# On A Roll

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OUTLINING THE KEY STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT ROLLOUT

Let’s say your company has decided to embark on an exciting new adventure. The pilot tests have been completed, the budget has been approved, and everyone is excited and ready to go. You are part of the team that will help guide the rollout to successful completion. Now what?

As the project manager for the facilities portion of the project, what questions should you be asking? How do you develop an achievable timeline? What is involved? Where do you start? The purpose of this article is to help you with the planning and implementation steps that will lead you to success.

DEVELOP A PROJECT PLAN

First things first, develop a project plan. A project plan is a document that contains a project scope and objective. It is critical to establish a clearly defined scope and understanding of the project goal.

As you develop your project plan, consider using a Gantt chart template, which is available through most spreadsheet or project management software packages. Develop the Gantt chart by dividing the project into the following:

• Major components

• Tasks

• Sub-tasks

Create a progress bar for each task. The bar should be in line with the name of the task and should have a start date and an end date. Note that task bars can overlap to indicate that certain tasks will be happening at the same time.

The beginning of some tasks may be dependent on a previous task being completed. In this case, they should be connected with a line and arrow from the end of the first task to the beginning of the next.

DEFINE THE PROJECT TIMELINE

Follow the "critical path" to define the project timeline. This technique involves carefully examining all of the moving pieces of the project plan, looking at how each piece is dependent on each other and calculating the time frame from start to finish. Be realistic in the development of your timeline. You don't want to over promise and under deliver!

To determine the expected completion date, it is best to work backward from that date, defining critical lead times for specific tasks. For example, let's say the project is a rollout of multiple pieces of equipment for a cook-line remodel. Consider the following:

• Look at each piece of equipment. What is the lead time from purchase order to delivery? Can the equipment manufacturer meet your demand?

• Think about your installation workforce. Do your installation partners have enough crews to perform the work?

• Are there holidays that affect the schedule?

• Are there other company initiatives that need to be taken into consideration?

Once you have developed the schedule, be sure that your schedule aligns with the goals of the project and the other stakeholders. You may ask, what other stakeholders? This group might include:

• Operations

• Purchasing

• Marketing

• Finance

COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communication is essential to the success of any project. Work with all members of your team to establish a standardized communication method.

For example, hold weekly meetings or conference calls. These should be led by one person and have a very clear agenda. The leader should publish an outline of the meeting well in advance to give participants time to prepare. Soon after the meeting, the leader—or some other designated person—should send a follow-up email with notes from the meeting so that there is a clear understanding of what was agreed to and expected from all participants. In between weekly meetings or calls, you can have scheduled email communications to stay in touch.

Early in the project, take the time to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the players with whom you are working. A vendor partner who exhibits some weaknesses may need additional time and communication from you. You don’t want to wait until it is too late to recover. Establish consistent calls and updates, either on a weekly basis or as often as needed.

WEEKLY PROJECT STATUS REPORTS

Status reports are useful tools on many levels. They ensure follow-up on critical tasks, hold your team accountable and help gauge performance against the timeline. In addition, a weekly report is an effective way to inform stakeholders and management of any problems or delays. Of course, it's vital to ensure that the status reports are effective. Be sure to deliver them consistently and in a timely manner. Establish when the reports will be available, and stick to the schedule. Make them clear and concise, with only mission-critical details. At the same time, ensure they are informative and honest. As each report is sent, be prepared to answer questions.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Challenges will emerge. Common examples include weather delays, equipment delivery issues or damage, and illness. The challenge is to mitigate those risks as quickly as possible in order to recover.

Consider ways you can prepare for the unknown. Can equipment be shifted from another location that is further down the schedule? Can you bring in another crew? Can you talk to your stakeholders to determine the risk of delaying the installation?

Picture this: The project is rolling along smoothly, the results from the rollout are incredible and you have been asked what it would take to finish the rollout several months ahead of schedule. Before you get wrapped up in the enthusiasm, take a breath and redevelop the project plan. You will be thankful that you did.

Now that you have some insights on successful project management, my hope is that you can use these pointers on your next large project and bring it home with success.

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