

Good Project Design Delivers Outcomes on Time

Simple, practical tips that show how project design directly affects whether you achieve outcomes on time.



1



Start with Clear, Specific Outcomes

- Define exactly what success looks like (not just activities)
- Use plain, measurable statements
Example: "Train 100 self-advocates" vs. "Improve advocacy skills"



Why it matters: If outcomes are vague, timelines drift because no one knows what "done" means.

3



Keep the Design Simple

- Avoid overloading the project with too many goals or activities
- Focus on what actually drives results



Why it matters: Complexity slows progress and creates bottlenecks.

5



Assign Clear Ownership

- Every task and outcome should have a named person responsible



Why it matters: Shared responsibility often means no accountability → delays.

7



Build in Checkpoints (Not Just Final Deadlines)

- Set regular progress reviews (monthly/quarterly)
- Adjust early if something isn't working



Why it matters: Small delays caught early prevent major delays later.

9



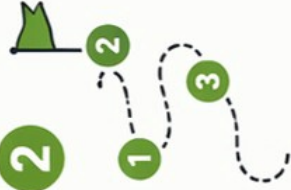
Design for Data Collection from Day One

- Decide how you'll measure progress before starting
- Keep data collection simple and built into activities



Why it matters: If you can't track progress, you can't manage timelines.

2



Work Backwards (Design with the End in Mind)

- Identify your final outcome → map the steps needed to get there
- Create a clear sequence of milestones



Why it matters: Prevents last-minute scrambling and missed steps.

4



Build in Realistic Timelines

- Estimate how long tasks actually take (then add a buffer)
- Consider approvals, hiring, procurement, etc.



Why it matters: Unrealistic timelines are the #1 reason outcomes are delayed.

6



Align Activities to Outcomes (Not Just "Doing Work")

- Ask: "Does this activity directly contribute to the outcome?"



Why it matters: Projects get off track when time is spent on low-impact work.

8



Plan for Barriers Up Front

- Identify likely risks (staff turnover, policy delays, partner issues)
- Have backup plans



Why it matters: Surprises are a major cause of missed timelines.

10



Engage the Right Partners Early

- Involve key stakeholders in the design phase
- Clarify roles and expectations



Why it matters: Misalignment later causes rework and delays.



BOTTOM LINE

Good project design = fewer surprises, clearer direction, and faster results.



When design is weak, timelines slip—even if people are working hard.

