

Issues Management

Issues must be identified, managed, and resolved throughout the life of an initiative for that effort to be successful. Issue management plays an important role in maintaining stability and efficiency.

The purpose of issue management is to identify, document, and resolve issues by reviewing and considering all relevant information. It addresses obstacles that can hinder success and/or block a team from achieving its goals. These obstacles can include such factors as differences of opinion, situations to be investigated, and emerging or unanticipated responsibilities. Unresolved issues can also be a source of conflict that delays or prevents attaining goals, milestones, and deliverables.

It is the responsibility of the manager to effectively manage and monitor issues on a regular basis, follow up with issue owners to ensure progress is being made towards resolution, and to report on status. In addition to overcoming obstacles, issue management also contributes to having constructive working relationships among the stakeholders.

As issues arise, an issue log is commonly used to document them. This log include a description of the issue, the assignment of each issue to one or more individuals for resolution, a target date by which the issue needs to be resolved, and other related information. The log helps monitor and control issues until closure is reached. This is an iterative practice conducted throughout the project lifecycle and involves the following activities.

- Review Issues - Regularly review (at least weekly for a simple project; perhaps daily for a complex project) existing project issues and identify new ones.
- Issue Log - Establish and maintain an issue log. Instructions for using the issue log should be provided within the template.
- Resolve Issues - Work towards issue resolution, maintaining close collaboration with stakeholders.
- Regular Updates - Regularly update (at least

weekly for a simple project; perhaps daily for a complex project) the issue log with current information.

- Communicate - Regularly communicate (at least weekly for a simple project; perhaps daily for a complex project) with stakeholders about the status of open issues.
- Once an issue has been resolved, an official communication should be sent to stakeholders communicating how the issue was resolved.
- Documentation - When an issue is resolved, record the resolution in the issue log. Instructions for recording issue resolution should be provided within the issue log template.
- Escalation - If an issue remains unresolved for a lengthy period of time (we may want to specify a time range here), the issue should be escalated using the agreed upon escalation procedure.
- Lessons Learned - The issue log should be reviewed at the end of the project in a timely fashion so that lessons learned, can be documented and included in the project's lessons learned analysis.

In general, all projects, regardless of type or size, should have an issue tracking system or log where issues are regularly managed and monitored. As issues are identified and resolved, the log provides historical documentation of concerns that have been addressed throughout the life of the effort. Some best practices for managing issues include:

- Escalation Process - An escalation process should be identified as part of overall issue management planning activities and should be documented.
- Documentation - All issues should be centrally documented using an issue tracking log.
- Minimum Requirements - Tools to manage issues should contain a unique identification number, priority, issue description, impact summary, action steps, current status, and issue owner.
- Resolution Statement - Issues should be stated in a way that it is clear how they can be resolved. Example: Instead of "The project needs resources", use "The project requires two mid-level Java developers before the first week of



January to meet the project delivery date in April”.

- **Prioritization** - Issues should be prioritized, assigned an owner, next steps, and due dates. Issue ownership should be communicated clearly to those responsible for action items.
- **80/20 Rule** - Be mindful of the “80/20 rule”, which says that 80% of the project impact will come from approximately 20% of the documented issues. Concentrate the majority of mitigation efforts on issues that pose the greatest potential threat to success.
- **Regular Review** - Regular review of issues and the issue log is a highly recommended practice. The review process should occur daily for complex projects and at least weekly for simple projects. Open issues should be reviewed at each project team status meeting and progress made on the issues should be recorded in the issue log.
- **Issue History** - Closed issues should remain in the issue log as a historical record and to facilitate lessons learned activities.

Risk vs. Issue

Sometimes there is confusion between issue and risk management and how activities of each interface and interact with each other. According to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK):

- A risk is an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, has a positive or negative impact on a project’s objectives.
- An issue is a point or matter in question or in dispute, or a point or matter that is not settled and is under discussion or over which there are opposing views or disagreements. Often project issues are first identified as a risk and through the risk management planning process may already have a planned approach to managing the issue.

Risk management includes risk management planning, identification, analysis, responses, and monitoring and control. The objectives of risk management are to increase the probability and impact of positive events and decrease the probability and impact of potentially negative events. Issue management includes utilizing the outputs from risk planning if the issue was first identified as a risk.

For more information on issue management, the Project Management Community of Practice or the CDC UP please visit the CDC Unified Process website at <http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/>. ■

Project Management Community of Practice

- **March 01, 2012**
2012 Project Management Summit
- **March 23, 2012**
Understanding Records Management
- **April 27, 2012**
Contracting
- **May 18, 2012**
Cloud Computing at CDC
- **June 22, 2012**
Project Change Management
- **July 27, 2012**
PM Best Practices – A Panel Discussion
- **August 24, 2012**
Enterprise Performance Life Cycle (EPLC)
- **September 28, 2012**
A Conversation with CDC Policy Leadership
- **October 26, 2012**
The Value of Alternative Analysis
- **December 07, 2012**
Managing Risk

For more information on the Project Management Community of Practice visit the PMCoP website at <http://www2.cdc.gov/cdcup/library/pmcp/> ■

CDC Unified Process Presentations

The CDC UP offers a short overview presentation to any CDC employee and/or contractor group. Presentations are often performed at your facility, on a day of the week convenient for your group, and typically take place over lunch structured as one hour lunch-and-learn style meeting.

Contact the CDC Unified Process at cdcup@cdc.gov or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup> to arrange a short overview presentation for your group. ■

Contact the CDC Unified Process

The CDC Unified Process Project Management Newsletter is authored by Daniel Vitek, MBA, PMP and published by the Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services.

For questions about the CDC UP, comments regarding this newsletter, suggestions for future newsletter topics, or to subscribe to the CDC UP Project Management Newsletter please contact the CDC UP at cdcup@cdc.gov

<http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/>

