

IT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Documenting Your Software Project

Using Teamwork When Writing Documentation

- The project was not a solo project; if it was, you couldn't really call yourself a manager. Because many hands worked on the project, many hands should also work on the documentation.
- If your budget allows you to hire a technical writer, you'll find that this is money well spent.
- **Have meetings:** When you finish the lessons learned document, the document should be something that everyone on the team is familiar and comfortable with.
- **Set milestones:** Just as timelines exist for other parts of the project, they should exist for the documentation as well. Treat this part of the project as if it is as important as the creation of any module or component (it is as important!) and make sure that it gets done.

Three factors to consider when you write

- The method of documentation (printed or electronic): If it is electronic, can the document exist within another document, or must it be a stand-alone document? If it is printed, is it a subset of a large document or a stand-alone entity?
- The target audience: Is the document to be used to jog your memory six months from now, or is it something to distribute to all users?
- The scope of the documentation: Should the document only address a change that was made, or should it be all-inclusive?



Completing the Lessons Learned Documentation

Getting your historical information together at the beginning of a project

Your best input for project planning is historical information, which can include

- Lessons learned documents
- Past project files
- Procurement information
- Interviews with previous project team members

Creating a lessons learned spreadsheet at the beginning of the project

Table 17-1 Lessons Learned Spreadsheet for Future Documentation

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Project Area</i>	<i>Lesson Learned</i>	<i>Team Owner</i>
Testing	Workflow Testing	Prior to starting the testing phase, we need to set the expectation that testers don't stop to resolve issues — they just need to document each issue.	Testing Manager
Testing	Workflow Testing	During workflow testing, we need to encourage end users to perform their normal job functions.	Testing Manager
Training	End-User Training	During the planning phase, we need to set the expectation that 90% of end users must be trained in order to ensure successful system implementation.	Client
Reports	End-User Reports	Start gathering information on needed end-user reports at the beginning of the project to compensate for the learning curve for stored procedures.	Client
Print Testing	Testing	Ensure that all appropriate project team members understand the complexities of testing the print capabilities of the project.	Project Manager

Organizing Your Lessons Learned Document

Organizing the summary of your document

For example, you might write something like this:

- The Corona project was a project in which we built a Web-based program that allowed the residents of Corona, California, to pay traffic tickets online. Originally expected to last six months, the project lasted roughly eight months, between January 2 and August 15, 2006.

Organizing the meat of the document

One of the easiest divisions you can choose is to break the content down into lessons learned by various key stakeholders, with each group getting its own section. Prioritize the order of the groups based on who is most likely to need the information. For example:

- Lessons learned by developers (this should be the first section because developers have a higher chance of needing the information than others).
- Lessons learned by project managers (second in importance).
- Lessons learned by users (third in importance).
- Lessons learned for other participants.

Documenting the project's successes

- Success is sweet.
- It feels good to accomplish something and know that you pulled off a task that was very difficult.
- Regardless of how you feel inside, you cannot be afraid to commit the successes to paper as part of your lessons learned documentation.
- Commit it to paper, be honest about it, and feel good about it!

Documenting the project's failures

- Along the path, you experienced failures as well as successes. You went in one direction believing that it was the best path to follow, then were blind sided by an issue that you never gave much forethought to. This is natural with almost every project.
- Sometimes an entire project ends in failure. When that happens, the project truly becomes nothing more than a feasibility study.
- Documenting the causes of the failure can really help in the long term. You can say whether you think future projects of this type can ever be feasible and offer specific recommendations that ultimately improve your company's strategic approach.