

READY

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



Appalachian
Regional
Commission

THE APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION

(ARC) is an economic development partnership entity of the federal government and 13 state governments focusing on 423 counties across the Appalachian Region. ARC's mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia to help the Region achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation.

ARC's "READY Appalachia: A Community Capacity-Building Initiative" provides direct technical assistance and funding to support four key pillars of economic development in the Region: Appalachian local governments, local development districts (LDDs), nonprofit organizations, and community foundations. The READY Local Governments training program is designed to help local governments in the Appalachian Region better apply for, manage, leverage, and implement federally funded projects to invest in infrastructure, business and workforce development, and other long-term solutions to improve the lives of residents.

The curriculum was created in partnership with GrantWorks and CO.STARTERS to provide a nine week virtual cohort-based training at no-cost to participants. While the content has been developed with local governments in mind, it is relevant to many types of organizations doing important economic development work in grant application development.



COURSE 7

PROJECT MANAGEMENT + IMPLEMENTATION

7



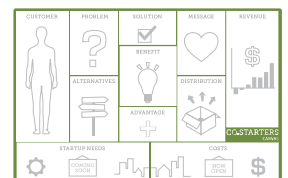
AS YOU ARRIVE...

(10 minutes)

Building on your course and fieldwork from last week, please make note of the following so you are fully prepared for today's session.

1. How will financial records be kept and tracked to ensure compliance with your federal grants?
2. Do you currently use any sort of project management system? If so, make note below.
3. Review your completed CO.STARTERS Canvas of your project. Has anything changed in the past week? If so, make updates.

CO.STARTERS Canvas



PROJECT MANAGEMENT 101

(35 minutes)

You've got your grant and financial management systems in place to make sure you're compliant with the terms and conditions of the federal grant.

But you still have to get the project done.

Project management is an umbrella term for all the processes and procedures needed to accomplish a specific undertaking. It's about making plans, organizing tasks, and leading a team to accomplish a specific goal or objective within a certain time while staying within budget and ensuring quality. It involves coordinating people, resources, and activities to get things done smoothly and efficiently.

Whereas grant management focuses primarily on the financial and administrative aspects of handling grant funds, project management involves the overall management of the project's activities and objectives to achieve successful outcomes.

THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT LIFECYCLE

Project management typically involves several phases, which may vary depending on the methodology used. However, a commonly recognized framework includes the following phases:

Initiating: In this phase, the project's purpose and feasibility are assessed. Key activities may include identifying stakeholders, defining project objectives, conducting initial feasibility studies, and obtaining project approval. For a federal grant, these activities are usually accomplished during the application and agreement signing process.

Planning: During this phase, the project plan is developed in detail. This involves defining project scope, estimating resources, scheduling tasks, and setting milestones. Risk management strategies are also established during this phase.

Executing: This phase involves the actual implementation of the project and plan. Project managers coordinate resources, assign tasks to team members, and monitor progress to ensure that the project stays on track according to the established schedule, budget, and quality standards.

Monitoring and Controlling: Throughout the project lifecycle, performance is monitored. This involves tracking project metrics, identifying variances from the plan, and implementing corrective actions as needed to keep the project on course.

Closing: In the final phase, the project is formally completed and deliverables are handed over to the stakeholders. This involves conducting project reviews, documenting lessons learned, obtaining final approvals, releasing project resources, and closing out any remaining administrative tasks, such as contracts and financials.

These phases are often shown in a linear fashion, but in reality, project management is iterative, and there may be overlap between phases. Additionally, some projects may require additional phases or variations based on their unique requirements.

KEY PROJECT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Within these phases, there are some key activities (think of them as buckets) that will need to be addressed in an ongoing fashion to make sure the project is completed on time and in compliance with the grant requirements.

Scope Management: This entails defining and controlling what is included and excluded from the project.

Time Management: This focuses on ensuring the project is completed on time.

TIP:

A lot of the planning and design is often completed as part of the grant application process. Still, more work is often done post-award to build out an even more detailed project plan.



Cost Management: This involves estimating, budgeting, and controlling costs within the project.

Quality Management: This focuses on ensuring that the project meets the required quality standards.

Human Resources Management: This involves hiring, organizing, and managing the project team.

Communications Management: This involves ensuring that project information is generated, collected, shared, stored, and appropriately managed throughout the project lifecycle.

Risk Management: This focuses on identifying, analyzing, and responding to project risks to maximize the likelihood of project success.

Procurement Management: This entails acquiring goods and services from outside the project team.

Stakeholder Management: This involves identifying stakeholders, analyzing their interests and impact on the project, and developing strategies to effectively engage them throughout the project.

These areas provide a structured approach to managing projects effectively, ensuring that all aspects of a project are properly planned, executed, monitored, and controlled to achieve the project objectives.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

As you can see, a lot goes into project management! A couple guiding principles can keep you on the right path.

Have a clear scope of work. You already did this as part of the grant process, right? You may have done part of the work, but during this phase, you need to create a much more detailed account. Clearly define the project's objectives, scope, deliverables, and success criteria at the outset. From there, develop a comprehensive project plan outlining tasks, milestones, timelines, resources, and dependencies. Be clear on who is benefiting from the project, as that may help you determine some of the important details.

Communicate effectively. Everyone needs to have a clear understanding of what the project is, what the intended outcomes are, and their role to play in achieving them. You must maintain open and transparent communication channels with all stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.

Put the right project controls in place. Keeping a project running smoothly requires having a plan for when things go wrong. Establish checklists, review points, and quality testing to catch potential issues early (update control documents regularly!). Identify potential risks before the project starts and develop strategies to mitigate them.

Document everything. You should be getting this one by now! Maintain comprehensive project documentation, including plans, schedules, meeting minutes, decisions, and issues logs. This will be vital for your grant audit and closeout processes.

Use a project management system. With all there is to keep track of in implementing a federal grant project, you may want to use a digital system to keep track of tasks, schedules, budgets, and communication all in one place.

COMMON PITFALLS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management, while essential for successfully completing projects, can be fraught with challenges. Here are some common pitfalls that project managers may encounter:

Not enough detail. Failure to provide enough detail and relying on partners or vendors to fill in the gaps can lead to confusion, scope creep, and a lack of direction. When it's not clear what is needed, it may take more time to work through the details or fix things done incorrectly—ultimately extending the life of the project.

Too much detail. Alternately, you can have too much of a good thing. Stay out of the nuances of professional services outside your expertise. If you define things too specifically (or incorrectly), it can make it impractical for vendors to participate in the project.

Inadequate planning. Insufficient planning in terms of timelines, resource allocation, and proper sequencing can cause your project to go off course. It's important to do things in the right order and account for dependencies when figuring out project plans.

Lack of (or ignoring) risk management. Neglecting to identify, assess, and mitigate risks can result in unexpected issues arising during the project lifecycle, potentially derailing progress. It's important to work through risks before they come up and have a plan for those that are likely to impact the work.

Failure to adapt. Projects rarely go exactly as planned, and failing to adapt to changes in circumstances, requirements, or stakeholder needs can lead to project failure. Getting a project completed is an art, not a science. While you need to stay within the grant agreement parameters, you may need to be flexible in order to actually achieve the grant objectives.

Communication breakdowns. Poor communication among team members, stakeholders, and project managers can lead to misunderstandings, delays, and decreased productivity.

Being aware of these pitfalls and actively working to mitigate them can greatly improve the likelihood of project success.

TIP:

Prioritize which risks you plan for based on the impact they will have on the overall project and the likelihood of those risks coming to fruition.



ACTIVITY: Project Management Discussion

In your cohorts, discuss:

What additional tips or best practices do you have for managing projects well? What have you seen go wrong and what did you learn from it?

CREATING A PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN

(20 minutes)

A **project management plan** (PMP) is a comprehensive document that outlines how a project will be executed, monitored, controlled, and closed. It serves as a roadmap for project execution and provides guidance for project team members and stakeholders. While similar to a grant management plan (and there is some overlap), its focus is more on project execution than grant compliance. Key areas of a project management plan include:

Introduction: An overview of the project, including its purpose, objectives, and key stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

Project Scope: Defines the boundaries of the project, including what is included and what is not.

Deliverables: Tangible items or results that the project will produce, often broken down into smaller milestones.

Timeline and Schedule: A detailed timeline that outlines when tasks and milestones will be completed, including start and end dates for each phase.

Task Breakdown Structure + Dependencies: Breakdown of the project into smaller, manageable tasks or activities, including identification of task dependencies.

Resource Allocation: Identification and allocation of resources such as people, equipment, and materials needed for each task.

Budget: Cost estimates for each phase of the project (or each milestone/deliverable), including labor, materials, and other expenses.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Methods for tracking project progress, assessing performance against objectives, and making adjustments as needed.

Risk Management Plan: Identification of potential risks to the project's success and strategies for mitigating or addressing them.

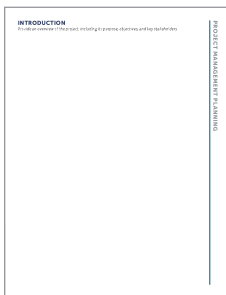
Communication Plan: Defines how project stakeholders will be informed about project progress, including frequency and methods of communication.

Quality Assurance Plan: Procedures and standards to ensure that project deliverables meet quality expectations.

Change Management Plan: Procedures for managing changes to the project scope, timeline, or budget.

Closure Plan: Procedures for closing out the project, including finalizing deliverables, documenting lessons learned, and transitioning responsibilities.

Project Management Plan



ACTIVITY: Project Management Plan

Take a quick look at the *Project Management Planning* worksheets. Then, in your cohorts, discuss: How is the plan similar to the grant management plan? How is it different? Which elements do you think will be the most challenging to complete?

DETERMINING SCOPE + SETTING PROJECT MILESTONES

(45 minutes)

As we've already mentioned, successful project management hinges on having a clearly defined scope of work to accomplish the grant objectives. Without one, your project is in danger of scope creep (adding extra things that don't fit), confusion, wasting precious time and money, delays, and a lot of unhappy people.

Spending the proper time to plan out your project scope—from the major things down to the individual tasks—will set you on the right path.

PROJECT SCOPING

Scope refers to the overall objectives, deliverables, features, and functionalities that need to be accomplished to successfully complete the project. It defines the boundaries of the project and outlines what is included and excluded from the project. The scope provides a clear understanding of the project's purpose and what needs to be achieved, serving as a foundation for planning, execution, and control of the project.

While determining the project scope happens at the entire project level, it also needs to be determined for each of the smaller milestones.

TIP:

Don't forget that any changes to the project scope as the project progresses must be approved by the granting agency!



PROJECT MILESTONES

A **project milestone** is a significant development or marker on a journey. It typically marks a turning point or an accomplishment. Once you pass it, you don't circle back again. Milestones serve as key checkpoints along the project timeline, helping to track progress, evaluate performance, and ensure that the project stays on schedule.

A project milestone should have the following characteristics:

Significance: Milestones represent major accomplishments or turning points within the project. They often signify the completion of a significant task, the achievement of an important goal, or the start of a new phase.

Time-bound: Milestones are fixed points in time. They have specific target dates or deadlines associated with them. These dates help in monitoring progress and ensuring that the project stays on track.

Measurable: Milestones are usually tangible and measurable outcomes that can be easily observed or evaluated. They may involve the delivery of a product, completion of a key activity, or attainment of a predefined milestone criteria.

Critical: Milestones are essential to the overall success of the project. They typically represent key deliverables or objectives that must be achieved to move the project forward.

Communicated: Milestones are communicated to all stakeholders involved in the project. This helps in aligning expectations, coordinating efforts, and ensuring everyone is aware of the project's progress.

Essentially, a milestone occurs where there is a natural hand-off between a series of actions and the next. It's what has to happen before something else can.

When setting your milestones, ask yourself a couple key questions:

- What are the major tasks or phases of the project?
- Which tasks or activities are critical to the project's success?
- What are the key reporting points? What is important to your stakeholders? What will they want to be notified about?
- What will signify progress?
- Are there key deliverables that would signify a milestone?
- Does the grant agreement offer guidance?

TIP:

Milestones can overlap in a project. This happens when different tasks or phases happen at the same time or different teams are working on different aspects of the same project.

MITIGATING RISK + SETTING CONTROLS

(20 minutes)

Even with the best laid plans, rarely does a project fully go according to plan.

RISK MITIGATION

Risk mitigation means taking steps to reduce or avoid problems before they happen. It involves identifying potential risks and doing things to make them less likely to occur or to have less impact if they do happen. It's about being proactive and taking action to protect against potential negative outcomes.

By identifying and addressing potential risks early in the project, you can reduce their impact on project objectives, timelines, budget, and quality. Effective risk mitigation can help prevent costly delays, resource shortages, or quality issues that could jeopardize project success.

While projects will vary in the specifics, most risk mitigation will involve the following steps:

1. **Identify risks.** Recognize and list potential risks that could affect your project. This involves brainstorming with stakeholders, reviewing historical data, and analyzing the project environment.
2. **Assess risks.** Evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of each identified risk. Use qualitative or quantitative analysis methods to prioritize risks based on the overall potential impact and probability of them actually happening.
3. **Develop mitigation strategies.** Create specific plans to address each identified priority risk. Determine actions that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of occurrence or minimize the impact of the risk if it materializes.
4. **Implement mitigation measures.** Put the mitigation strategies into action. Assign responsibilities, allocate resources, and establish timelines for executing the risk mitigation plans.
5. **Monitor and review risks.** Continuously monitor the effectiveness of the risk mitigation measures. Regularly review the status of identified risks and adjust mitigation strategies as necessary based on changing circumstances.
6. **Communicate with stakeholders.** Keep stakeholders informed about the identified risks and the actions being taken to mitigate them. Transparent communication fosters trust and ensures everyone is aware of potential challenges and how they're being addressed.

By following these steps, local governments can systematically identify, assess, and address potential risks to minimize their impact on grant objectives.

COMMON FEATURES OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Some common features of project management tools include:

Task management: These tools allow users to create, assign, prioritize, and track tasks associated with a project. This helps ensure that everyone knows what needs to be done and by when.

Gantt charts: Gantt charts provide a visual representation of project timelines, showing tasks, milestones, and dependencies. This helps teams understand the project schedule and make adjustments as needed.

File sharing and document management: Project management tools often include features for sharing files and documents related to the project. This centralizes project-related information and ensures that team members have access to the latest files.

Collaboration tools: Many project management tools offer features such as commenting, real-time messaging, and discussion forums to facilitate collaboration among team members.

Time tracking: Some tools include built-in time tracking features that allow team members to log the time spent on different tasks. This can help with project budgeting and resource allocation.

Reporting and analytics: Project management tools often provide reporting and analytics features that allow users to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and measure project performance against key metrics.

Integration with other tools: Many project management tools integrate with other software applications commonly used in project management, such as email, calendar, and productivity tools, to streamline workflows and improve productivity.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOL

Popular project management tools include Trello, Asana, Microsoft Project, Basecamp, Monday.com, and many others.

While most project management systems have similar features, no two are the same. In fact, choosing the right project management tool depends on several factors:

Project Complexity: Consider the complexity of your projects. For simple, straightforward projects, a lightweight tool with minimal features might suffice. For more complex projects with multiple dependencies and stakeholders, you might need a more robust tool.

Team Size and Structure: Take into account the size of your team and how they work together. Some tools are better suited for small, agile teams, while others are designed for larger, more structured organizations. Ensure that the tool can accommodate your team's needs and workflows.



Features and Functionality: Identify the specific features and functionalities you require. For example, if you need advanced reporting and analytics, you might opt for a tool like Monday.com or Microsoft Project. If collaboration and communication are your priorities, tools like Basecamp or Slack might be more suitable.

Ease of Use: Consider the user interface and ease of use of the tool. It should be intuitive and easy for team members to adopt. Conduct trials or demos of different tools to see which ones resonate best with your team.

Integration: Check if the tool integrates well with other software applications your team uses. Seamless integration with email, calendar, file storage, and other tools can enhance productivity and streamline workflows.

Budget: Evaluate the cost of the tool and whether it fits within your budget constraints. Some tools offer free versions with limited features, while others have tiered pricing plans based on the number of users or additional features.

Support and Customer Service: Assess the level of support and customer service provided by the tool vendor. Look for resources such as documentation, tutorials, and responsive customer support to help your team get the most out of the tool.

You'll need to do your own research to determine which tool is best for you.

TIP:

When deciding on a project management tool, think about the tools you are already using to manage day-to-day activities and identify where you have gaps for managing your grant projects. Find a tool that addresses those gaps.

ACTIVITY: Project Management Tools

In your cohorts, discuss:

What project management tools do you have experience with? Which platforms and features did you find helpful? Which were challenging or fell short?

MANAGING PROJECT TEAMS + PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

(15 minutes)

When implementing a grant project, one of the key activities you'll have to do is managing the project team and partner relationships. Though distinct groups, they both involve working with people—individuals who thrive when certain conditions are met.

Establish clear expectations. Define roles, responsibilities, and expectations for each individual and organization involved in the grant project from the outset. Make sure team members understand what is expected of them and how their contributions align with the project's overall goals.

TIP:

When determining roles and responsibilities, clearly outline how decisions will be made to clear up potential confusion or delays from the very start.

Establish clear communication channels. Maintain open and transparent communication channels among all partners and teammates. Encourage regular check-ins, meetings, and progress updates to ensure everyone is aligned and informed about the project's status.

Build trust. Foster a trusting relationship among all involved by being reliable, responsive, and accountable. Trust is essential for effective collaboration and problem-solving.

Leverage differences and personal strengths. Recognize and respect the diversity of perspectives, expertise, and organizational cultures. Embrace different viewpoints and leverage the strengths of each person to enhance the project's outcomes. Delegate tasks based on skills, strengths, and expertise.

Encourage collaboration. Foster a collaborative and supportive team environment where people feel comfortable sharing ideas, brainstorming solutions, and working together towards common goals.

Address challenges promptly. Anticipate and address any challenges or conflicts that may arise during the grant period promptly. Encourage open dialogue to resolve issues collaboratively and mitigate any potential negative impacts on the project.

Document everything. Keep detailed records of communications, decisions, agreements, and project progress. Documenting everything helps prevent misunderstandings, provides clarity in case of disputes, and ensures compliance with grant requirements.

ACTIVITY: Project Teams + Partners

In your cohorts, discuss:

What additional tips do you have for managing project teams and partner relationships? What potential pitfalls should be avoided?



USE DATA TO TELL YOUR GRANT'S STORY

(15 minutes)

Instead of relying solely on traditional progress reports and status updates, use storytelling to communicate project progress and milestones to stakeholders and the community at large.

WHY STORYTELLING?

Behind every federal grant are real people whose lives are affected by the funded project. Storytelling humanizes the impact of the grant by sharing the stories of beneficiaries, volunteers, staff members, and others involved in the project, making the impact more tangible and relatable.

At the end of the project, gather stories that capture the project team's experiences, challenges, and successes. These stories can provide valuable insights and lessons learned for future projects, helping to improve project management practices over time.

Moreover, document project stories, testimonials, and case studies for future reference. These stories can be used in marketing materials, funding proposals, and presentations to showcase the organization's impact and track record of success. It can also help to reinforce the project's value and creates a sense of pride and accomplishment in the community.

CONNECTING STORY TO DATA

When you think of “story” what comes to mind? If you're like most people, the phrase “once upon a time...” probably comes to mind.

While that sort of storytelling is really important—particularly for raising awareness of the work accomplished by your grant—the data you collect throughout the grant implementation process can help you even better tell the story of community change. Data helps you aggregate the isolated stories into a single snapshot that is easy to understand and digest. Try this process:

Start with a single story. Think of a success story from your grant project. Maybe you have a business you supported that's done something great. What about their story is compelling? What about it will get people excited?

Identify how it's representative. Once you've identified what about that single story makes it compelling, which of those are things you can also say about others? For example, maybe it was that they were able to launch their business, or that they went from unsure to confident... These are the sorts of things that make people realize the story isn't a one-off.

Pair the numbers with a face. Numbers alone aren't compelling—they must have the appropriate context behind them. And when you pair the numbers with a face, they can be powerful.

What's compelling?	How is this representative?	Other ways to track it?

ACTIVITY: Data for Storytelling

Think of a success story (or potential success story) from your grant initiative. What about it is compelling? How is it representative? Use the *Data for Storytelling* worksheet to capture your thoughts.

What data should you track to show that this story is only one of many representing change in your community?

FIELDWORK

- Finish working through your *Project Management Planning* worksheets, outlining milestones, risks, etc. Then, share your plan with someone else on your grant team. Do they see anything you missed or another way to approach it?
- Look through the required project controls. What steps do you need to take to put these in place?
- Research project management software options. Which 2-3 do you think might be a good fit for your project and organization?
- Share your *Data for Storytelling* idea with a couple people. What other stories (and related data) do they think you should capture to demonstrate your grant's impact?

INTRODUCTION

Provide an overview of the project, including its purpose, objectives, and key stakeholders.

PROJECT CONTROLS

Plan out all the policies, procedures, and plans you'll need to successfully execute your project.

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	POLICIES NEEDED/NOTES
Risk management	<i>identification of potential risks to the project's success and strategies for mitigating or addressing them</i>	
Quality assurance	<i>procedures and standards to ensure that project deliverables meet quality expectations</i>	
Change management	<i>procedures for managing changes to the project scope, timeline, or budget</i>	
Procurement	<i>details how goods and services will be procured for the project, including vendor selection, contracts, and ongoing vendor management</i>	
Resource management	<i>describes how project resources, including personnel, equipment, and materials, will be acquired, allocated, and managed.</i>	
Issue management	<i>specifies how project issues and conflicts will be identified, tracked, and resolved in a timely manner.</i>	
Communications	<i>specifies how project information will be communicated to stakeholders, including the methods and frequency of communication</i>	

DRAINAGE PROJECT

Project scope completed

Site survey and assessment completed

Detailed designs for the drainage system completed

Permits approved

Required materials and equipment procured

Construction site preparations complete

Drainage infrastructure installed

Grading and slope stabilization completed

Stormwater management facilities completed

Quality assurance reviews and inspections completed

Testing completed

As-built drawings finalized

Personnel trained on operation and maintenance

Project closeout complete

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Project scope completed

Training program/curriculum selected + purchased

Local trainers certified to deliver program

Opportunity promoted to local small businesses

Small businesses enrolled in training program

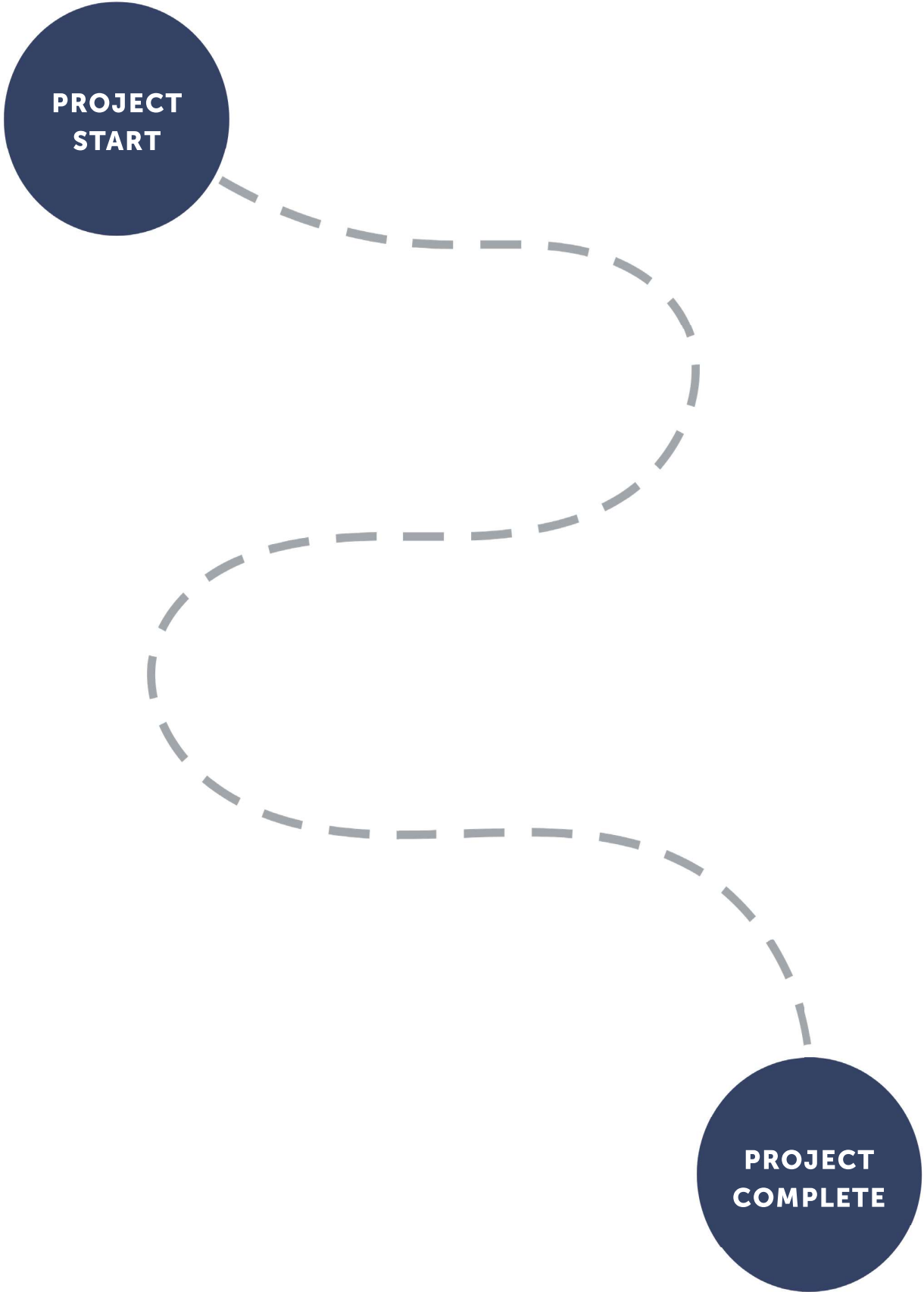
Small business training fully delivered

Feedback collected

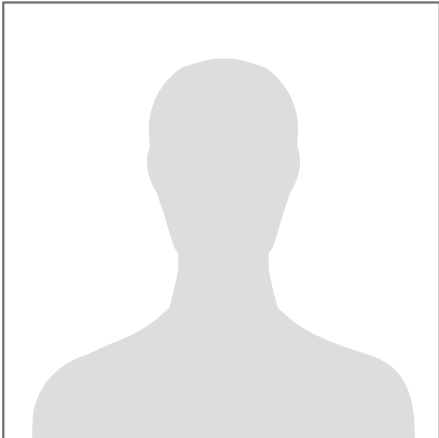
Skills assessment and impact measurement analysis complete

Post-training support to program participants complete

Project closeout complete



SUCCESS STORY



What's compelling?	How is this representative?	What can you track/report?



