



ANTHROPOLOGY
CAREER READINESS
NETWORK

Project Management Basics for Anthropologists

Project management is a skill that we often take for granted, but it is essential to success in any type of organization. **Project management** is a methodology or structured approach to enable a team to track and accomplish its goals within the given constraints. A **Project Manager (PM)** is a professional applying knowledge, skills, and software tools to guide the team's work including tasks, budget, timing, risk, and stakeholder buy-in. Most projects follow a similar cycle, **as show below**. It is the PM's job to make sure adequate attention is given to each step to ensure a smooth process.



Project management can show up in the workplace in a number of ways. Many people will find that their work includes aspects of project management. However, Project Manager can be a standalone role. Training and accreditation are available, often resulting in higher salaries. The **Project Management Institute (PMI)** is the accrediting organization in the US, and it provides the standards, research, education, and training of PMs. You can become a **Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM)** or a **Project Management Professional (PMP)**. Visit pmi.org for more.

Anthropologists are especially well suited to this work since they have the basic PM skills of building rapport and securing stakeholder input. Anthropologists know how to identify and analyze project culture to support cooperation and maximize a positive outcome for stakeholders. Anthropology students can gain experience with project management through group projects, research, and student association activities. Here are two examples of anthropologists as project managers.

Example 1 - Project management for a Museum Exhibition

1. Initiation

Museums launch exhibitions to educate, entertain, and emphasize their value to the community. In this “big idea” phase, the concept for the exhibition is developed, often at high levels among museum leadership and usually without PM involvement.



2. Planning

The PM is a member of the hired or in-house exhibition team along with an exhibition director, designers, curators, fabricators, and others. In this “kickoff” phase, the PM helps develop the preliminary budget and timeline based on initial creative work. Experience with varied stakeholder requirements can reduce the risk of poor outcomes (e.g., inattention to accessibility). Meetings are critical for coordination and troubleshooting. Sometimes the PM joins the creative design process as it moves from visual concept to final design.

3. Execution

Once the exhibition team finalizes the design, research and writing, art and artifacts collection, and fabrication will occur. The team’s budget and timeline are monitored by the PM. The PM also monitors exhibition development, including staff and construction support. Synchronizing tasks lead to timely completion and reduced risk and cost overruns. A PM must also keep the exhibition director, a critical stakeholder, updated.



4. Monitoring and Controlling

This phase involves inspection and troubleshooting. The PM advises the exhibition director of complications or delays and helps resolve problems for all aspects of production. The PM may assist in checking for errors or misrepresentations in the exhibition content. Adherence to the budget and timeline are essential.

5. Closing

In this final “wrapping-it-up” phase, the exhibition has been completed and the PM takes charge of record keeping. The PM produces a set of records relevant to their duties, ensuring that they are ready for archival storage. The PM also assists exhibition director with any additional tasks related to the exhibition as requested.



Example 2 - Project Management for a new Patient and Family Advisory Network

1. Initiation

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) wants to build a patient and family advisory network. This network will advise contractors on patient-focused research and healthcare quality measures to improve healthcare for Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries.



2. Planning

A medical anthropologist is the PM with a project team of patient advocates, recruiters, and outreach coordinators. The PM submits a Project Management Plan to CMS that outlines an outreach and engagement strategy that targets patients and families of diverse demographics to join the patient and family advisory network. The Plan includes development of a website, advisor training, and social media campaign that will encourage patients and families to join the network to meet CMS' goals.



3. Execution

During recruitment and onboarding of patients and families to the advisory network, the PM monitors the team's timeline and deliverables. A database is created to track patient and family advisors' activities and projects. The PM meets regularly with CMS to report on key data that include recruitment numbers, active projects, and feedback from contractors and patient and family advisors to ensure goals are met.



4. Monitoring and Controlling

The PM advises CMS of gaps in diversity in the patient advisory network and adjusts the recruitment and outreach strategies accordingly. An email is set up so patient and family advisors and contractors can contact the project team for support. Educational materials are developed to encourage patient and family advisors to participate. The PM tracks the teams' hours to stay within budget.

5. Closing/Maintenance

The PM and project team successfully implemented a patient and family advisory network of 85 patients and family advisors for CMS. During the closing process, the PM creates an archive of work instructions and processes to ensure the network remains active when CMS takes over the project. The PM submits a Recommendation of engagement initiatives to retain current patient and family advisors and recruit new ones to the network.

