Ten project management tips from sustainability project managers

About this guide

Project management is an extremely important factor in determining the success of a sustainability project. This guide has been developed to help council sustainability practitioners manage their sustainability projects.

This guide defines project management, why it is important and provides ten practical project management tips from project managers who have received funding from the NSW Environmental Trust under its Urban Sustainability Program.

The guide also provides information on project management courses that have been recommended by local government sustainability officers.

What is project management?

Project management is a formalised and structured method of managing change in a rigorous manner. It focuses on developing specifically defined outputs that are to be delivered by a certain time, to a defined quality and with a given level of resources so that planned outcomes or benefits are achieved. (http://www.egovernment.tas.gov.au)

Why is project management important?

There has been an increased accountability requirement on Local Government to have a greater focus on effectiveness and efficiency in the way business is conducted. Project management can support the achievement of project and organisational goals, as well as give greater assurance to stakeholders that resources are managed effectively.

Applying a formalised project management framework, or methodology, to projects can help with clarification of, and agreement to, goals, identifying resources needed, ensuring accountability for results and performance, and fostering a focus on final benefits to be achieved.

Research by Roberts and Furlonger indicates that 85 - 90% of projects fail to deliver on time, on budget and to the quality of performance expected.

The causes include:
- Lack of a valid business case justifying the project
- Objectives not properly defined and agreed
- Lack of communication and stakeholder management
- Outcomes/benefits not properly defined in measurable terms
- Lack of quality control
- Poor estimation of duration and cost
- Inadequate definition and acceptance of roles (governance)
- Insufficient planning and coordination of resources

Project Management Courses:

There are a large number of project management courses available and relevant to local government. Too many to list them all. However a number of courses have been recommended to LGSA by local government project managers. These include:

• "Introduction to Project Management". Institute of Public Administration Australia NSW (IPAA)
http://www.nsw.ipaa.org.au

• "Developing Project Management Expertise". Australian Public Service Commission
http://www.apsc.gov.au/

• "Introduction to Project Management Concepts and Techniques". Local Government and Shires Association of NSW, Learning Solutions http://www.lgsa.org.au/events-training/courses-staff

If you have recently attended a project management course that you would like to see added to this list please email sustainability@lgsa.org.au

Ten project management tips from sustainability project managers:

1. Project planning should take into account Councils strategic goals, systems and timeframes.
2. Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the project team.
3. Assess project risks before beginning your project.
4. Make the most of internal council expertise.
5. Involve your community in your project from the beginning.
6. Ensure you communicate and promote your project successes.
7. Don't forget to sustain yourself and your project team.
8. Use project reporting as a reflection and monitoring tool.
9. Document key agreements and decisions
10. Plan for the future by embedding sustainability into council core business.

Local Government Association of NSW

Shires Association of NSW

Project Phase	Top Tips from USP project managers	Examples, tool and templates:
1. Planning	Project planning should take into account Councils strategic goals, systems and timeframes.	Plans that challenge key processes may result in resistance and ultimately undermine the outcomes of the project.
2. Governance	Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the project team.	Use terms of reference documents to guide project steering committees.
3. Risk management	Assess project risks before beginning your project.	Use a risk management template e.g. Tasmanian Government template http://www.egovernment.tas.gov.au/project_management
4. Working with internal stakeholders	Make the most of internal council expertise.	Set up a cross-disciplinary project team. Don't forget to include staff at the operational level who have on the ground expertise.
5. Working with the community	Involve your community in your project from the beginning.	Incentives can significantly increase community engagement.
6.Communication and promotion	Ensure you communicate and promote your project successes.	Using stories and 'snapshots' from early adopters or champions inspire others. Expressing project outcomes in terms of return on investment is one way to promote your results to the community.
7. Building your capacity	Don't forget to sustain yourself and your project team.	Regularly revisiting the ultimate objectives of the project can help to keep you motivated. Invest in professional development opportunities. Celebrate successes.

8. Project administration	Document key agreements and decisions	There have been several instances where verbal agreements have fallen through during the life of the project. It is important to get written contracts in place early on.
9. Monitoring and evaluation	Use progress reporting as a reflection and monitoring tool.	Progress reports should be used to better inform your project. Take the time to check whether you are on track to meeting your intended outcomes.
10. Planning for the future	Plan for the future by embedding sustainability into council core business.	Use your sustainability project as an opportunity to create lasting change. Can you integrate sustainability into councils management plans, job descriptions and induction training? Make sure your project processes are as self sustaining as possible. Don't forget about succession planning! Staff turnover (especially in multi-council projects) is a big problem for project continuity and effectiveness.

More information:

If you have additional examples to add to this guide or if you require any assistance in taking any of the following actions, please contact the Sustainability Team on (02) 9242 4000 or email sustainability@lgsa.org.au