How to Plan Good Projects

The Project Plan

Every project is different. But the questions you need to answer to plan your project well are mostly the same. Make a record of your plan to remind you of what you need to do and why you need to do it.

- What problem will your project help fix?

- What will change if your project works?

- How you will measure success or show the project made a difference?

The "problem" for a research project may be that we do not know enough about something. If a research project works, we will know something we did not know before. For a demonstration or "try it out" project, the change is in what people know or do or think or feel.

Next, fill in the who, what, where, when and how of the project. Start with who will take part in the project. These are the people you try things out with or get information from. It is usually not just the project team.

- How many people do you want to include?

- Where will they come from?

- What kind of skill or experience do they need to have?

- How will you find them?

- What will they do in the project? (Will they listen to something? Watch? Ask questions? Role play? Answer questions? Read something?)

- Where will it happen?

- When will it happen? How long will it take?

For each one of your answers, you should be able to say why you picked that answer. Each answer affects how much time your project will take and how much it will cost. If the project gets too big, you will feel overwhelmed and scared to do it. If the project is too small, you may not be able to show that it can make a difference in people's lives.

Do a step-by-step list of all the activities or things you have to do to carry out the project. For each step, say what materials, equipment, and space you need to do that step and how much extra they will cost.

Try to figure out how much time it will take to do each step. Add in extra time in case things go wrong. For example, it will take more time than you think to make phone calls, because you may have to phone people back a few times if they are not in.

If you work in a team, you will have to work out who will do which jobs. For each activity, figure out what skills a person needs to be able to do that job. Does the person need to be able to

- read well?
- write?
- use a computer?
- speak clearly?
- work on their own?
- get around town on their own?

When it is time to decide who will do what jobs in the project, it is important to pick someone who

- has the needed skills,
- is interested in that job, and
- has the time to do the job.

Sometimes people are interested and want to help out with everything, but they do not have the know-how to do some jobs, even with good instructions. Find the person a partner who can help get the job done well, or give that job to someone else.

Decide what kind of information you will gather and plan how you will make sense of it.

The last step is to ask "What can go wrong?" For each problem, work out *now* how you can prevent it or deal with it. Teams need a plan for what to do if team members do not agree about something.

Once you have done these things, go back over your plan and make any changes so you have the best chance to succeed.