



Developing a Work Breakdown Structure

A work breakdown structure (WBS) is a critical project planning tool that decomposes the scope into logical, manageable components called “work packages”. Steps to develop a high-quality WBS include:

- **Identify Project Phases**
Break the project into high-level phases like Initiation, Planning, Execution, Monitoring, and Closure.
- **Decompose Deliverables**
Drill down the major outputs and components to be produced during each phase.
- **Develop Milestones**
Note meaningful checkpoints that will mark completion of major deliverables.
- **Define Tasks**
Decompose phases and deliverables into clear, discrete tasks and activities.
- **Assign Ownership**
Designate roles responsible for completing each component of work.
- **Align to Timeline**
Include target start and end dates for phases, milestones and major tasks.
- **Estimate Level of Effort**
Assess rough effort and resources required for each work package.
- **Link Dependencies**
Note predecessor and successor relationships between activities.

The WBS provides a common reference point for the scope of work. It enables estimating costs, assigning resources, managing deliverables, and monitoring progress. The layered decomposition provides helpful roll-ups for status reporting. Careful development of the WBS prevents scope creep and sets the stage for effective project execution. It transforms an abstract vision into a concrete foundation for action.