

This document was prepared by Rtr. Bhuwan K.C. for E-course on Project Management. This document introduces participants to identify the processes through which a plan is implemented and monitored.

Project Management

E-Course
MODULE 2

2007

Role of the Project Coordinator

Introduction

In this module, you will identify the processes through which a plan is implemented and monitored. You will gain an understanding of those factors that are essential to the smooth implementation of the project, such as developing a timeline, monitoring expenditure and training staff and volunteers. At the end of this chapter, you will have an operational plan with statements of responsibility for key positions and 'milestones.'

The role of the Project Coordinator

The role of the Project Coordinator is to ensure that the project is successful and the SMART objectives of the project are met. Job statements or position descriptions hint at the requirements of the role. It would be useful to analyse your own or someone else's position description. You will probably find the following requirements useful.

The Project Coordinator:

- ✓ Has a vision that he or she can share and develop with the project team;
- ✓ Communicates clearly;
- ✓ Recognises the need for all project members to have good communication skills and provides opportunities for them to develop and practice those skills;
- ✓ Is experienced at setting objectives which are relevant and appropriate to the context;
- ✓ Is skilled in developing a work plan that allocates resources, sets a schedule and arranges for the various equipment needed for the project;
- ✓ Is able to state what he or she expects from the performance of each member of the team, clearly and concisely;
- ✓ Monitors the progress of the project and is able to communicate this to the funders, team members and members of the community; and
- ✓ Monitors the performance of individual team members against the work plans and agreed outcomes.

From your reading and analysis, you will begin to gain an idea of what is expected for a Project Coordinator to be successful. However, these sources rarely indicate there are many unforeseen problems involved in fulfilling the role and being a successful Coordinator.

Project Coordinators must first accept that nothing is certain and that there are likely to face new challenges week-to-week. A common challenge is confusion among volunteers/staff as to the objectives of the project. This may happen because:

- ✓ Of cultural differences;
- ✓ Members of the project team may not be as familiar with the project as the project coordinator;
- ✓ The limits and context of the project have not been explained clearly; or



- ✓ There are misinterpretations of various aspects of the project by members of the team.

Secondly, Project Coordinators should acknowledge that there is more than one way of achieving an objective. Although it is important to set the ground rules for action, there is no need to be dogmatic about a particular way of achieving what the project has been established to achieve.

Third, Project Coordinators must trust their partners, colleagues and members of the community. This does not mean that you accept what they say and do without question, but rather begin with the assumptions that:

- ✓ Everyone acts in good faith;
- ✓ You can anticipate what might go wrong and discuss this with the relevant people;
- ✓ There is an atmosphere of openness to discuss what has gone wrong and be prepared to negotiate how it might be put right; and
- ✓ Strive for tolerance – everyone’s ideas and opinions should be respected, and the Project Coordinator should facilitate an atmosphere where all are welcome.

The fourth guideline is to be patient — understand the importance of accepting things as they come. Also, remember everyone can make a contribution to the project; Project Coordinators should facilitate this instead of just attempting to put their own mark on the project.

The fifth is to be frank, to have the courage to speak out and discuss problems and issues, particularly those that may lead to a conflict situation.

Managing a project or managing resources

Textbooks usually explain that these days a Project Coordinator is more likely to be concerned with managing resources than with completing a project. This is often because of the concern for ‘accountability’, being able to demonstrate that resources allocated to the project – usually from external sources – have been used in the way the funders intended. There are three types of resource that a Programme Coordinator will be responsible for. These are: time, money and people.

Managing time as a resource

The most valuable resource the project team has is time. You cannot retrieve wasted time and you cannot save up time when you are not very busy to use when you are overworked. Evans Musonda, from Zambia, noted in his report on the Child Rights Project that some time was lost waiting for participants in the first phase of the project, but this was not a problem in the second phase. It is essential to plan out your use of time and the activities related to the project. One of the common complaints people make when they are asked to plan out their time for the next few weeks is that the planning takes away their independence and makes the work predictable. It is true that planning takes away the thrill of arriving at work and deciding what to do for the day. But at the same time, planning and timetabling remove the likelihood of unpleasant surprises.



Begin by making a project wall chart

This is a good activity to do with all of the members of the project team, as it shows everyone the complexity of the management task. You will need to record the entire key reporting dates for the project:

- ✓ Community meetings;
- ✓ Accountability reports for funders;
- ✓ Team meetings;
- ✓ For sending invitations to community members;
- ✓ Writing reports;
- ✓ Sending out agenda papers for discussion, etc.

You will also need to record all of the milestones of your project and then fill in the steps that it will take to get to these milestones. Next, it will be important to think about your communication strategy. Once you have plotted the milestones, you can tentatively plan for ways to publicize the project when newsworthy events are expected. You can also mark the dates when you will send newsletters to project members and others. Finally, you should think about recruitment of volunteers and skills training and mark these on the project plan, so that everyone understands the knowledge and skills they need to be effective in the project.

A project wall chart is a great way to keep track of the timeline for the project. When you first fill in the dates, you may find that you need to adjust your activities, so that you do not have several crucial activities falling in the same week (unless that is your intention).

Once you have an overall timeline, you can look to the development of work plans for each project member, by identifying key responsibilities for the activities recorded. The creation of the timeline, coupled with the objectives, gives you the priorities for the project for each week.

Setting your priorities

You will also need a mechanism to set priorities for each day or week. The key to this is to distinguish the important from the urgent. The important is always something on your agenda, while the urgent is often something on someone else's agenda. In an ideal world, you will manage a project so that there is never anything urgent to attend to. You will know about the deadlines and will have made arrangements to meet them. But in the real world, often someone will make a demand on your time that you had not foreseen.

Remember that the fact that someone asked you (or told you) to do something at once does not mean that you have to do it. Some principles for making decisions regarding priorities are:

- ✓ If it's important and urgent, it's a task you should do immediately.
- ✓ If it's not so important to the project, but urgent and ought to be done, then you should delegate it to someone else or do it yourself in your spare time.
- ✓ If it's not really important to the project at all, no matter how urgent the other person says it is, you may need to make the decision not to do it. In this case, you need to think seriously about the consequences of not doing the task.



- ✓ If it's important and not urgent, it's a task you can plan for and either schedule for yourself or delegate to someone else.
- ✓ If it's not important and not urgent, you again need to ask yourself whether you should do it at all.

Reporting on use of time

Writing a report on what you and the project team have achieved is another way of reporting on how you have used your time. Holding regular meetings, where someone records the main events and progress as well as the major difficulties, is as important as keeping the balance sheet for income and expenditure. And if you have not managed to keep to the timeline, you will need to analyse the reasons and be transparent in reporting your findings. It is usually helpful to distribute the minutes of each meeting to members afterwards, so they can refer to what was discussed and their responsibilities.

Managing money as a resource

One of the most common statements in the evaluations of IYP sponsored projects is that "limited financial resources," meant that a project could only be implemented to a limited extent.

One of the golden principles in project management is: Don't spend money that you don't have. The promise of funding is not good enough. My grandmother used to say, *"Promises about money are like pie crust, easily broken."*

As Project Coordinator, you are accountable for the money and other resources with which to complete the project. Someone must be responsible for managing the finances of the project, either you or someone given that specific responsibility of treasurer. It is important to set up proper bookkeeping processes, so that expenditure never exceeds income. It is also important to establish some basic principles of financial management from the beginning.

For example, if you have a cheque account at the bank, two people should countersign every cheque and complete the cheque stub for every transaction. If you use cash to pay for supplies, you should have an internal agreement about the largest amount you can spend on a cash purchase without consulting the project team. This is often referred to as petty cash. In some organizations in Sydney, Australia the limit for petty cash is \$50 a week; any purchases that will cost more than this must be delivered with an invoice.

Some organizations demand all members approve a large purchase before hand. Cash payments should be recorded in a cashbook, with the date, the name of the person requesting the cash, the purpose and the amount. You should always get some kind of receipt for payments you have authorised and keep them in an agreed place. Ideally, your bank will provide you with a statement for the account every month, which you can reconcile against your own accounts book. Your funders will expect you to make financial reports on a regular basis.



Managing people as a resource

One of the major challenges for a Project Coordinator is to manage people, so that they contribute in the most effective way they can to the project. People are important resources for a project, bringing knowledge and skills as well as physical, spiritual and emotional strength. But managing them does not mean treating them as pieces of equipment, ready to do a job. They are also colleagues and friends or, at the very least, people who share a common interest.

Establishing principles and guidelines

Principles for managing staff as a resource are as important as principles for managing money. In the same way that most organizations have a cash book, many organizations use a 'day-book' where paid staff and volunteers record their time of arrival and departure, the tasks they undertook and the successes or difficulties they faced that day.

Most organizations also have some way for a manager to communicate with a project team member about their job performance. They also have policies about absences for reasons of sickness or for cultural or religious obligations, or about just taking a holiday.

Your role as Project Coordinator is to establish these principles and make sure all project members are aware of them. One of the best ways to make sure that all project members, including volunteers, are aware of the principles and expectations, as well as their role in the project, is to provide them with a job description and to organise an induction process. An induction process should ideally be a face-to-face meeting with all team members, and the development of a training reference manual or hand out. The advantage of the face-to-face meeting is that project members get to meet others whom they might not otherwise interact with, helping to build a sense of unity. The advantage of a training reference manual is that project members can read it when they have time and can refer to it when they have problems or questions.

Having basic principles in place will make it easier to manage the people in the project team. Having friends and colleagues in your project team poses a particular challenge.

Your colleagues can be your allies or they can turn into your rivals. Respect for them and their concerns are vital. Just because you know them well and perhaps have worked together before does not mean that you can take for granted the amount of work they will do or make assumptions about how they will react. Consultation is important, and so is showing your trust in them by giving them appropriate responsibilities, if they are willing to take them.

We all need feedback and constructive comments about the way we are doing our work and meetings with the project team and with individuals should be part of the on-going work of the Project Coordinator.

Developing relevant knowledge and skills

Training is essential to ensure that everyone involved in the project can play their part effectively, and time for training should be scheduled into the project timeline and into people's work patterns. It should not be considered an 'extra,' either by you as manager, by paid members of the project team or by



volunteers. Training in skills that may be used in other projects may be one of the ways in which volunteers can be effectively rewarded for their time.

The learning that comes from involvement in a project is one of the most important outcomes of any community-based project. But training sessions are important in formally building knowledge and understanding. It is usually fairly straightforward to identify the knowledge and skills people will need to undertake specific tasks in the project. For example, in a project to minimise the impact of waste disposal on a community, the project team will need to know about the specific health risks to the community, may need to speak in public or write press releases, and/or know how to remove safely and dispose of particular kinds of waste. They may also need to learn other skills, such as how to conduct formal meetings, liaise with public officials, begin developing a longer-term plan, or maintain financial records for a project.

For the above example, training could include hosting a guest speaker from a local NGO who discusses the health risks waste poses with team members and holding a half-day “communications retreat” where members are trained in public speaking and how to write press releases. Training is most effective when the new knowledge and skills can be put into practice straight away. Your timeline will have helped reveal when training sessions should be scheduled.

The Project Coordinator may delegate someone to document the training sessions and their immediate outcomes. But in a small project, everyone is aware of the effectiveness of other team members. Project team meetings may be effective ways for the Project Coordinator to be fully aware of the performance and progress of team members.

Monitoring the progress of the project also involves being aware of the people involved in the project team and their development.

For the less formal training—the learning by experiencing and doing—it is equally important to plan rather than to treat it as an after thought. Project team members need to know in advance that opportunities are available to take part in certain activities, so that they can consider how they can best take advantage of these opportunities.

Managing Volunteers

Many people in the nonprofit sector face the challenge of managing volunteers. As much as volunteers are helpful, it can be difficult to keep them accountable and responsible, not least because they are unpaid. Common problems include lack of reporting to the Project Coordinator, lack of interest and/or motivation and inadequate skills. Additionally, Project Coordinators often have problems supervising a large group of volunteers. Because volunteers tend to have a high turnover rate (meaning, volunteers usually work temporarily before being replaced by another volunteer), constant retraining is needed and this requires time and resources. To minimize the time spent on training, it is helpful to have a manual that can be given for use to incoming volunteers. The manual can be lent out rather than given to keep. In this way, volunteers can easily become familiar with the project and what is required of them without needing too much attention from the Project Coordinator.

Solutions for Challenges when Working with Volunteers:



- ‘Developing and Managing Volunteer Programs,’ an Internet Library Topic with links to volunteer management websites. www.mapnp.org/library/staffing/outsrcng/volnteer/volnteer.htm
- The Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) is the international professional membership association for individuals working in the field of volunteer resources management. Their website still provides non-members with links to useful websites and lists of publications specializing in managing volunteers. <http://www.avaintl.org/index.html>

Resolving conflicts

Conflicts will often arise in situations where people work together to reach a common goal. Resolving conflict can be one of the most challenging demands made on a Program Coordinator. Probably the important principle in any group situation is to ensure that individuals never criticize or verbally attack another project team member, but rather that they make their criticism in terms of the idea or the action of that person and that the criticism is never demeaning. So, a project team member would not say: “Sandhya is stupid”, or even “Sandhya’s idea is stupid.” But rather, “Sandhya’s way of folding the flyers is not effective, because you can’t see the most important information after the flyer is folded and the folded flyer is too big to go in the envelope.”

Rewarding people

Paid project employees and volunteers should be involved as far as possible in the operational decisions about the project, at least as it affects them. Volunteers may have agreed to work without financial reward, but everyone likes to feel that their contribution is valued. Thanking everyone for his or her role is important. There may be other ways of ‘rewarding’ volunteers and you should consider what might be relevant in your context.

Conclusion

The role of the Project Coordinator is crucial. However, it is important to remember that the Project Coordinator is only one member of a team. Successful projects are those where the Project Coordinator has coordinated the skills and abilities of project members to support achievement of project objectives, where tasks are fairly delegated and responsibilities are clearly stated. They also are those where time and money have been used effectively to meet the objectives of the project.



Appendix A

Sample Job Description

(Research Officer)

Rotaract club of Kathmandu Metro is a club for 18-30 year-olds that fosters leadership and responsible citizenship, encourages high ethical standards in business and social sector, and promotes international peace and understanding. It is voluntary service club which is sponsored by Rotary club of Kathmandu Metro.

The club is going to start a project entitled “If not now, then when” to raise awareness among school level youths on sexual health, HIV/AIDS and gender. Activities generally associated with project will be workshop and formation of Action Clubs. The key aims of project are:

- a) To provide accurate information about reproductive and sexual health issues including HIV/AIDS
- b) To explain how to use their knowledge about sex and reproductive health in day to day life
- c) To explore possibilities of the participants so that they can make a significant change in society through their own efforts

The main job to be performed by research officer would be (a) to conduct research on core subject matters of workshop (b) to prepare a curriculum for the workshop, (c) to monitor and evaluate activities of project (d) to prepare reports of project in monthly basis. The research officer should be in constant touch with project manager and update him in day to day basis.

The research officer holds key responsibilities so he/she should able to contribute 12-15 hours of work every week.

The research officer should possess following virtues:

- a) Should have excellent written and oral English
- b) Should have done research works in related field previously
- c) Should be able to use word and excel programs of Microsoft Office Package
- d) Should be competent and accountable

