



# Project Management (Part 8) - Bringing Your Project to Closure

An Online Continuing Education Course for Engineers

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# **Project Management (Part 8) - Bringing Your Project to Closure**

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# Bringing Your Project to Closure

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## ***In This Course***

- ▶ Planning for a successful project completion
  - ▶ Addressing any remaining administrative issues
  - ▶ Helping your team transition to the end of your project
  - ▶ Evaluating your project's successes and failures with the post-project evaluation
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One characteristic that distinguishes a project from other work assignments is its distinct end — the point at which all work is complete and the results are achieved. However, with intense demands pulling you to your next assignment, you may be compelled to let your completed projects languish and eventually fade away instead of clearly ending them with an announcement, recognition of the results, and a thank-you to all the people who made those results possible.

Unfortunately, not bringing your projects to full closure hurts both the organization and the people who performed the work. When you don't assess the extent to which your project achieved the desired outcomes, you can't determine whether you conceived, planned, and performed the project well. Furthermore, team members don't have the chance to experience closure, achievement, and a job well done.

This course shows you how to close your project successfully by finishing all substantive work, performing the final administrative tasks, and helping team members complete their association with your project and move on. In addition, this course helps you announce your project's end and conduct a post-project evaluation.



### ***Tip***

Very large projects are often subdivided into phases, and each phase is treated as a separate miniproject. The discussions in this course apply to the closing the project stage of each miniproject as well as the closing phase of the entire project.

## ***Staying the Course to Completion***

Following your project all the way through to completion helps ensure that everyone gets the maximum benefits from your project's results. You also get the chance to compare your project's benefits with the costs incurred, confirm the company's return on investment, and validate its process for selecting projects.



### ***Warning***

Bringing a project to an end typically entails wrapping up a multitude of small details and open issues. Dealing with these numerous assignments can be frustrating under the best of circumstances. However, the following situations can make the end of a project even more difficult:

- ✓ You don't have a detailed, written list of all the activities you must perform during closeout.
- ✓ Some team members transferred to new assignments during your project's course, forcing the remaining members to assume new responsibilities in addition to their original ones.
- ✓ The project staff loses motivation as general interest in the project wanes and people look forward to new assignments.
- ✓ The project staff wants the project to continue because they don't want to end the personal and professional relationships they've developed or they're not excited about their next assignments.
- ✓ Your customers (internal and/or external) aren't overly interested in completing the final details of the project.

Reduce the impact of difficult situations like these and increase the chances for your project's success by planning for closure at the outset of your project, identifying and attending to all closure details and tasks, and refocusing your team. This section shows you how to do this (and more).

## ***Planning ahead for your project's closure***

If you wait until the end of your project to start thinking in detail about its closure, it may be too late to gather all the necessary information and resources. Instead, start planning for your project's completion at the same time that you prepare your initial project plan by doing the following:

- ✓ **Describe your project objectives completely and clearly and identify all relevant objective measures and specifications.** If one of the project objectives is to change an existing situation, describe that situation before you perform the project so you have a comparative basis for assessment at the end of your project.
- ✓ **Prepare a checklist of everything you must do before you can officially close your project.** Here are some examples of closure items to include on your checklist:
  - Complete any unfinished project activities.
  - Complete all required deliverables.
  - Obtain all necessary acceptances and approvals of project results, including those of the client(s).
  - Assess the extent to which project results met expectations.
  - Perform all required administrative tasks.
  - Terminate all related contracts for goods and services.
  - Transition team members to their new assignments.
  - Ensure that all project documentation and deliverables are archived in the appropriate storage locations.

### ***Tip***

For each item on the project-closure checklist, specify who will perform it, when it will be done, and what resources will be required.

- ✓ **Include closure activities in your project plan.** In your project's Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), specify all activities you'll have to perform to close out your project and then plan for sufficient time and resources to perform them.

## ***Updating your initial closure plans when you're ready to wind down the project***

Encourage your team members to consider the closing the project stage of your project to be a separate assignment with its own objectives, tasks, and resource requirements. As you complete the main project's work, review and update the preliminary closure plans you developed in your initial project plan (see the preceding section for details on these preliminary plans).

## ***Charging up your team for the sprint to the finish line***

As team members work hard to fulfill project obligations, their focus often shifts from accomplishing the project's overall objectives to completing their individual assignments. In addition, other audiences who were initially very interested in the project's results may become involved with other priorities and activities as the project continues (which means they likely lose interest and enthusiasm for your project). Yet, successful project completion requires a coordinated effort by all key participants.



### **Remember**

To reinforce your team's focus and interest, do the following:

- ✓ **Remind people of the value and importance of the project's final results.** Frequently discuss the benefits the organization will realize from your project's final results as well as the individual benefits your team members will gain. People are more likely to work hard to successfully complete a project when they realize the benefits they'll achieve by doing so.
- ✓ **Call your team together and reaffirm your mutual commitment to bring the project to successful completion.** Discuss why you feel the project is important and describe your personal commitment to completing it successfully. Encourage other people to make similar commitments. People overcome obstacles and perform difficult assignments more effectively when they're committed to succeed.
- ✓ **Monitor final activities closely and give each team member frequent feedback on performance.** Set up frequent milestones and progress-reporting times with team members. Staying in close touch with team members provides you and them up-to-date info on how close you are to final closure. This close contact also provides the opportunity to identify and deal with any issues and problems that may arise throughout the course of your project.
- ✓ **Be accessible to all team members.** Make yourself available when team members want to confer with you. Consider having lunch periodically with them and letting them see you around their office area. Being accessible affirms your interest in and the importance of their work.

## ***Handling Administrative Issues***

Just as you must have authorization for people to legally spend time, effort, and resources to perform work on your project, you must rescind this authorization when you close the project to ensure that people won't continue to spend time, effort, or resources on it in the future. You can officially terminate this authorization by doing the following:

- ✓ **Obtain all required approvals.** Obtain written approval that your project has passed all performance tests and adhered to applicable standards and certifications. In addition, be sure you've obtained customer or client acceptances. This step confirms that no additional work is necessary on the project.
- ✓ **Reconcile any outstanding transactions.** If you've made project purchases from outside sources, resolve any disputes with vendors and suppliers, pay all outstanding bills, and make sure the contracts are officially closed. Make sure you adjust any project work effort or expenditures that were posted to incorrect accounts.
- ✓ **Close out all charge categories.** Get official confirmation that no future labor or financial charges can be made to your project accounts.

## Providing a Smooth Transition for Team Members

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- ✓ **Announce the completion of the project.** You can make this announcement on the company intranet, in a meeting, or in a wide publication, such as a newsletter. You need to make this announcement for the following three reasons:
  - To alert people in your organization that the planned outcomes of your project are now available
  - To confirm to people who supported your project that their efforts led to a successful result
  - To let people know they can no longer charge time or resources to your project
- ✓ **Take a moment to let team members and others who supported your project know the true results of the time and work they invested.** Nothing can give your team members stronger motivation to jump into the next assignment and provide continued high-quality support than telling them about the positive results of their previous hard work.