How to implement a research project

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on behalf of the European Association for Palliative Care
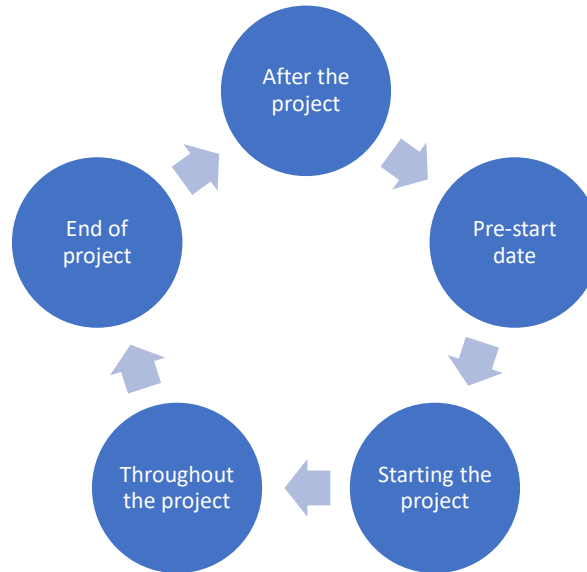

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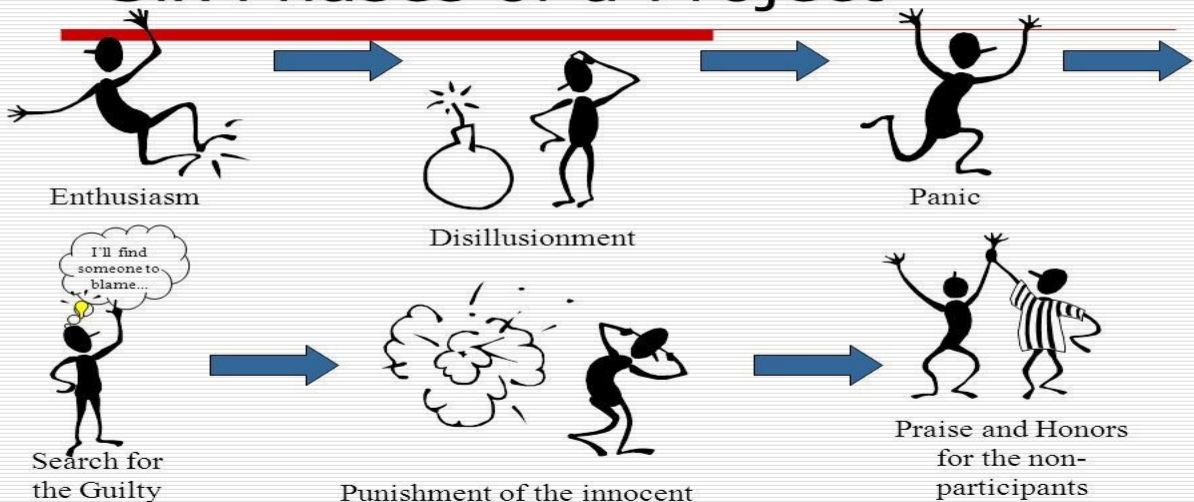
Learning objectives

1. To introduce the various steps required before the start and during a project
2. To describe considerations to ensure that projects are well managed and run on time and within budget
3. To explain the different requirements of project management
4. To discuss two examples of preparation for project initiation

Key requirements

- Staffing
- Leadership
- Funding
- Location
- Vision
- Timeline
- Achieving stability
- Managing change
- Publicity and the media

Project implementation

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After the project

Pre-start date

End of project

Starting the project

Throughout the project

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Before starting the project

Staffing and training
•Recruit research staff
•Induction for research staff
•Offer specific research methods training for research staff
•Ensure that recruitment procedures are agreed and that all staff are aware of their roles and have had the necessary training such a 'Good clinical practice'

Research ethics and governance
•Prepare ethical approval submission
•Complete any governance requirements
•Liaise with research sites such as hospitals, hospices, clinics, to establish links to facilitate research access
•Establish procedures for safe data collection such as reporting 'Serious Adverse Events', lone working policies, storage and transfer of data, obtaining informed consent, etc
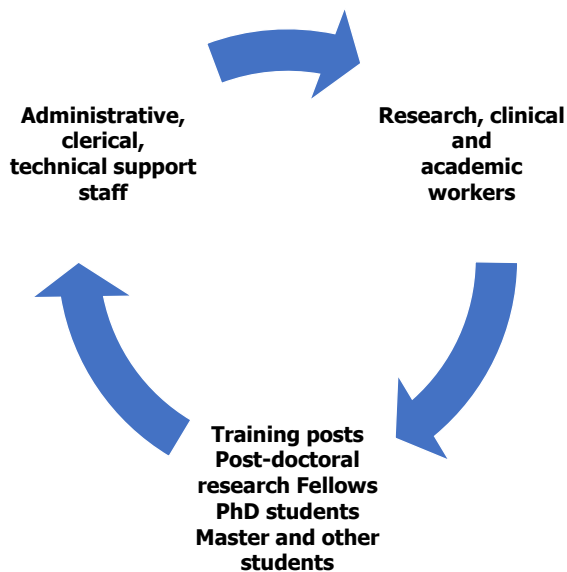
People

People are the most important resource.

- How many?
- What skills and experience?
- What disciplines and backgrounds?
- Length of contracts for research staff?

Consider different types of staff

Administrative, clerical, technical support staff

Research, clinical and academic workers

Training posts
Post-doctoral research Fellows
PhD students
Master and other students

Starting the project

Leadership of the project
- Hold an initial meeting with the whole research to provide introductions and to explain roles and expectations
- Establish patterns of meetings for research project team
- Communicate project time plan and milestones
- Clarify any needs for additional equipment or resources
- Mentorship of research staff

Advisory or Steering Committee
•Establish project advisory group, if it is a large project, or project steering group for clinical trial
•Patient/Public Involvement in project advisory/steering group

Leadership

- Inspire and motivate team
- Management skills
- Human resource management skills
- Negotiation skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Emotional labour
- Budget and financial management skills
- Personal credibility and standing.

Sharing the vision for the project

- Aims of the project
- Project plan and timelines
- Be clear about focus of activities and effort
- Be specific about goals and outcomes - deliverables
- Review and revise project plan to monitor progress

Throughout the project

- Monitor project progress again time plan
- Monitor project expenditure against budget
- Monitor potential risks and establish mitigation strategies
- Manage changes and conflict within the team
- Report to funders as required
- Dissemination planning

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Achieving stability and managing change

- Key appointments
- Employment contracts and roles
- Career development
- Building team cohesion
- Sustainable funding stream
- Good facilities
- Managing change effectively

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End of the project

- Complete final report
- Safely and securely archive all study documentation as required
- Complete report to ethical board
- Facilitate career progression for research staff

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Challenges to setting up and managing a multidisciplinary research project

- People –attracting the 'right' people, staff retention, getting the right skill mix.
- Research career development is poorly organised and funded.
- Working in teams – conflict, time consuming
- Multidisciplinary – professional boundaries and values
- Leadership - attracting the 'right' person.
- Budgets and funding, changing whims of funders.
- Managing changes in personnel, focus and responding to social and political changes.

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Two examples of pre-project management

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Project A - Staffing

Recruitment
- Poor quality field
- Few with suitable qualifications and expertise
- Some have certain skills but not all skills required
- Most on higher salaries than funding available

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Project B – Ethics and access

- Ethical submission initially rejected in one region but accepted in another
- Ethical requirements not the same in different organisations
- Processing of ethical submission very slow
- Application for 'research passport' delayed
- Some hospitals now no longer able to recruit to study

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Thank you for your attention

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Further reading

- Aveyard, H., Payne, S. A., & Preston, N. J. (2021). A post-graduate's guide to doing a literature review in health and social care. 2nd edition Oxford University Press: Oxford.