

Good Practice Guide Appendices Appendix 12

Cluster Project Planning

Project Start Up

Time must be allocated for members of the cluster team who will be involved in the project, with arrangements made for backfill and project planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

A number of steps and tasks should be considered when initiating a cluster project, including:

- Agreeing the Business Case
- Establishment of Project Board or Steering Group
- Designating project management or co-ordination role
- Identifying internal and external sources of relevant expertise
- Reaching agreement on:
 - The project plan
 - The approach to recording and monitoring issues and risks
 - Reporting and accountability methods and responsibilities
 - Acceptance criteria for project progress and delivery

The Business Case

A comprehensive and robust business case will capture the justification for the cluster project. The purpose of a business case is to present the benefits, cost (finance, resources, time) and impact of any proposed project, and can be used to seek approval from cluster stakeholders. As the project progresses, it will serve as a reference to ensure that the justification for the project remains valid and is able to deliver the proposed benefits. The business case can serve to reassure stakeholders and motivate them to agreeing or approving next steps.

The Project Board or Steering Group

Once approval has been given for a project to proceed, a project control group can assist with decision-making, problem solving and monitoring progress and performance. The specific composition and terms of reference of the Project Steering Group will depend on the nature of the project, considering:

- Membership of the Project Steering Group
- Any training or induction needs

- The Group's role and purpose, for instance:
 - Making decisions
 - Resolving risks, issues and obstacles impacting on project progress & performance
 - Approving budgetary expenditure
 - Considering changes to project scope
- The need for a more formal governance structure, with documented Terms of Reference for the Project Group to describe its role, responsibilities and requirements

It is important early on to appoint a project manager with the relevant skills and experience, to undertake day-to-day management and co-ordination of starting up and delivering the project.

The responsibilities of the project manager are summarised below.

Responsibilities of a Project Manager

- Identify and agree all tasks and dependencies for a successful project
- Provide a single line of accountability to the Project's Steering Group
- Develop and manage a Project Plan
- Identify and manage the project stakeholders
- Manage:
 - All communications (internal and external)
 - The project team and experts with particular responsibilities
 - Any identified risks to delivering the project's objectives
 - The project budget
 - Progress and performance of the project

Project Initiation

It is helpful to define and document key components of the project plan, including:

- Definitions, scope and composition (task areas or stages) of the Project
- Definition of the Project's proposed deliverables
- Approach and methodology to be employed in achieving the defined deliverables
- Timescales for achieving the Project's deliverables
- Milestones to indicate successful progress of the Project
- How risks and issues will be identified, recorded and addressed
- Need for a Project budget, with details
- Perceived costs of the Project
- Any exclusions from the scope of the Project
- Any benefits from applying degrees of testing to evaluate outcomes and success of the Project's deliverables

Expertise for Cluster Projects

Internal or external expertise and advice may be helpful in relation to:

- Service redesign
- Patient Pathway redesign
- Organisational redesign
- Technical and/or telecommunications
- Establishment of new legal entities
- HR and recruitment
- Financial management
- Operational management
- Strategic and/or business development management
- Rebranding
- Partnership-working with other community health care providers
- Patient and population engagement

Cluster Project Plan

Having a plan to design, test and launch the cluster project will help to identify all the tasks required, define timescales, identify dependencies and agree any milestones against which project delivery and performance can be measured. Using a collaborative or consultative approach will help to ensure that nothing is overlooked and provides the opportunity to seek resources within the wider stakeholder group, such as project management and specialist area expertise (see Box 24).

For large projects or programmes, it may be beneficial to categorise tasks into key areas or work-streams, which may include:

- Business Model design (including clinical, operational and/or managerial design)
- Legal and financial
- Communications and engagement
- HR and Recruitment
- Training
- IT and Telecommunications
- Testing
- 'Go Live' - launching the project

A detailed and time-scaled project plan will contribute to effective monitoring and management of the project and helps to identify and resolve any obstacles, risks and issues. Important considerations to ensure delivery on agreed outcomes include:

- A target date for the launch
- Any risks to the timescales for project tasks agreed
- Resources required for the range of tasks identified, including backfill arrangements
- Specific tasks to be assigned to relevant experts
- How day-to-day work pressures are balanced against project tasks
- Approval arrangements for the proposed project plan

Recording and Monitoring

In order to factor in key dependencies and mitigate any risks, a robust mechanism should be in place to log, monitor and resolve issues that may threaten the delivery of the project outcomes. Considerations for the Risks and Issues Log are listed below.

Cluster Project Risks and Issues Log

- Define the obstacles, threats or challenges to be addressed
- Agree how to mitigate or solve the obstacles, threats or challenges
- Determine the immediacy of the required action
- Capture any risks that require attention, action or decision by the Project Steering Group
- Identify any issues which may need review and action once the project is launched

Reporting and Accountability

The Project Steering Group and stakeholders will need clarity on the measures that indicate whether the project is progressing in line with the original business case, is on target and within budget. They will also need assurance that, in the longer term, the project will continue to deliver the original aims and objectives, and continues to serve its original purpose. Consideration of the following will be helpful:

- Who needs to be updated, in what format and how often
- Who is responsible for providing the updates
- Arrangements for an escalation process when issues require action or decision
- Responsibility for issues requiring action or decision

Cluster Project Evaluation

'Evaluation is a process that takes place before, during and after an activity. It includes looking at the quality of the content, the delivery process and the impact of the activity or programme on the audience(s) or participants. It is concerned with making an assessment, judging an activity or service against a set of criteria. Evaluation assesses the worth or value of something.' (Research Councils UK, 2011)

Evaluation at its best is systematic and rigorous and will help cluster teams to understand the effectiveness of service interventions, providing timely and accurate data upon which to base commissioning decisions. The kinds of questions that can be answered by evaluation include:

- Is the cluster project meeting the needs of the local population and service users?
- How are people responding to a specific service impacted by the project?
- What happens to service users as a result of the project?
- Is the best use being made of resources in delivering specific projects?
- How do costs and benefits of projects compare?
- Are the required standards being met through the project improvements?

There is no magic formula to developing an evaluation plan. Cluster teams need to think about their objectives, the data available and reporting requirements. An evaluation tool can be found at Res Pack x that provides a framework for cluster project evaluations. Done well, evaluation improves cluster activity, gives a sense of achievement and provides a greater understanding of the impact of projects and improvement activity.