work to do. Following a project management plan will help you reduce stress while producing quality work. Project management is a lot like taking a journey. You have some idea of where you want to go, but you're unsure what steps will get you there. As with any trip, project management becomes a snap when you invest a little planning time up front.

1. MAP: Set up your project management plan

The first step to creating your project management plan is starting a roadmap. Try examining the project and asking a few simple questions:

- What are my goals? What end result am I trying to accomplish?
- What is my deadline?
- Who will I need to include in this project?
- What supplies / resources will I need to get this done?

This is a grounding exercise that is designed to help you get a basic idea of what this project will require of you. This is the important foundation for your project management plan. You will now find it a lot easier to break these "big picture" ideas into smaller steps to follow.

2. ORGANIZE: Keep your project paperwork organized

The key to any successful journey is organizing your travel paperwork – a project is no different. Just as you do with your hotel reservations, plane tickets and tourist brochures, you need a system for storing all of your project files in one location so you never have to waste time searching. Like travel paperwork, project files are temporary. These files will only be used until the project is completed. Assign a separate drawer or hanging file box for your project paperwork. Of course, the best possible project organizing system is portable so that you can take them with you wherever you go on.

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3. IMPLEMENT: Put your project management plan into action

They say that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step – and the same is true of your project. You have to start somewhere. The creation of your Project Management Plan should always be the first on your list. Maybe your second step will be working out a schedule or drawing up a list of tasks. Or perhaps you want to have a meeting to brainstorm with your team. Don't spend too much time worrying about exactly which step to take – any move forward is a good one. You may feel stuck at the beginning of your project, but just getting started often provides the momentum you need to keep you moving in the right direction.

4. RECOGNIZE: Pay attention to progress with your project management plan

Most long journeys actually involve a series of smaller trips, stopping to see this site or visit this town along the way. This is also how a project management plan works. Every project, no matter how large, is just a series of smaller tasks – and your job is simply to figure out what those tasks are. Each one of these steps constitutes a “milestone” which gets you a little closer to your end goal. While you never want to lose sight of your final destination, your project will be a lot less overwhelming if you simply focus on your next milestone (bit sized is always easier to swallow!) Once you accomplish that task, move to the next – in no time, you will find that you have systematically worked your way to the end of the project.

5. COMPLETE: Make sure you are meeting your project management plan deadlines

On any journey, you have some idea of how long you plan to spend in each location and when you will need to arrive at your next destination. The same is true while executing your project management plan, but instead of scheduling from your departure date forward, you will schedule from your arrival (or deadline) date backward. Ask yourself when each previous step must be completed for the next step to happen on time, as well as how long each step will realistically take to complete. These can each be plugged into your calendar. This will help you to create a schedule you can live with, allow you to see progress along the way, and prevent a lot of last-minute rushing (which keeps your stress levels down).

With a project management plan and the steps above you should be well on your way to many successful and enjoyable project management experiences.

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