Planning a Detailed Implementation Plan Workshop
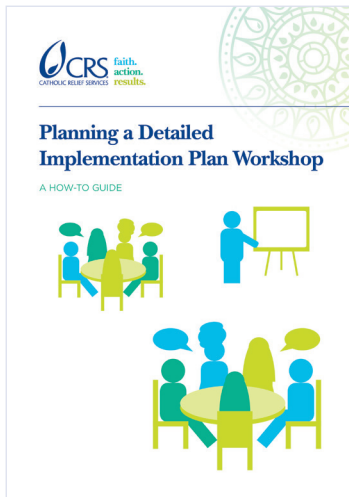
A HOW-TO GUIDE

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A detailed implementation plan (DIP) workshop is a participatory event that engages members of the project team in scheduling project activities and sub-activities in sufficient detail to facilitate smooth and effective project implementation.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

CoP   chief of party

CR   country representative

CRS   Catholic Relief Services

DIP   detailed implementation plan

DRD   deputy regional director

HoOps   head of operations

HoP   head of programming

ICT   information and communications technology

ICT4D   information and communications technology for development

IDEA   Institutional Donor Engagement and Advancement

IR   intermediate result

MEAL   monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning

PM   project manager

SO   strategic objective

Contents

INTRODUCTION

A detailed implementation plan (DIP) workshop is a participatory event that engages members of the project team in scheduling project activities and sub-activities in sufficient detail to facilitate smooth and effective project implementation. A DIP workshop is also an important opportunity for strengthening relationships between project team members and establishing a shared understanding of the project scope, schedule and resources.

This document is designed to be used by the planner of the DIP workshop—typically the project manager (PM) or chief of party (CoP)—as a guide through the planning steps and the decisions to be made leading up to the DIP workshop. The how-to guide also provides tips for the workshop itself, and a broad overview of DIP workshop follow-up steps. While this how-to guide will be especially useful for planning the initial DIP workshop in the start-up phase of a project, it also serves as a helpful reference for planning DIP workshops in each subsequent year of a multi-year project.

Other tools and templates that the DIP workshop planner should use along with this how-to guide include:

- **DIP Workshop: _7 Steps of Planning template_**—this is a document that the planner will prepare to clearly define the DIP workshop objectives, participants, and high-level logistics and methodology. The workshop planner may also share the final version of this document with participants before the workshop to provide an overview of the workshop methodology and background on why the workshop is important.
- **DIP Workshop: _Facilitation Guide template_**—this will help the planner to develop the workshop agenda, and provides step-by-step instructions for facilitating workshop sessions.
- **DIP Workshop: _Facilitator slides_**—this PowerPoint slideshow saves the planner time by providing customizable slides with session titles, instructions, discussion questions and more.
- **DIP Workshop: _Handouts_**—these are ready-made handouts and supplemental materials for distribution during the workshop as referenced in the Facilitation Guide template.

For more information about DIPs, see the key action guidance for project management Standard 7, key action 3 on the Compass website.

> **A detailed implementation plan (DIP) workshop is a participatory event that engages members of the project team in scheduling project activities and sub-activities in sufficient detail to facilitate smooth and effective project implementation.**

DIP workshops for follow-on projects

For most follow-on projects (second phases, expansions, etc.), DIP development should be easier than for an entirely new project, since the project team will be able to leverage the learning and experience from the previous project. Avoid the temptation to simply "recycle" the DIP from the previous project. Organize both a start-up workshop and a DIP workshop to sufficiently orient the team and plan sub-activities. Throughout this guide, we've included key reflection questions and guidance specific to planning a DIP workshop for a follow-on project.

GLOSSARY

- **Activity**: Higher-level actions listed in the project Proframe or proposal activity schedule to accomplish the stated outputs (the project deliverables). Activities are documented in DIPs.
- **Critical path**: The series of tasks that determines the minimum amount of time required to complete an activity, an output, a next-level result or an entire project.
- **Detailed implementation plan**: A schedule of activities and sub-activities that has sufficient detail to permit the smooth and effective implementation of the project. The DIP is completed after a project proposal is approved and before full project implementation begins.
- **Milestone**: An action or event marking a significant change or stage of development.
- **Network diagram**: A flowchart that shows the sequence, duration and interdependencies between the project activities and sub-activities.
- **Sub-activities**: Detailed descriptions of activity components that provide more information about what needs to be done to complete the activity and achieve the related output. Sub-activities are documented in DIPs.
- **Tasks**: Actions that need to be taken to complete a sub-activity of a project. Tasks guide the day-to-day work of programs and operations units, and are documented in workplans based on the project DIP.
- **Workplan**: A document that describes the detailed tasks required to complete the sub-activities of a project.
- **Work breakdown structure**: A hierarchical task list created by decomposing the project into components and the breakdown of the project process into increasingly detailed tasks.
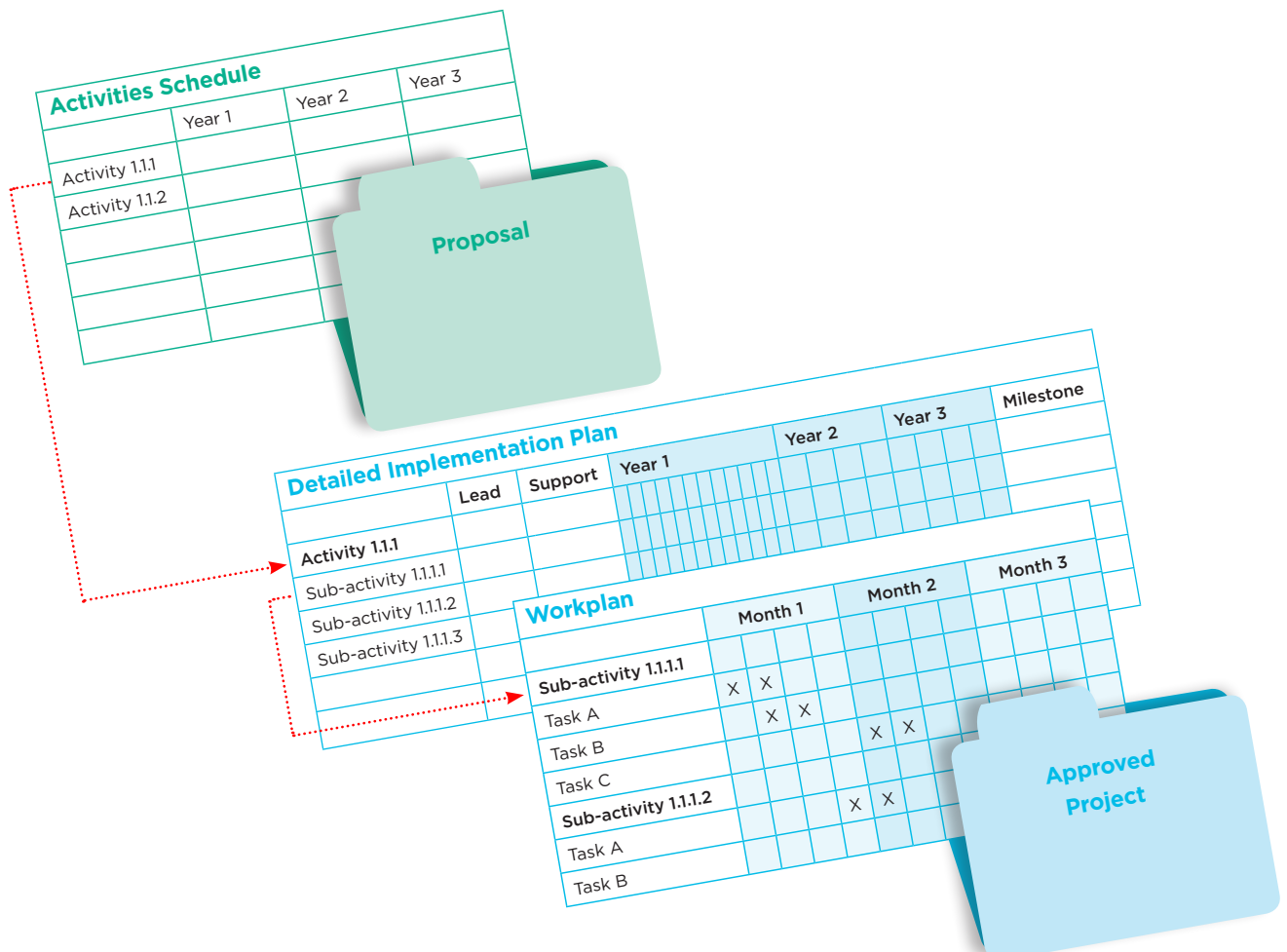
A. BEFORE THE WORKSHOP: PLAN AND PREPARE

1. **Determine the facilitation needs for the workshop.** A single facilitator may be sufficient for DIP workshops with a small number of attendees. For the initial DIP workshop of a project, a co-facilitator is recommended if the lead facilitator was not involved in the project design or if you anticipate a great number of attendees. Ideally, at least one of the facilitators should be familiar with the project design process. If any activities in the workshop will be held online, identify someone other than the lead facilitator to manage the technical components of the workshop (such as webinar production).

2. **Form a small planning team to support preparation of the DIP workshop (as needed)**. While this may not be necessary for smaller projects, a planning team is often helpful when preparing a DIP workshop for a complex project. The team can help you identify appropriate CRS and partner participants, support agenda and facilitation plan development, and plan logistics. Planning team members may also participate in daily reviews and recommend adjustments during the DIP workshop (see step 18) and/or support post-workshop follow-up. Discuss with the head of programming (HoP) who to include on the planning team. The planning team should ideally include both programming and operations staff. For a high-visibility or otherwise strategic project funded by an institutional donor, it may also be helpful to include IDEA staff who understand the donor's interests and requirements. Select those individuals best positioned to help you complete the steps below. Convene this team periodically leading up to the DIP workshop.

   > **A planning team can help you identify appropriate CRS and partner participants, support agenda and facilitation plan development, and plan logistics. The planning team should ideally include both programming and operations staff.**

3. **Plan for a project start-up workshop before the initial DIP workshop**. The start-up workshop's duration may range from a day (for a small project with an existing partner) to a multi-day event (for a complex project with many partners). The start-up workshop builds the foundation for an effective DIP workshop; it may immediately precede the DIP workshop (e.g., as the first and second days of a five-day event), or take place several weeks before the DIP workshop. See project management Standard 7, key action 2 on Compass for further guidance on how to organize the start-up workshop.

   > **The start-up workshop builds the foundation for an effective DIP workshop.**

   If the start-up and DIP workshops are held separately, and there will be DIP workshop participants who did not participate in the start-up workshop, ask those participants to meet with a colleague (ideally from their technical area) who attended the start-up workshop to review key project details and key points raised during that event.

4. **Develop an initial draft of the *DIP Workshop: 7 Steps of Planning* document, keeping in mind the specifics of the project context.** Use the *DIP Workshop: 7 Steps of Planning* starter template to define the specifics of the workshop—purpose, participants and process. In developing this document, reflect on key aspects of the project that will impact the DIP workshop including:

    - The project operating context.
    - The relationships between and among members of the project team and individual partner organizations.
    - Especially challenging issues emerging during the design or award negotiation process (for initial DIP workshops) or during implementation (for DIP workshops in Year 2 and beyond).

5. **Identify DIP workshop participants**. Choose participants who have a specific interest in identifying, scheduling and managing DIP activities and who have a solid understanding of programming and operations realities.

    - **CRS participants** in a DIP workshop may include:
        - Program staff—field office or country program-office-based staff, generalists and sectoral or other technical specialists including MEAL staff, who have a realistic sense of the steps and time needed to implement project activities.
        - Operations staff from human resources, supply chain management (including procurement), fleet, finance, and ICT (for projects with ICT4D components). These staff members understand the internal and external constraints affecting operations, and will know how long project operations processes may take.
        - Senior managers, including the country representative (CR), HoP and head of operations (HoOps), often participate in some or all of the DIP development, especially for large, complex, sensitive or strategic projects. The HoP often supports the PM/CoP with DIP workshop planning.
        - Deputy regional directors (DRDs) generally do not participate in DIP development, although they may co-facilitate a uniquely complex or strategic project (e.g. multiyear Food for Peace-funded awards).
    - **Partner staff/consortium member participants** in a DIP workshop may include: partner director (if substantially involved with the project and well-grounded in field realities), project manager and other project field staff, partner programming sector leads, partner human resources and finance staff, plus any other key partner operations staff (e.g., supply chain management, ICT, fleet, etc.). Work with the partner project managers to determine which key partner program and operations staff should participate in the workshop.

Click here to download a fully editable checklist of these steps.

- Other stakeholders—such as donors, engaged government officials and other government staff—are not typically invited to the DIP workshop unless they are part of the implementing team. It is more common to involve them in the project start-up workshop activities that precede the DIP workshop (see Standard 7, key action 2 on Compass for more guidance on start-up workshops).

6. **Plan preparatory activities for participants to complete before the workshop.** Workshop planners can be overly ambitious about what they hope to accomplish with participants during a workshop. Take a moment to revisit each of your objectives for the workshop. Consider what is essential to accomplish during the workshop while participants are together, what you can afford to do after the workshop, and what you can do before the workshop to prepare participants so they can make the most of their time together. Preparatory activities may include:

   - **A review of key documents.** At minimum, encourage all participants to review any relevant final proposal sections and key attachments before the DIP workshop. The start-up workshop should include a more detailed review of key content from the proposal. If there are other documents that participants need to review besides the content they will cover during the start-up workshop, identify these documents and share them with participants before the DIP workshop (see step 11 below). Ensuring that everyone completes the reading before the workshop can be tricky. Consider setting up a quiz about the key document review in Microsoft Forms to reinforce important points and encourage participants to share some of their own reflections on the key documents. This can help guide them in the review process and introduce a layer of accountability so that all participants are more likely to come to the workshop fully prepared.

   - **A virtual orientation.** A virtual session before the workshop using Microsoft Teams can be useful for offering participants an opportunity to reflect on key concepts and approaches that will be used in the DIP workshop, such as what a DIP is and why it is important. If the start-up workshop took place long before the DIP workshop, use the virtual orientation to offer participants a refresher on the results framework and on any risks, issues and opportunities that emerged during the project design validation process. If you plan a small group orientation, then consider using the breakout feature of Microsoft Teams to give participants an opportunity to interact with individuals that will be part of their small group during the DIP workshop.

7. **Review and revise the DIP template based on the project's requirements.** If the project is funded by an institutional donor and the donor has a DIP template, use that template as a starting point. Otherwise, use the CRS DIP template. Keep in mind that the CRS and partner plans may require a greater level of detail than the donor template provides to be useful in guiding the work of the project team. If you need to share a version of the DIP with the donor after the workshop, modify the more detailed plan to provide the level of detail that will be most appropriate and useful to the donor. Familiarize yourself with the DIP template to better understand the kinds of activities participants will need to plan in detail during the DIP workshop. Adjust the DIP template to meet the specific needs of the project by:

   - Deleting, adding or otherwise adjusting DIP template planning categories as necessary.
   - Pre-populating the template with the approved wording of the project strategic objectives (SOs), intermediate results (IRs), outputs and activities from the proposal or Proframe.
   - For institutional donor-funded projects, reviewing the Award Management Deliverables Calendar (Standard 10, key action 1) and adding related activities to the DIP.
   - Adjusting the template to reflect the overall project period and the timeframe being used for planning (i.e., monthly for the current annual planning period, possibly weekly for the first quarter, and quarterly columns for subsequent years).
   - Creating separate tabs for each year of the DIP and one tab showing a summary for the life of the project. (Optional)

8. **Open the *DIP Workshop: Facilitation Guide template* and adapt it to your workshop.**
   - Determine the workshop duration and the session sequence.
   - Adjust the step-by-step facilitation guide instructions for each session.
   - Calculate the duration of each workshop session.
   - Add opening and closing sessions, and breaks for each day of the workshop.
   - Develop a workshop agenda for participants.

9. **Decide how best to structure workshop small groups.**
   - Identify a leader for each small group and confirm each leader's availability to play this role. The role of the small group leaders will be to: (a) ensure that all members of their small group understand the instructions for small group activities during the workshop, and (b) ensure that each individual in their small group has the opportunity to speak and meaningfully contribute to the outputs of small group activities. Emphasize to the small group leaders that they are not required to develop the outputs for their small groups, but they do need to ensure that their small group works together effectively to produce the requested outputs.

FOR INSTITUTIONAL DONOR-FUNDED PROJECTS

As the project manager or chief of party, you must review the project agreement before the DIP workshop to ensure that you fully understand any donor restrictions on the timing of activities, resource allocations and other elements of the project. You should also review the project charter and agreed project tolerances. This will help you to be clear about which changes proposed during the DIP workshop you can approve, which will need to be reviewed by the project governance structure, and which will require donor approval.

WHAT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO ORGANIZE WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS INTO SMALL GROUPS?

Small groups will work closely together to complete portions of the DIP by:

- Detailing and sequencing activities and sub-activities for each output
- Identifying the critical path
- Identifying milestones
- Assigning responsibility for each sub-activity

Organize small groups based on the results framework IRs and outputs (unless another arrangement makes more sense for your project). Assign participants to groups based on their expertise relative to the focus of the output and IR. Ideally, one group would work on all outputs under their assigned IR. For very complex IRs, you may decide to distribute outputs among two or more groups. If there are any cross-cutting outputs or activities, consider how groups will address these during the workshop.

In addition to output-based groups, consider organizing a group or two focusing specifically on cross-cutting issues (e.g., project sustainability, exit and close-out planning, and/or partnership and consortium management) which too often do not receive enough attention in DIP planning. Think through how to ensure good coordination between these groups and IR- and output-based groups.

10. **Make arrangements for the workshop event space.** Schedule an appropriate meeting space and arrange for all required equipment.
    - Be sure the venue has sufficient wall space for the number of small groups.
    - Wherever possible, choose a venue with good internet connectivity.
    - Work with project/program team assistants and operations staff to confirm other logistical arrangements (such as meals and tea breaks) as required. Be sure to provide staff with clear budget information (including budget limits) for the event space and other costs.
    - For multi-day workshops, consider scheduling an informal, non-work-related activity outside of the event space on the third or fourth day of the workshop to strengthen team cohesion and allow participants to unwind.

11. **Send workshop invitations, preparatory materials and instructions to CRS and partner participants**. Although CRS and partner teams should have reserved time for the DIP workshop based on the dates established when developing the project early start-up plan (see project management Standard 6, key action 2 on Compass), sending a formal invitation will help to ensure participants are prepared.
    - Confirm the dates and email a formal invitation at least one month prior to the workshop.
    - If project circumstances necessitate that CRS organizes the DIP workshop several weeks after the start-up workshop, remind partners and CRS staff who participated in the project start-up workshop to complete any DIP workshop preparatory tasks.

> **For multi-day workshops, consider scheduling an informal, non-work-related activity outside of the event space to strengthen team cohesion and allow participants to unwind.**

- Translate documents as needed and attach any documents that participants need to review before the DIP workshop, including:
  - *DIP Workshop: 7 Steps of Planning*
  - Draft agenda
  - Other documents identified during step 6 above that participants should review beforehand

12. **Prepare to give clear guidance to the DIP workshop participants about the level of detail to include in the DIP.** A common question in DIP development is: "How detailed should the activities and sub-activities be?" The DIP must be detailed enough so that the sub-activities can be successfully managed and monitored.

    - Familiarize yourself with the terms "activity," "sub-activity," and "task" from the glossary above.
    - Review the example in Handout C to see how activities, sub-activities and tasks relate to the DIP and workplans. Create a similar handout using an output from your project and prepare to share this during the DIP workshop to illustrate the level of detail to include in the DIP.

13. **Adapt the *DIP Workshop: Facilitator Slides* based on the detailed facilitation guide.** Review and adapt the *DIP Workshop: Facilitator Slides* based on the sessions you have chosen and any additions and changes you have made to the facilitation guide.

14. **Meet with CRS operations staff to discuss how to optimize their contributions to the DIP workshop.** While some country programs effectively and consistently engage operations staff in DIP development, this is not always the case across all countries and projects. If operations staff in your country program have not typically participated in developing project DIPs, meet with the operations participants before the workshop to discuss the importance of their role. During the meeting with operations staff:

> **Emphasize the importance of operations staff contributions for ensuring a complete and realistic DIP.**

    - Emphasize the importance of operations staff contributions for ensuring a complete and realistic DIP.
    - Get operations staff's feedback on how the workshop activities could be structured to best make use of their time and maximize their contribution.

15. **Review the goals and draft agenda for the DIP workshop with partners during project start-up discussions (for the initial DIP workshop only).** Take advantage of pre-DIP workshop meetings and discussions with partner staff to ensure a common understanding of the purpose of and plan for the DIP workshop.

16. **Reach out to small-group leaders before the workshop to ensure they understand what is required to effectively manage the small-group work**. Be sure that small-group leaders understand:

   ■ How the small groups will be organized.
   ■ Instructions for any small-group activity they will be facilitating.
   ■ The level of detail that will be required for the DIP. Share the output example that you developed during step 11 above and ensure that facilitators can explain the level of detail appropriate to the DIP.

17. **Develop an approach for gathering and incorporating feedback from participants during the workshop.** Prepare a daily evaluation or an ongoing feedback mechanism throughout the workshop to collect information about participants' perspectives on the workshop sessions. Plan reminders about the feedback mechanism at the beginning and end of each day. Build in time to review each day's feedback before the next day of the workshop begins. Make adjustments to the agenda or workshop approach to improve the participant experience as needed.

18. **Consider establishing a small committee to meet during the workshop.** It may be helpful to form a small committee to monitor workshop progress and any issues requiring attention during the workshop. This is particularly important during DIP workshops for complex projects and/or complex partnerships. Invite a small number of participants (perhaps the small-group facilitators and one or two other key participants, potentially from the DIP workshop planning team, if you formed one) to join a committee that will meet after the final session on each day to share perspectives on how things are going, review feedback collected from workshop participants, and assist in identifying any changes needed to the workshop plan for the subsequent day(s).

   It may be helpful to form a small committee to monitor workshop progress and any issues requiring attention during the workshop.

19. **Gather any materials (supplies, handouts, etc.) needed for the DIP workshop**. Use the *DIP Workshop: Facilitation Guide template* to develop a list of handouts and materials you will need for the workshop. Finalize and print all handouts. Gather all other materials you will need. A typical list of supplies that you might require for an average DIP workshop includes:

   ■ Flipchart paper
   ■ Markers
   ■ Index cards
   ■ Masking tape
   ■ Extra paper (white and colored)
   ■ Materials for feedback session (see *DIP Workshop: Handouts tool*)
   ■ Small treats and/or prizes

B. DURING THE WORKSHOP: TIPS TO CONSIDER

See the *DIP Workshop: Facilitation Guide template* for detailed guidance on what to do during the workshop.

A day or two before the DIP workshop, review the following tips to think about what you can do to ensure that everything goes smoothly during the workshop:

- Prepare some lively music to play softly during warm-up and breaks to lighten the mood.
- Bring some small, inexpensive snacks or fun prizes that can be given out to participants as rewards or treats.
- DIP workshops are intense. Monitor energy levels in the room and incorporate energizers as needed to help enliven the atmosphere during slow periods—especially after lunch or breaks, or while working on a particularly challenging activity.
- Pay attention to which workshop activities are going well and which are not. Rotate from group to group to monitor progress during each session. Clarify instructions and adapt your facilitation as soon as possible to respond to any issues that arise. In DIP workshops with a large number of participants, seek feedback each day from different individuals and your workshop committee (if you have formed one) to determine whether any larger changes are needed to the workshop agenda or activities.
- Carefully observe group dynamics throughout the workshop. Moderate to the extent possible any sensitive topics, power dynamics, or relationship issues that might impact the group negatively. If you have formed a workshop committee (see step 18 above), discuss group dynamics during daily committee check-ins.
- Consider whether to invite one or more workshop participants to assist in finalizing the detailed implementation plan after the workshop. This small task force would be charged with refining, scheduling, and assigning responsibility for any activities and sub-activities that were not fully developed by the end of the DIP workshop.

Adapt your facilitation as soon as possible to respond to any issues that arise.

C. AFTER THE WORKSHOP: DEVELOP WORKPLANS BASED ON THE DIP

The DIP generated through the workshop will list all the activities and sub-activities for the project. However, the specific departments or teams that are part of the wider project team (e.g., project sectoral teams for complex, multi-sector projects, supply chain management, human resources, etc.) and individual staff generally need to further break down sub-activities into tasks in order to plan individual and team daily and weekly work.

If activities and sub-activities still need to be refined, scheduled and assigned, finalize these details as soon as possible after the workshop. Fill out the DIP template as completely as possible.

- Share the final DIP with the teams and departments involved in project implementation.
- Support members of the project team to use the DIP to develop workplans by:
  - Meeting with team leaders and team members to review relevant activities and sub-activities in the DIP, particularly those on the project's "critical path", and to confirm the budget and other resources available for the activities and sub-activities they are responsible for.
  - Helping colleagues as needed to further break down sub-activities into individual tasks by person and by week, and to use the resulting workplans for monitoring and supervision at the individual and team levels.
  - Assisting any other staff members who serve as CRS' primary liaison to a partner organization to support the partner in following a similar process with their own team.

For guidance on the development of detailed project supply chain management plans, see the _Supply Chain Management Handbook_.

> **Once you have finalized the DIP … use it!**
>
> The DIP is a living document and is only helpful if it is used.
>
> - Review and update it during quarterly planning and review meetings (see project management Standard 11, key action 4).
> - Use it during project financial planning and analysis (e.g. forecasting and budget comparison).
> - Develop a new DIP for each project year.