



Improving Performance with Process Mapping



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1. Introduction

What is Process Mapping?

A process is a series of tasks that are completed to accomplish an organizational goal. For example, the grant management process for grantees includes the individual steps that start with developing your Consolidated Plan, followed by issuing requests for proposals, signing contracts, expending funds, and, finally, reporting. Each step comprises smaller steps that determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall process. Process mapping is reviewing existing processes and improving them for maximum efficiency.

Efficient processes use the least amount of resources and time necessary to deliver services and achieve results.

Why Map Processes?

Efficient and effective processes contribute to maximizing investments by ensuring that grantees are administering programs cost-effectively and with good staff morale and good working relationships with partners, which lead to efficient project delivery and successful projects.

Process mapping is critical for a grantee that needs to do any of the following:

- Reduce general and administrative expenses
- Streamline processes or reorganize personnel and responsibilities
- Improve subrecipient and subcontractor performance
- Meet rigorous compliance audits
- Automate procedures

Process mapping will help grantees answer this key question:

Are processes efficient and streamlined so that tasks are accomplished in the shortest time at the least cost while providing appropriate oversight and reporting?

Analyzing their core processes can help grantees assess their internal capacity. As changes are made in staffing or procedures, grantees will need to revisit their core process analysis.

2. How to Map Processes

Grantees should map the tasks necessary to deliver services to ensure that their processes are efficient. This is one of the fastest ways to identify blockages and inefficiencies and to brainstorm and select new pathways.

2.1 Choose a process.

The grantee must first decide which process to map. Possibilities include executing contracts, soliciting proposals and funding activities, monitoring projects, reporting, and more. As you get started with process mapping, choosing a process that has strong potential for improvement will build staff confidence in the value of the activity and help generate momentum for process improvement. Tips presented in the sidebar will help ensure your process mapping is a success.

Prepare for Success:

- Block out dedicated staff time for process mapping.
- Consider a retreat setting.
- Gather input from your team in advance to promote inclusivity.
- Build consensus around the work.

Consider:

- Do we receive complaints again and again about a particular aspect of our work?
- Are certain aspects of our work error prone?
- Are certain aspects of our work very time-consuming?
- Do we always run over-budget in a particular area?

2.2 Assemble a team.

Preferably, the process mapping and analysis team will include people from all levels of the organization who are involved in the process. It is important to include managers and operations directors on the team as well as line staff and to ensure that staff have the opportunity to communicate ideas and concerns in a constructive environment. While you can do process mapping with any number of people, a comfortable number might be five to seven people with one additional person designated to facilitate the process, by coordinating the event logistics and guiding the discussion.

Bring the Right People:

- Plan in advance so that key people are involved.
- Include a diverse group on your team.

Consider:

- Which staff have responsibility for this task?
- Who oversees this work?
- Who is the end user?
- Is there an outside stakeholder who can provide a useful perspective on our process?

2.3 Map out the way work is currently done.

One way of doing this is by using sticky notes to map the process with your team. This method allows for all team members to simultaneously contribute to the process map and for changes or additions to be made easily.

First, diagram each step in the existing process, taking care to consider each task and subtask of the process. Use process mapping symbols to show the process start and end, tasks, and decision points. Often, it is easier to sketch out the process start and end (including resources and inputs and final results) and then go back and fill in the details, identifying the steps taken in between. Lay out all of the tasks in the process to create your process map.

Get Started:

- Dispense different colors or shapes of sticky notes and determine a key for 1) start and end, 2) activities, and 3) decisions. Later, you will also need to flag 4) problem areas and 5) solutions.
- Start writing! Empower each team member to write steps of the process on sticky notes.
- Post all of the notes on a wall or table and put them in order from start to finish.
- Connect the notes using arrows to show the flow of the process from start to finish.



START/END



ACTIVITY



DECISION



PROBLEM

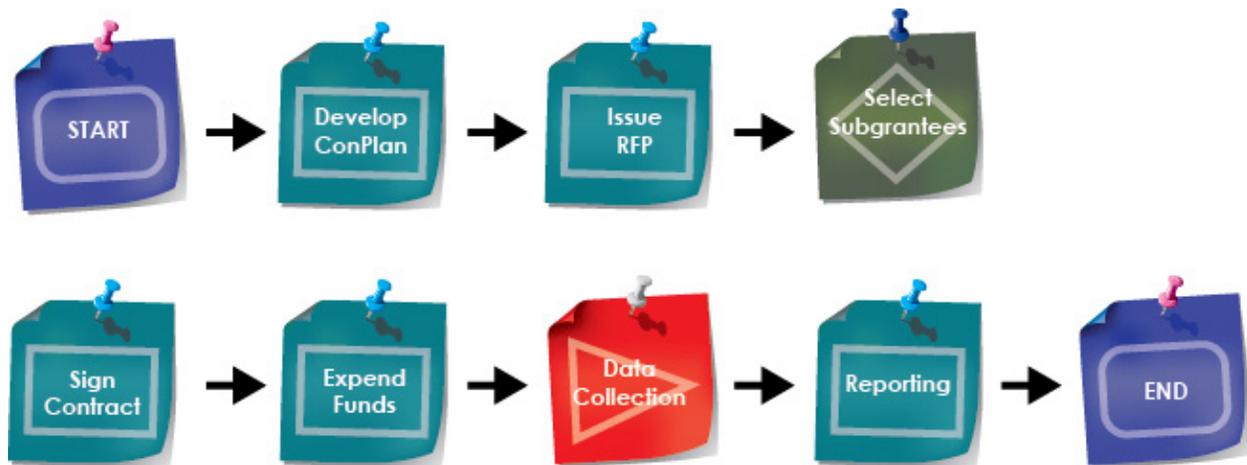


SOLUTION

Consider:

- When does the process start?
- Where does the process end?
- Who are the actors in the process? What steps does each person take?
- What are all of the steps that happen in between? Think about this from a chronological and spatial perspective.

Process Map Example



2.4 Identify problem areas.

When the process as it stands has been mapped out, review it as a team to identify any problem areas. These might be tasks or activities that are slow, redundant, unnecessary, or unrealistic. Steps that are unnecessary to successfully achieve your goal should be changed or eliminated. As you go, flag all problem areas by either marking them with a particular color sticky note or with whatever you have decided to use as problem flags.

Flag Problem Areas:

- Pick a different colored sticky note to flag all problem areas.
- Place these sticky notes on your process map on the wall.

Consider:

- Where does the process slow down? What group of steps takes the longest to complete?
- Is there work that is duplicated or unnecessary?
- Does the handoff of work from one person to the next throughout the process introduce potential for error or redundancy?

2.5 Brainstorm solutions.

Review where the team has placed problem flags on the map. Identify all possible action steps for each problem flag, without evaluating them. Start by asking each team member to write their ideas for potential solutions on individual sticky notes. Pick a different colored sticky note to use for solutions. Then, place the solutions in the appropriate places on the process map. Discuss each solution as a group. You can remove and add sticky notes on the wall to think through new process alternatives.

Brainstorm Solutions:

- Pick a different colored sticky note to flag all solutions.
- Write, write, write. Have all team members consider possible fixes.
- Place these sticky notes on your process map on the wall to visualize alternatives.

Consider:

- Are there steps that can be eliminated from the process?
- Can we reassign any work to hasten or streamline steps?
- Where can we streamline handling or processing of information among team members?

2.6 Finalize the improved process map.

Based on the work you have already completed, formally review and document the improved process map as a group.

Final Steps:

- Decide what changes you are going to make and finalize the new process map.
- Assign individuals responsibility for carrying out each change.
- Document tasks and deadlines in a master plan.
- Measure progress.

2.7 Set action steps and responsibilities.

Agree to a set of final action steps by group consensus to get from the current process to the improved process. Assign responsibility for each action step and set deadlines.

2.8 Create a master plan for improvement.

Summarize who has responsibility for what actions and the associated deadlines. Distribute the plan and make sure everyone agrees with it and that it accurately reflects the decisions made during the sessions. Think about how you will evaluate the changes and measure improvement. Define the improvement measures as part of the master plan and determine appropriate points to assess progress.

2.9 Implement the master plan.

Throughout implementation of the process improvements, the team should meet regularly to determine what is going well and what is not. Measure and communicate progress.

