

Forecasting and Mitigating Project Risks

Despite your best efforts to create and follow a comprehensive work plan, your Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program project will inevitably face challenges. As a project leader, you can help ensure program continuity by periodically forecasting potential risks and mitigating them—in other words, lessening the blow—before they happen.

Some likely risks to TPP projects include:

- **Changes to staff.** For example, your longtime school coordinator, who has managed many fruitful relationships, resigns unexpectedly.
- **Changes in participant availability.** For example, the school that most of your participants attend changes its schedule, leaving those students unable to participate in your program.
- **Changes to referrals.** For example, a partner that refers many participants to your program goes out of business and can no longer make referrals.
- **Changes in location.** For example, your program space floods or rent goes up dramatically.

Use this resource to identify potential risks to your TPP project and strategies to mitigate these risks.

Forecasting risks

Start by identifying potential risks to your project. On a sheet of paper or whiteboard, create a matrix like the one below. Then plot each potential risk according to its **impact** (how big of a problem it would be for your project) and **probability** (how likely it is to happen in the next 3 to 5 years).

IMPACT	High	Difficult/Insurable (e.g., change in population, building floods)	Critical (e.g., participants unable to attend program due to school schedule change, changed or delayed funding)
	Low	Low Importance (e.g., volunteer turnover, change in internet provider)	Routine (e.g., human error in collecting or reporting data)
		Low	High

PROBABILITY

Mitigating risks

Now that you've identified and categorized potential risks, you can focus on mitigating them.

Create a table like the one below to document how you will mitigate risks to your project. Focus on developing mitigation strategies for risks that are **high impact** and **high probability**, such as a large grant payment being delayed. (It's much less important to plan for risks that are low impact and low probability, such as a part-time volunteer leaving.)

As a rule of thumb, risks that are **high probability** (right side of the matrix above) require ongoing monitoring and those that are **high impact** (top row of the matrix above) require ongoing management.

Risk Area	Risk Description	Probability	Impact	Mitigating Actions	Person Responsible
Partner	A school schedule change affects students' ability to attend program	High	High	Create a formal agreement with the existing school partner to lessen the likelihood of a sudden change	Project Director
				Cultivate relationships with other schools whose schedule aligns with that of your program	Partnership Coordinator
Funding	We submit a grant report late and lose funding for the next grant period	High	High	Create a grant report submission protocol that requires grants be submitted 5 days before the due date and assigns one team member to own the submission and another to provide oversight	Project Manager

Your next step is to implement these mitigation strategies and continually monitor risks, especially high probability ones. Going forward, periodically update your risk matrix and risk mitigation table to reflect changes in risks and mitigation strategies.

Keep in mind: Risk is a reality that you can't entirely avoid, so planning for it is your best defense.

Adapted from: Mintz, J. (2013). [Risky Business: Why All Nonprofits Should Periodically Assess Their Risk](#). Nonprofit Quarterly.

This resource was supported by the Office of Population Affairs (Grant TPSAH000006). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services; nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.