

Research Project Manager Skills Development Guide

Thank you for completing the Research Project Manager Skills Inventory!

- **There are no right or wrong answers.**
- This guide is intended to help you think about your research project management strengths and any areas you might wish to develop.
- Transfer your responses from the Inventory to pages 2-3 below to see at a glance which questions on the Inventory relate to each of the eight Research Project Manager Skills. For example, if you answered 'Sometimes' to item 2 on the Inventory, tick the relevant box overleaf.
- To be effective, a Research Project Manager should develop their skills in all eight areas.
- Starting points for developing each of the eight areas can be found on pages 5-10.

1. Stakeholder identification and management (Questions 2, 6, 15)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
2. I manage stakeholder needs and expectations effectively			
6. I prioritize needs and expectations			
15. I identify the key stakeholders in any project			

2. Scope clarification and management (Questions 9, 11, 22)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
9. I work with stakeholders to agree specific project deliverables			
11. I negotiate a project's purpose, objectives and boundaries			
22. I make explicit what is included in a project and what is not			

3. Resource management (Questions 3, 21, 24)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
3. I construct a realistic timeline for any project			
21. I identify and estimate the skills and resources necessary to complete a project			
24. I know which elements of the project's budget I need to manage			

4. Organization and time management (Questions 10, 12, 19, 25)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
10. I organize project activities into an effective sequence before scheduling them			
12. I use scheduled project activities to monitor project progress			
19. I divide any project into manageable tasks			
25. I use the project plan to help me make the most effective use of my time			

5. Project management tool use (Questions 13, 23)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
13. I use a range of tools effectively to keep a project on track			
23. I know what project management tools are available for specific purposes			

6. Communication and project review (Questions 1, 4, 20)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
1. I communicate clearly what needs to be done and by what deadline			
4. When problems arise, I make sure people know what to do to address them promptly			
20. I use a range of communication and feedback methods with project stakeholders			

7. Problem solving and risk management (Questions 5, 8, 14, 17)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
5. I consider options to minimize damage and delays			
8. I identify as many possible risks to a project as I can			
14. I assess the potential impact of project risks and work out ways to address them			
17. If a project falls behind schedule, I work with my team to find appropriate solutions			

8. Leadership and teamwork (Questions 7, 16, 18)	Not at all or Rarely	Sometimes	Often or Very often
7. I keep my project team focused on what needs to be done to achieve the project's objectives			
16. I set clear expectations for my team and manage their performance as part of the overall project plan			
18. It is my role to help my team deliver the project on time and to its agreed scope			

My Top Three Research Project Management Skills:

1.

2.

3.

Possible Development Areas:

1.

2.

3.

Skills Development Ideas and Resources

1. Stakeholder identification and management

A Research Project Manager should be able to identify their project's key stakeholders - the individuals or groups who have the greatest influence on or over the project. Anticipating stakeholder needs and expectations will enable you to determine if these are likely to conflict, so you can prioritize needs and manage expectations appropriately.

It all starts with thorough identification of your project's stakeholders. There are exercises to help you think this through in our starter course: [Getting Started with Research Project Management](#).

2. Scope clarification and management

A project's scope is a written statement establishing your project's purpose, goals, objectives, boundaries and resource constraints. It is a vital document that may be used to obtain project funding and set the criteria by which your project's success may be judged.

Different scoping skills may be called on over a project's life time. These include goal setting, understanding research design, identifying the key elements within the project and how they will impact on its successful completion, surfacing and questioning assumptions, negotiation with stakeholders, clarifying anything that is unclear, making sure incoming stakeholders and project team members fully understand the scope and managing their expectations over the project's duration.

One of the quickest ways to expand your research project management skills in this area is to study existing scoping documents within your research field, particularly projects funded by sponsors. Since every project is a trade-off between scope, quality, time and cost, a Research Project Manager can add value by quickly identifying what impact any changes to a project's scope are likely to have on research quality, costs and completion time.

Using existing scoping examples, you could practice this skill using the 'what if' technique. What if the project had to be completed in a shorter time frame? What implications would

that have on scope, quality and cost? What if stakeholders wanted to expand the range of project participants? Again, what impact would that have on time and resources?

If you want to develop your negotiation and influencing skills, your organization may run focused workshops where you can practice in a lower-risk, face-to-face environment. If you have access to such an opportunity, it can be well worth taking.

In addition to developing skills, when it comes to managing expectations, experienced research project managers often have an agreed protocol in place to handle potential scope changes once a project is under way. You can find an example protocol in our latest book: ['How To Manage A Research Project'](#).

3. Resource management

This is among the most fundamental skills a Research Project Manager needs to master, but once you understand the principles of resource estimation and which resources, including budget aspects, you actually need to manage, the whole process becomes much simpler.

Most of us tend to underestimate the resources needed, partly because it is difficult to estimate what skills will be needed on any given project and for how long. A fast and relatively reliable way to improve some estimates, particularly if a task or activity is repeatable, such as questionnaire data entry, is to do a small trial run, time how long it takes and extrapolate from there.

At Evaluation Works, we also like to use templates¹ to help map skills and resources against project plans so that no items are inadvertently missed. The same templates also help match roles and responsibilities so everything that needs to happen is allocated to the most appropriate person.

¹ All templates are included in our next level course, [Introduction to Research Project Management](#).

4. Organization and time management

A hallmark of an effective Research Project Manager is their ability to achieve research goals on time and within budget. Organizational and time management skills are vital in this respect. This is one area where implementing a few simple strategies can make a huge difference in enabling you to bring even the most complex and challenging research projects under control.

Learning to break a project down into manageable tasks and activities, sequencing them in the most effective manner that makes the best use of the time and resources available, and monitoring these at an appropriate level, are skills you can acquire relatively quickly yet continue to benefit from throughout your career.

Technical skills such as these are a great place to start for anyone looking to manage research more effectively. There are plenty of tools and techniques you can explore, including Gantt charts, network analysis and critical path techniques.

5. Project management tool use

Back in the day there were only two project management ‘tools’ available for those of us needing to manage research projects and programmes: a generic software tool that didn’t really cope with the unique demands of managing research and, you guessed it, the human mind. Give me the human mind every time. It is the most flexible and adaptable ‘tool’ every Research Project Manager has and should always be your number one choice.

However, there are now a growing number of project management software tools - many of them available for free - that can help you keep track of to-do lists and project tasks and even share them amongst members of your project team. These are still relatively new in their application to research and many academic institutions in particular have been slow to use them to their full potential, making this an area where individual preference is still the deciding factor in project usage.

We recommend you invest your time primarily on understanding the principles and purpose behind the use of any management tool. By learning how to manage a project effectively,

you will be better able to appreciate what kinds of tools you might need in your research project management toolbox, why these may be of value, what function they perform and how the choices available may or may not improve your management capabilities, efficiency or suit the specific requirements of any given project.

6. Communication and project review

Good communication is a major success factor in managing any research project and achieving your objectives. Like leadership skills, communication skills are not something we develop in isolation, but must be flexible and responsive to the needs of others.

The best communicators have three things in common. They use a variety of formal and informal communication methods. They know which methods are likely to get the best results in which situations. They are good listeners and understand their own communication style strengths and weaknesses and how those affect others.

Most projects will provide you with a range of opportunities to practice your communication skills, so you can quickly increase your experience if you choose to. You can also try expanding the range of communication methods you use and find out how project stakeholders and team members prefer to receive information and updates, so you can accommodate these in your communication strategy.

There are plenty of ways to identify your preferred communication style and those of others. Here is a freely available one you may find helpful: the [DISC personality test](#). Psychology Today also has a self-completion listening skills test. The test items themselves are quite revealing and take about 15 minutes to complete. You can get partial results for free, but they do charge a fee for the full results. Details are on their website.

Project review is a rather more formal communication activity and worth mentioning here because it is a great way to get feedback on what worked well and what could be improved for future projects. It's a highly professional approach and easy to implement.

7. Problem solving and risk management

Risks are issues that can have a negative or adverse impact on your project. There is always a degree of uncertainty in managing research and your problem solving and risk management skills will ensure you are well prepared to handle any issues that may arise. It is advisable to think carefully during the planning stage about where your project may be vulnerable and devise a risk management strategy to help you deal with problems should they occur.

Problems usually mean delays, threats to research quality or a need for more resources, none of which are good news for delivering your research objectives on time and within budget. Time spent thinking through your options means you will be better prepared to face them and be able to respond quickly, minimizing any disruption to your project.

Key people leaving is one of the most common risks to research in any field and one of the most time-consuming and important to deal with, so it is one every research project should address and an excellent place to start considering options and developing your risk management strategy. In fact, this is just one of eight types of risks known to affect research. You can find out more about each of these as part of our next level course, [Introduction To Research Project Management](#), where we provide exercises to help you identify risks and their likely impact on your project, as well as sharing proven strategies for overcoming them.

8. Leadership and teamwork

Research Project Managers are also leaders, but often they have little or no direct authority over a project team, or have to work with colleagues and stakeholders of greater seniority, or from different departments, cultures and organizations. Your ability to motivate, encourage, influence and lead by example will be paramount in achieving your goals.

Of all the eight skillsets a Research Project Manager needs, leadership skills are amongst the most challenging to develop and there is always something new to learn, so be prepared to try things out, don't be afraid to get feedback on your progress and seek out opportunities to practice.

A good place to start is by thinking about leadership role models. Who do you consider to be a good leader? Why are they so good at leading? What do they do? How might you incorporate some of these aspects into your own life?

As with communication skills, another way is to explore your leadership attributes is by completing a self-perception leadership questionnaire or inventory. There are many available that can help you identify your leadership strengths and suggest areas you might wish to develop, such as James Kouzes and Barry Posner's *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI), part of [The Leadership Challenge](#). This can provide helpful self-development insights that Research Project Managers may find useful at any career stage.