

A very practical guide to project implementation

March 11, 2025



One of the things that I love about the profession of project management is its practicality. From the likes of multi-billion dollar mega projects, to putting up a garden shed. The techniques that support its planning, execution, management of resources, reduction of risk of failure and misalignment to specifications remain precisely the same. And lead, if done correctly to the same levels of expected success.

If you you've got a "small" project. Maybe it's a website revamp, a local charity event, you are writing a novel or, even if you are organising for a garage sale, it's a project, and it needs managing. And just because it's "small" doesn't mean it can't explode into a chaotic, budget-devouring, time expansive monster if you're not careful.

Think Big, Act Tiny

We've all seen those epic project management diagrams with Gantt charts that look like the Madrid Underground map. While you might not need a spreadsheet that could launch a rocket, you *can* steal some big-project swag.

- **Define the "Why" (and the "Why Not?"):** Big projects start with a clear vision. So should yours! What are you actually trying to achieve? And, more importantly, what are you *not* trying to achieve? Scope creep is the tiny gremlin that turns your garage clear out into a full-scale home renovation. Write down your goals, stick them on a post-it, and defend them like they're the last slice of pizza.

- **The “To-Do” List: Your Tiny Tyrant:** Big projects have detailed task breakdowns. Yours can too! But instead of a 50-page document, use a simple checklist. Break your project into bite-sized chunks. And if you’re feeling fancy, use colorful pens. Because why not? It’s your project, you’re the boss, and you can color-code your critical actions if you want.
- **Communication: The Art of Not Being a Ghost:** In big projects, everyone talks (sometimes too much). Even in small projects, keep the lines open. A quick email, a group chat, or even a fax (if you’re feeling retro) can prevent misunderstandings. Remember, a “quick update” is better than a “where did this project go?” meltdown.
- **The “What Could Possibly Go Wrong?” Game (aka Risk Management):** Big projects have risk assessments. Yours can too! Think about potential hiccups. Your computer crashes? Your venue cancels? Your garage could spontaneously combust? Prepare for the unexpected. Even a simple “if X happens, we’ll do Y” plan can save you from a full-blown panic attack.

Quality on a Shoestring: The MacGyver Approach

You don’t need a team of experts to deliver quality. You just need a bit of creativity and a willingness to learn.

- **Become a Jack-of-All-Trades (or at Least a Few):** You might not have a dedicated graphic designer, but you can learn basic design skills with free online tools. You might not have a professional photographer, but you can learn a few tricks with your smartphone. Embrace the DIY spirit! Just remember, knowing your limits is key. If it’s vital to the project, hire a professional. If it’s just a nice to have, see what you can learn.
- **Leverage Your Network (and Bribe Them with Cake):** Got a friend who’s good with spreadsheets? A cousin who’s a social media whiz? Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Offer them a cup of tea, a slice of cake, or your undying gratitude. People are often willing to lend a hand, especially if they see your passion. Your resources list is wider than you think.

- **Test, Test, Test (and Then Test Again):** In big projects, they have QA teams. In small projects, you're the QA team! Test your website, proofread your documents, and get feedback from others. Even a quick once over can catch glaring errors. If it is an event, schedule a run through. Even a simple garage sale will run smoother if you have first checked out others in your vicinity. Take the time to assess what's worked well for others. Consider how you can incorporate the learning. Remember it is always better to learn ahead of the fact rather than afterwards.

- **Embrace the "Good Enough" Principle (Sometimes):** Perfection is the enemy of done. Sometimes, you have to accept that "good enough" is good enough. Don't waste time chasing an unattainable ideal. Focus on delivering a functional, high-quality product within your resources. Be clear on what good looks like, and the minimum requirements to satisfy stakeholders.

Remember, it's a marathon, not a sprint (unless it's a sock drawer, then it's a frantic dash).

Having navigated the wilds of your small project, armed with sticky notes, rather than data sheets and a healthy dose of "winging it." You've learned a few things, probably had a few laughs, and hopefully, emerged victorious. But here's the reality: even the tiniest projects deserve a touch of project management finesse.

Why? Because even a "simple" task can spiral out of control if left unchecked. Costing you in terms of money, time and frustrations.

And while you may not need to implement every facet of project management methodologies, churning out reports and Gantt charts for every little thing. Instead, consider it a toolkit for your creative endeavors. Think of it less as a rigid structure and more as a set of helpful guidelines that empower you to bring your vision to life, no matter the scale.

Most importantly by embracing the core principles – clear objectives, structured planning, effective communication, and proactive risk management – you're not just ensuring the success of this project. You're building valuable skills that can be applied to anything you tackle in the future. You're learning to think strategically, anticipate challenges, and deliver results consistently.

Ultimately, managing small projects with precision isn't about stifling creativity or adding unnecessary bureaucracy. It's about empowering yourself to turn your ideas into reality, efficiently and effectively. It's about taking ownership of your projects, big or small, and delivering quality work you can be proud of. And who knows? Maybe those meticulously managed smaller projects will inspire you to tackle even bigger challenges, armed with the confidence and skills you've honed along the way. Because even a small project, managed well, can be the launchpad for something truly extraordinary.