

CRITICAL PATH

The development of an overall planning document, or critical path, constitutes an essential planning and coordination activity, as well as a learning experience. Careful planning is key to a successful summit, and the creation of the critical path starts the preparatory phase. The critical path is especially important if many staff are new to summit organization.

Preparation of a critical path requires considerable detailed work and time to complete. Yet, there is no more effective way to demonstrate to all participants the totality and complexity of the project and the coordination needed for success.

For this reason, as many members of the staff as possible should participate in the critical path sessions, chaired by the senior manager, Plans and Programmes, or the Executive Director. The process forces everyone involved to focus on the planning process and, to identify the time and effort needed to implement plans and meet objectives.

In the event that more than one summit is being organized by the same group, the critical path exercise can usually be completed more quickly for the second summit and is less important as a learning tool.

Once complete, the subsequent checklist of tasks and deadlines becomes invaluable for ensuring thoroughness and timeliness of preparations. Regular monthly or bi-weekly meetings should be held to review and, if necessary, revise the critical path. It becomes a vital tool for the Executive Director for tracking overall progress, section by section throughout the preparatory phase. By the time preparations reach the "transition phase", however, several weeks before the summit, events are usually moving too quickly for the critical path to be useful.