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## The Realization of a Successful Project

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This information leaflet is intended for people who want to prepare and implement a project in the school, no matter the size of the project being considered. In particular, its aim is to equip the parents responsible for an initiative within the framework of the parental participation structures: Governing Boards, Parent Participation Committees, Parents' Committees, Special Needs Advisory Committees, regional structures of the FCPQ. To learn more about these organizations, you should consult other leaflets already produced by the FCPQ, in particular:

- Leaflet 1: The Parent Participation Organization, Helping schools be their best
- Leaflet 12: The Governing Board at the Heart of the School
- Leaflet 14: The Parents' Committee –Focal Point of Parental Participation
- Leaflet 15: The Special Needs Advisory Committee

## Resources

To obtain reference material and to find useful tools or competent resource persons, please contact the FCPQ.

We offer :

- Advice;
- Information brochures;
- References;
- Training workshops.

Visit our web site [www.fcpcq.qc.ca](http://www.fcpcq.qc.ca) or contact your regional association through the Parents' Committee at your School Board.

## Acknowledgments

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# A project, a life, a passion



Project leaders often speak about their projects as "my baby." This expression conveys all the emotion and energy instrumental to the project's success. A project is a little like a birth or a voyage. It is a time that is lived passionately, with all its dreams, pleasures and apprehensions.

This leaflet is meant to be a kind of travel guide. It emphasizes preparation and shows the many demands that must be met to see a project through to a successful conclusion.

An idea really turns into a project when it is taken up by a group, an organization or a collective of any sort. The project comes to life from the moment it is integrated by a given milieu.

A good project can come from different sources: a parent, a group of volunteers, staff members, students, and so on. A brilliant idea can arise quite naturally from a discussion in a hallway, a committee, a dialog in a Governing Board meeting or elsewhere. What do you do then?

## Defining your project

Before seriously embarking on a project you have in mind, you have to form as clear a picture of it as possible and anticipate what it involves. It is worthwhile to examine it from every aspect so you aren't turned down the first time you present it.

The process suggested below is of paramount importance. If any of the following questions are skipped, the project may get off to a bad start or run into trouble, frustrating those who set it in motion. The few hours given to this reflection turn into a profitable investment. In a way, it is a visualization stage.

Two heads are always  
better than one.

If you take the trouble to write down your answers to the following questions, alone or preferably in a group, you will have in hand a precious tool with which to begin the process.

This document will also have the advantage of giving the project's supporters confidence and assurance. The larger the project, the more important the process becomes. It is as valid for the simplest project as for the most complex. Often, it allows you to avoid wasted energy, or even money. So let's get to it!



### Clearly identify the **NEED...** for what reasons?

The strength of a project often lies in its ability to respond to a real need or an obvious problem. To what need or situation is the project meant to respond? This is not just a whim; there's a real shortcoming that needs to be corrected or a value that can be added. Do you know the story about a barber who became a millionaire because, from the beginning, he knew the difference between what he wanted and what he needed? The business world provides another good example: before a new product is launched, a market study is always done to evaluate supply and demand. In short, you have to formulate not the "why" but the "because."

#### For example:

- You want to organize a conference on "taxing" because parents are not well-informed on the issue. Great!
- You want to outline play areas in the schoolyard because the children are fighting during recess: that's fine, but is the project sufficiently well defined to respond to this situation?

### Determine the **TARGET...** for whom?

Who, exactly, is targeted by this project? What public, what client or what end-user? The answer to this question seems simple but can have major repercussions on the entire project. You have to take the time to clearly identify the target: the people, their number, their specific characteristics, and so on.

#### For example:

- The PPO wants to publish a newsletter for the school: is it intended for parents, students or both?
- There is talk of circulating a petition to improve security around the school: who will be asked to sign it?

### Establish the **OBJECTIVES...** why?

The objectives are different from the needs. Objectives represent what you hope to have achieved at the end of the project. In other words, what is the expected outcome?

A project usually targets a general objective, but it can also look for positive secondary effects. In this way, the same project can pursue various objectives. Therefore, you have to make choices or give one objective priority, because too many objectives may create confusion and increase the risk of failure.

#### For example:

- Measurable objective: a 75 % response rate to a survey of parents;
- Main objective: after the project, every classroom will have a new reading corner; secondary objective: in addition, parents will have been made aware of the need to support their child's interest in reading;
- Varied objectives: pairing with other countries: learning another language or looking towards the Third World?



### Specify the CONTENT... what is it?

This is the most well known aspect of the project: it is what we want to do. The wording should be clear and precise. You will find that ideas about the project vary from one person to another in the same group. As well, people sometimes confuse what they want to achieve with the measures or the steps to achieve it.

#### For example:

- Setting up a list of volunteers that is continually updated?
- Activity to acknowledge student achievement (yearly or not)?
- School festivity or school anniversary celebration?

### Explore the MEASURES... how?

There are many measures to choose from. You don't have to list them all right away, but you need to have some idea of what they are!

#### For example:

- Measures that will be used to recruit volunteers;
- Distributing a program, an information sheet, showing a video, etc., during bicycle safety week;
- Organizing the school photo session: purchase, distribution, etc.
- Holding a theatrical activity as part of a regional conference.

### Determine the RESOURCES... with whom and with what?

A project will be successful if the person in charge is committed and determined. A leader, in other words! But this person cannot be the one and only resource. He/She has to count on other people, on financial income, tools, information and so forth.

The more precise and well measured the description of the resources, the more chance there is that the project will get the go-ahead from decision-makers.

### People resources... who to count on?

#### For example:

- Individual resources: volunteer parents, principals, school or school board staff, external resources, parents and friends;
- Collective resources: the organizing committee, sub-committees;
- External resources: public, civic or community organizations.



### Financial resources... with what budget?

#### For example:

- The revenues inherent to the project: membership fees, entry fees;
- External sources: allocations, grants, donations, voluntary contributions.

### Material resources... with what tools?

#### For example:

- Premises and furnishings;
- Instruments and equipment;
- Reprography and printing.

### Information resources... with what knowledge?

#### For example:

- Information on past experiences and their evaluation;
- Available resource material;
- Community behaviours and traditions.

### Anticipate the OBSTACLES... under what conditions?

All sorts of constraints can interfere with the realization of a project or create major difficulties. It's best to plan ahead!

#### For example:

- Constraints regarding transportation, premises, availability of personnel;
- Municipal permits for construction, advertising or door-to-door campaigns;
- Permits for the sale of food or alcohol, lotteries or drawings.

### Forecast the DEADLINES... for when?

Without getting into the actual planning, you must envisage when you hope the project will be completed by realistically measuring the length of each preparation stage.

#### For example:

- A newspaper published three times a year;
- A trip outside of the country during the off-season;
- Painting the school during March break.



## One last set of questions

### *Does all this hold together?*

The elements identified above should fit together: for example, do the objectives correspond to the needs? Will we reach our clientele using the proposed measures? Do our budget forecasts fully take into account the chosen measures? And so on.

### *Does this undertaking correspond to my expectations and my interests?*

As it is described, does the project really reflect my personal commitment? Does it take into account the time I am ready to devote to it? These questions are even more relevant if the project was developed by a group. It would be a shame if the person in charge ended up alone once the project got under way, because participants' interest was not measured beforehand.

### *Is the project viable and is its continuity possible?*

One of the major challenges facing projects that arise from volunteer action has to do with continuity. Will the project be viable without me? How will I make sure it is continued?

# Selling your project

## Identify the decision-maker

To see a project through to a successful conclusion, you have to know a little about the workings of the organization in which it will be undertaken. The first stages of a project can be decisive: you have to know what steps to take!

This is the solicitation stage, with you acting as salesperson. It is important here to identify the person or the group that will make the final decision and to find the correct official channel to reach them and obtain their backing.

## Find support and know where resistance lies

In this adventure, you have to count on solid support, having measured beforehand the sources of resistance. If the project is implemented, who will win or lose by it? How can you strengthen the advantages for the former and reduce the disadvantages for the latter? Perhaps you have to reinforce or balance certain aspects of the project in light of the initial contacts. The early stages of a project should be seen as an occasion to improve the initial project.

### **For example:**

Some projects are partly or entirely within the jurisdiction of school board duties. Redoing the schoolyard or fitting out a play area lie squarely within its responsibilities. Given this, you can proceed via administrative channels, that is, through the principal, or via political channels, by appealing to the Council of



Commissioners or the Executive Committee. Principals are usually the best gateway to the school board. Afterwards, support can be sought in different areas: Commissioners, Parents' Committees, departments concerned, etc.

### Prepare and take action confidently

Confidence plays a crucial role in the pursuit of a project. It is built on a sound preparation, hence the importance of the work mentioned earlier. Reviewing your notes before every contact allows you to pick out those elements that must be emphasized, based on the person or group you are targeting.

A good salesperson :

- knows the path to success from the start!
- establishes good contact before disclosing the product;
- prepares the presentation carefully and adapts it to the situation;
- influences without being manipulative;
- knows the difference between tenacity and hounding;
- is relaxed, smiles and says thank you;
- knows when it's time to leave, before being asked.

## How do you get a project moving at school?

Many of the projects initiated by parents are intended for elementary or secondary school. It will be useful here to take a closer look at how schools work. Who do you speak to? Where do you present your idea? To whom do you submit the project once it has been defined?

### The gateway

In an elementary school, all projects usually ends up directly in the principal's office. In a secondary school, an idea can work its way through various operational levels before winding up, sooner or later, in the principal's office. This is where the official process should start.

Principals make sure the school runs smoothly, at the educational and the administrative levels, and they ensure the quality of the services provided by the school. Therefore, their agreement and support are essential to the realization of a project.

### Small projects linked to the school's larger

#### EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Principals are bombarded with all kinds of demands. Salespeople with any trifling thing to sell would like to put their advertising in the children's schoolbags. Doubtless it would be a good business strategy.



Obviously, the educational milieu refuses to be a catchall for such marketing and will not be led astray from its essential mission, which is "to impart knowledge to students, foster their social development and give them qualifications, while enabling them to undertake and achieve success in a course of study", according to the terms of the Education Act. (*Education Act, s. 36*)

Therefore, the principal must make choices and the primary point of reference is the school's Educational Project. It includes the aims and objectives for student success and some actions, which have been adopted by the Governing Board following a long process involving analysis, consultation and concerted action.

The projects that are most worthy of being chosen are those that are in tune with and based on the school's Educational Project. A project to create a municipal and school library will have more chance of attracting attention than a project to set up a film society, if the school has adopted an objective to emphasize the importance of reading among the students.

### Helping the school

Other conditions can argue in favour of one project rather than another. The principal will certainly listen more attentively to an idea that represents a net gain in respect to the limited resources of the school. So, an idea, an action or an event will be more appealing if it can be realized by a team of volunteers and not require the collaboration of staff members. The principal will have a similar reaction if significant financial resources are not required.

### Relations with existing structures

Another question must be asked: does a project have to be submitted to the Governing Board? It all depends on the content of the project. In most cases, the principal will inform the Governing Board of the existence of a project in the school. It will be submitted if the project involves one of the Governing Board's responsibilities: aims and objectives in the Educational Project, budget forecasts, programming of educational activities outside of school hours or outside of school, enforcing the Basic School Regulation, and so on.

If a project originates with a group of parents, must it be presented to the Parent Participation Committee (PPO)? Not necessarily! However, the support of the Parent Participation Committee can be a valuable asset, since they can then be counted on for their collaboration when needed.

#### A special case:

##### Implementation of your project by someone else

For several months, you and your committee have promoted the construction of a sports and community centre adjacent to your school. The school board and the municipality have accepted your project, voted funding and awarded the contracts. Your objective has been met. The implementation of your idea is now the responsibility of someone else. It's time to let go!

## Checklist for a special activity :

- Coordinates: date, place, time, authorizations, rental, reservation;
- Invitations: list of guests, special guests (availability?), text, printouts, mailing, reply forms;
- Course of events: program, welcome, souvenirs, speeches, organized activity, master of ceremonies, music (permit);
- Reception: menu, caterer (contract), alcoholic beverages (permit), dishes and utensils, tablecloths, flowers;
- Organization of space: installations, tables and chairs, lectern, sound system, other apparatus, cloakroom (tickets, hangers, attendant), decorations, parking (attendant), clean-up (before and after), return of merchandise;
- Financing: grants, drawings (permit), entry fee, income from sales, financial statement; Acknowledgements: list, mailing.

# Planning

*Congratulations, your project has been accepted!*

## Break it down into steps

The first planning draft outlined in the project description should be completed. The project production team now gets under way.

This is the time to break the project down into different steps so they are not all dealt with at the same time. This process can be as simple as differentiating between long-term planning, short-term planning and the development of the activity itself. This break down can also be developed by themes: communications, program, technical organization, group leadership, funding, and so on. The formula adopted obviously depends on the size of the project.

## Divide up the tasks

Making a list of tasks is a fascinating exercise: you see the evolution of the project as you add points to this list. Another step is to put the items in chronological order. The challenge is not to forget anything.

Afterwards, it is easier to proceed to the next step: dividing up the tasks.

## Establish and check deadlines

Once you know who is doing what, you can move on to the most perilous step: establishing deadlines and ensuring that they coincide with each other.

The preceding steps usually bring a dose of realism to the project.

It is often necessary, once again, to adjust some aspects. Is it truly realistic? Have we a margin of error? Is the division of work well balanced among the resources? And so on.

Expo 67 is said to have been among the first major events to use the count-down to determine its planning. In this method, you begin by asking what will happen during the project, what you will need and what provisions have to be made in the days preceding the event. You move backwards in this way to the present. The count-down can make people aware of certain unavoidable delays. This little tip can be very useful!

## Have a monitoring tool

In a relatively large project, planning is generally done in a group. Notes are written in chart form as the project is being planned. These notes must then be rewritten and distributed to each member, still in the form of a chart. Finally, at each production meeting, the group can check if the work was carried out following the prescribed steps and deadlines. The whole thing can be adjusted, as necessary.

### Qualities of a good project leader:

- Seeks pragmatic solutions;
- Considers feasibility;
- Knows how to deal with people;
- Is goal-oriented;
- Takes situations into account;
- Is more of a generalist than a specialist;
- Understands that success comes from others, especially from his/her team;
- Has adequate technical and administrative knowledge or, knows where to get it.

*(Based on Kouze, J. and Posner, B. (1987))*



### Look after the financial aspect

Most projects generate costs (income and expenses) that have to be carefully managed. In the education network, it's a good idea to use the mechanisms already in place for this purpose. For example, a Governing Board can deposit the income from a project into a specially designated fund, and the school board is required to keep the books for this project. (Education Act, s. 94) It is understandable that those in charge of a project should avoid personally taking on the financial risks associated with it.

## Realization

The successful realization of the project will match its preparation. A poorly prepared project is susceptible to chance and risks.

During the project, people have to know how to manage stress: stage fright is inevitable. Some show it more than others: it can be a source of stimulation or trigger contagious and perilous upsets.

### Trust others

A large-scale project relies on a team. The person in charge has to trust those who have agreed to collaborate on the project. Everyone has to show confidence in the group. Encouragement is catching!

### Reaction to chance events

Anything can happen during a project. Keeping your cool is a must. In trying circumstances, a good leader stays calm, quickly proposes solutions, lets it be known that he/she is in control of the situation and, most importantly, does not try to lay blame or judge anyone.

## Evaluating

### Take the time to evaluate and to celebrate

However long the project is, an evening, a week, one or several years, evaluation is still an integral part of the project. You have to take the time to meet, perform a "post-mortem" and celebrate even a mitigated success.

This is a time to take an honest look at things, to avoid judging people, to congratulate and thank everyone for their efforts and contributions.

This exercise can be done using the initial description of the project to evaluate the needs met, the objectives achieved and how it went in terms of the content, measures, resources and constraints originally forecast.

## Acknowledgements

All projects benefit from the contributions of various people. Therefore, one of the last steps is to list all the supporters, donators, volunteers and team members who were involved, closely or otherwise, in the realization of the project. They should receive a word of thanks. No matter how it's done, it's the thought that counts.

## Keep a record

Someday, someone will be interested in redoing the same project or a similar one. Your evaluation report, or even the complete file, will be a valuable tool telling of a project seen through to a successful conclusion..

# Dear project,

*I'm writing to tell you of the pleasure*

*You brought me during the wonderful times*

*We spent together.*

*Now that you're gone,*

*I realize*

*How you filled my life.*

*I grew in your presence.*

*I now have more confidence in myself.*

*I know how to show my enthusiasm better.*

*I learned how to be flexible,*

*Because I had to adapt to*

*Circumstances and predicaments*

*That we met along our way.*

*I developed marvelous friendships.*

*You have indeed enriched my life.*

