

Project Management 101b: Reducing Pressure and Stress
Developing Production Schedules and Operations Calendars

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Work backwards. That might sound counter-intuitive but setting the final deadline first can guarantee you've a realistic production schedule to meet that deadline.

To illustrate this, consider how an experienced cook might plan a meal parallel to the task of producing a timely newsletter. She (or me in this case) considers the factors that might affect my choice: number of people, food preferences, allergies, occasion, what else I have to accomplish at that time, availability of ingredients. In the case of an editor, factors might include audience, available contributors, upcoming events, current initiatives, promotional needs, standard coverage and features. In this example, the editor produces a newsletter that is both broadcast and mailed.

Next, you plan your menu/newsletter content based on the variables. The cook will estimate the time needed to coordinate preparation and place the food before her guests in the right order at the right moment. In the case of the editor, you estimate the time needed to complete each stage of the content collection (traffic control), writing, editing, production and distribution process.

Then you shop or in the case of the editor, identify who can provide the content and photographs, and make contact with your sources. The cook organizes all the ingredients and tools necessary to cook the meal; the editor organizes and edits all the content before executing the layout.

Here's an example of an actual newsletter that is produced by two volunteers, distributed to members both by mail and broadcast, and posted on a web site. Again, the first date that must be established is the delivery date ... when you want the publication to be in members' hands. The intervals between tasks need to be realistic and in line with the availability of the volunteers.

| Issue | deadline for submissions to editor | organize and edit material | materials to layout person | layout reviewed by editor | final edits; pre-press work | sent to print | delivered to mail house - mailed | uploaded to web site; prepared for broadcast system | broadcast date | In members' hands or e-mail boxes |
|--------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Summer | 7/12 | 7/12 | 7/14 | 7/16 | 7/19 | 7/20 | 7/23 | 7/24 | 7/24 | 7/24-7/27 |