

ACLA COURSE STUDY GUIDE

Foundations of Project Management

Initiate, plan, execute and close projects professionally
— life cycles, scope, scheduling, risk, teams and a
capstone simulation.

Mr. Emeka Nwosu · Beginner

7 modules · 31 lessons · 8 weeks

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About This Course

Foundations of Project Management is a complete, self-paced introduction to modern project delivery. Seven modules cover what makes projects (and project managers) different, predictive, agile and hybrid life cycles, and then walk the full arc of delivery: initiating with a business case and charter, planning scope, schedules, budgets and risk, executing while monitoring performance, closing with lessons learned, and leading teams with professional responsibility throughout. The course ends with a capstone project simulation that ties every phase together.

Course information

Course	Foundations of Project Management
Instructor	Mr. Emeka Nwosu
Level	Beginner
Structure	7 modules · 31 lessons · 8 weeks
Assessment	Module quizzes (pass mark 60%) and a final test (pass mark 80%). Certificate issued on final success, verifiable at acla.io/verify .

What you will be able to do

1. Explain and apply the core concepts of introduction to project management.
2. Explain and apply the core concepts of project life cycles and methodologies.
3. Explain and apply the core concepts of initiating a project.
4. Explain and apply the core concepts of planning a project.
5. Explain and apply the core concepts of executing, monitoring, and controlling.
6. Explain and apply the core concepts of closing a project.

How to use this study guide

This guide is the complete companion to the Tapi Learn mobile course. Each chapter corresponds to one course module and reproduces every lesson in full, including the key takeaways. Read a lesson in the app, then revisit the same text here to revise; the structure and headings match the in-app lesson reader. After finishing a module, take the module quiz in the app (60% to pass), and after all modules, the final test (80% to pass) to earn your verified ACLA certificate of completion.

Module 1: Introduction to Project Management

A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. Two words carry the weight of that definition. "Temporary" means every project has a defined beginning and end — it is not indefinite, even if it runs for years.

5 lessons · 10m

1.1 What Is a Project?

A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. Two words carry the weight of that definition. "Temporary" means every project has a defined beginning and end — it is not indefinite, even if it runs for years. "Unique" means the output differs in some meaningful way from anything the organization has produced before, even if similar projects have been done previously. This distinguishes projects from operations. Operations are ongoing and repetitive: running a call center, manufacturing a standard product, or processing payroll every month. Projects are how organizations change, grow, and respond to new demands: designing a new product line, migrating to a new IT platform, or restructuring a department. Most organizations run both operations and projects simultaneously, and project managers must often negotiate for people and resources that operations managers also need.

1.2 Projects, Programs, and Portfolios

Organizations rarely manage a single project in isolation. Related projects are often grouped into a program — a set of related projects managed together to obtain benefits not available from managing them individually (for example, a "digital transformation program" containing a new website project, a CRM implementation project, and a staff-retraining project). Programs, projects, and other work are in turn grouped into a portfolio — the collection of projects, programs, and operational work that an organization prioritizes and funds to achieve its strategic objectives. Level — Primary Question — Time Horizon — Success Measure Project — Are we delivering this specific output on time, on budget, to spec? — Weeks to a few years — Scope, schedule, cost, quality targets met Program — Are the related projects together producing a greater benefit than they would alone? — Months to several years — Realized benefits, synergy across projects Portfolio — Are we investing in the right mix of work to achieve strategy? — Ongoing — Strategic alignment, return on investment

1.3 The Role of the Project Manager

The project manager (PM) is the person assigned by the performing organization to lead the team responsible for achieving the project objectives. The PM is rarely the person doing the technical work of the project; instead, the PM's job is to plan, coordinate, communicate, remove obstacles, manage risk, and keep the project aligned with its purpose. Effective project managers combine three broad skill sets: Technical project management skills — the ability to apply the tools and processes of the discipline: scheduling, budgeting, risk analysis, and reporting. Leadership skills — the ability to guide, motivate, and align a team, and to influence people who do not report to the PM directly. Strategic and business management skills — the ability to see how the project fits into the organization's broader goals and to make decisions that support that alignment.

1.4 The Triple Constraint — and Beyond

Every project manager must balance a set of interdependent constraints. Classically these are described as the "triple constraint": scope, time, and cost, often pictured as a triangle in which changing one side affects the others. Modern practice expands this to include quality, risk, and resources as constraints that must be actively managed alongside scope, schedule, and budget. Figure 1. The Expanded Project Constraints

Constraint — Core Question

Scope — What work must be done — and what is explicitly out of bounds?

Schedule — By when must the work be completed?

Cost — What budget is available, and how will spending be tracked?

Quality — What standard must the deliverables meet to be acceptable?

Risk — What uncertain events could help or harm the project, and how will we respond?

Resources — What people, equipment, and materials are available, and when?

A change to any one constraint ripples into the others. Adding scope without adding time or budget typically erodes quality or increases risk. Part of the project manager's job is making these trade-offs visible to sponsors and stakeholders rather than absorbing them silently. "A project manager's core job is not to do the work — it is to make sure the right work gets done, in the right order, by the right people, for the right reasons."

1.5 The Ten Knowledge Areas

This course, like most foundational project management frameworks, is organized around ten interconnected knowledge areas. Each will be explored in depth in Module 4 (Planning) and Module 5 (Executing, Monitoring, and Controlling), but it is useful to see the full set from the start.

— Knowledge Area — What It Covers

- 1 — Integration Management — Coordinating all the other pieces into one coherent plan and decision process
- 2 — Scope Management — Defining and controlling what is — and is not — included in the project
- 3 — Schedule Management — Sequencing activities and managing the timeline
- 4 — Cost Management — Estimating, budgeting, and controlling project spend
- 5 — Quality Management — Ensuring deliverables meet requirements and are fit for use
- 6 — Resource Management — Acquiring and managing the team and physical resources
- 7 — Communications Management — Ensuring the right information reaches the right people at the right time
- 8 — Risk Management — Identifying, analyzing, and responding to uncertainty
- 9 — Procurement Management — Acquiring goods and services from outside the project team
- 10 — Stakeholder Management — Identifying and engaging everyone who affects or is affected by the project

Module 2: Project Life Cycles and Methodologies

Regardless of industry or methodology, most projects move through five overlapping process groups. These are not rigid phases with hard handoffs; in practice they overlap, and Monitoring & Controlling runs continuously alongside the others.

4 lessons · 8m

2.1 The Five Process Groups

Regardless of industry or methodology, most projects move through five overlapping process groups. These are not rigid phases with hard handoffs; in practice they overlap, and Monitoring & Controlling runs continuously alongside the others. Process Group — Purpose — Typical Outputs Initiating — Authorize the project and define it at a high level — Project charter, initial stakeholder list Planning — Establish the full scope and the plan to deliver it — Project management plan, schedule, budget, risk register Executing — Perform the work described in the plan — Deliverables, work performance data Monitoring & Controlling — Track, review, and regulate progress and performance — Change requests, performance reports, updates Closing — Formally finalize all activities and close the project or phase — Final product/service, lessons learned, archived records

2.2 Predictive (Waterfall) Life Cycles

In a predictive life cycle, the project scope, schedule, and cost are determined as early as possible, and the project moves through sequential phases — requirements, design, build, test, deploy — with each phase largely complete before the next begins. This approach works well when requirements are well understood in advance, the solution is well known, and the cost of changing course late is high (for example, construction, infrastructure, and regulated manufacturing).

2.3 Agile and Iterative Life Cycles

Agile life cycles embrace changing requirements by delivering the product in small, frequent increments, gathering feedback, and adjusting continuously. Rather than defining all requirements up front, the team maintains a prioritized backlog of work and delivers a subset of it in each short cycle (an iteration or "sprint," typically one to four weeks). Agile approaches — including Scrum, Kanban, and Extreme Programming — emerged largely from software development but are now applied well beyond it, guided by the four values and twelve principles of the Agile Manifesto (2001): prioritizing individuals and interactions, working solutions, customer collaboration, and responding to change.

2.4 Hybrid Life Cycles

Many real-world projects combine elements of both. A hybrid life cycle might use predictive planning for a well-defined infrastructure component while managing a related software component with agile sprints. Hybrid approaches are common when an organization is transitioning methodologies, when regulatory requirements demand predictive documentation, or when only part of the solution is genuinely uncertain. Figure 2. Comparing Life Cycle Approaches Dimension — Predictive — Agile — Hybrid Requirements — Defined up front — Emerge and evolve — Mixed: some fixed, some emergent Change — Managed through formal change control — Expected and welcomed — Formal control for fixed parts; flexible for the rest Delivery — One release at the end — Frequent incremental releases — Combination Best fit — Stable, well-understood work; strict compliance needs — High uncertainty; evolving customer needs — Complex programs with mixed characteristics “Methodology is a means to an end. Choose the life cycle that fits the uncertainty of the work, not the fashion of the moment.”

Module 3: Initiating a Project

Before any planning begins, an organization must decide whether a proposed project is worth doing. The business case documents the problem or opportunity the project addresses, the options considered, the recommended option, and the expected benefits weighed against the estimated cost and risk.

4 lessons · 8m

3.1 The Business Case

Before any planning begins, an organization must decide whether a proposed project is worth doing. The business case documents the problem or opportunity the project addresses, the options considered, the recommended option, and the expected benefits weighed against the estimated cost and risk. A strong business case answers a simple question for decision-makers: why should the organization spend money and people's time on this instead of something else?

3.2 The Project Charter

Once a project is approved, the project charter formally authorizes it and gives the project manager the authority to apply organizational resources to project activities. The charter is typically short — often two to four pages — but it is the single most important document a new project manager will produce, because everything else in the project traces back to it.

3.3 Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders

A stakeholder is any individual, group, or organization that may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of the project — sponsors, customers, end users, team members, regulators, suppliers, and even groups opposed to the project. Identifying stakeholders early, and continuing to identify new ones throughout the project, is one of the highest-leverage activities a project manager performs. A common tool for prioritizing stakeholder engagement is the power/interest grid, which maps each stakeholder by how much influence (power) they have over the project and how much interest they have in its outcome. Figure 3. Power/Interest Grid for Stakeholder Engagement

High Interest	Low Interest
High Power — Keep Satisfied — inform periodically, avoid surprises — Manage Closely — engage frequently, involve in key decisions	Low Power — Monitor — minimal effort, watch for changes in status — Keep Informed — regular updates, gather feedback

3.4 Feasibility and Formal Approval

Larger or higher-risk projects often require a feasibility study before the charter is finalized — an assessment of technical feasibility (can it be built with available technology and skills?), operational feasibility (can the organization sustain and use the result?), and financial feasibility (do the projected benefits exceed the costs, typically expressed through metrics such as return on investment, payback period, or net present value). Formal approval — often through a governance body sometimes called a project or portfolio review board — signs off on the charter and releases funding and resources, moving the project from an idea into authorized work. “A project without a charter is a rumor with a budget.”

Module 4: Planning a Project

Scope management defines what is — and is not — included in the project. It begins with collecting requirements from stakeholders, then translating those requirements into a scope statement that describes the deliverables and explicitly lists exclusions (what the project will not do).

6 lessons · 12m

4.1 Scope Management and the Work Breakdown Structure

Scope management defines what is — and is not — included in the project. It begins with collecting requirements from stakeholders, then translating those requirements into a scope statement that describes the deliverables and explicitly lists exclusions (what the project will not do). The scope statement is then decomposed into a work breakdown structure (WBS): a hierarchical decomposition of the total scope of work into smaller, more manageable components, down to work packages small enough to estimate and assign. Figure 4. Sample Work Breakdown Structure (partial) for a Website Redesign Project Level 1 — Level 2 — Level 3 (Work Package) 1.0 Website Redesign — 1.1 Discovery & Requirements — 1.1.1 Stakeholder interviews / 1.1.2 Content audit 1.2 Design — 1.2.1 Wireframes / 1.2.2 Visual design / 1.2.3 Design review 1.3 Development — 1.3.1 Front-end build / 1.3.2 CMS integration / 1.3.3 QA testing 1.4 Launch — 1.4.1 Content migration / 1.4.2 Go-live / 1.4.3 Post-launch support A useful discipline when building a WBS is the 100% rule: the WBS must capture 100% of the work defined by the project scope, and the sum of the work at any lower level must equal 100% of the work represented by its parent. Anything not on the WBS is, by definition, out of scope.

4.2 Schedule Management

Once work packages are defined, they are sequenced into a network of dependent activities. Common dependency types include finish-to-start (the most common — one activity must finish before the next can start), start-to-start, finish-to-finish, and start-to-finish. Duration estimates for each activity are then applied — using techniques such as analogous estimating (based on similar past projects), parametric estimating (using a rate, such as hours per unit), or three-point estimating (optimistic, most likely, and pessimistic estimates averaged, often using a weighted PERT formula). The critical path is the longest sequence of dependent activities through the network; it determines the shortest possible project duration. Activities on the critical path have zero float (no schedule flexibility) — any delay to a critical path activity delays the entire project. Activities off the critical path have positive float and can absorb some delay without affecting the finish date. Identifying the critical path lets the project manager focus schedule-risk attention where it matters most.

4.3 Cost Management

Cost management estimates the resources needed for each activity, aggregates those estimates into a time-phased budget (often visualized as an S-curve of planned cumulative spend), and establishes the cost baseline against which actual performance will later be measured. Good practice reserves two kinds of buffer: contingency reserve for identified risks within the project manager's control, and management reserve for unidentified risks, held and released only by management.

Quality planning identifies which quality standards apply to the project and its deliverables and determines how compliance will be demonstrated. A useful distinction is between quality assurance (proactive, process-focused activities designed to build quality in and prevent defects) and quality control (reactive, product-focused activities that inspect deliverables and detect defects). Both matter: assurance without control risks undetected defects reaching the customer; control without assurance is expensive because it finds problems only after they have already been built.

4.4 Resource Management

Resource planning identifies the people, equipment, facilities, and materials the project needs, and when. For the human side, this includes defining roles and responsibilities (often using a RACI chart — Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed — for key deliverables), planning for acquisition or training of needed skills, and building a resource calendar that shows availability against demand to catch over-allocation before it becomes a crisis.

Communications planning determines who needs what information, in what format, how often, and through what channel. A communications management plan typically documents stakeholder information needs, the method and frequency of each communication, and escalation paths for urgent issues. A common guideline is the 7±2 rule of thumb: keep regular status reports focused on the handful of items that truly matter to each audience rather than every available data point.

4.5 Risk Management

Risk management follows a repeatable cycle: identify risks, analyze them (qualitatively, by probability and impact, and sometimes quantitatively), plan responses, and then monitor them throughout the project as new risks emerge and old ones change. Each identified risk is recorded in a risk register. Risk — Probability — Impact — Response Strategy — Owner Key vendor misses delivery date — Medium — High — Mitigate — add schedule buffer; qualify a backup vendor — Procurement lead Requirements change mid-build — High — Medium — Accept — build in a change-control process and reserve — Project manager Critical staff member leaves project — Low — High — Transfer — cross-train a backup; document knowledge — Resource manager Regulatory approval delayed — Medium — High — Avoid — submit application early; engage regulator proactively — Compliance lead Four common response strategies apply to negative risks (threats): avoid (eliminate the threat), mitigate (reduce probability or impact), transfer (shift the consequence to a third party, e.g., through insurance or a contract), and accept (acknowledge the risk and do nothing further unless it occurs, sometimes with a contingency plan on standby). Positive risks (opportunities) have parallel strategies: exploit, enhance, share, and accept.

4.6 Procurement Management

When work or materials must be obtained from outside the project team, procurement management governs how contracts are planned, solicited, awarded, and administered. Contract types carry different risk profiles: fixed-price contracts put cost-overflow risk on the seller, cost-reimbursable contracts put it on the buyer, and time-and-materials contracts sit in between and are common for smaller, less well-defined engagements. Choosing the right contract type is itself a risk-management decision. “A plan is not a prediction. It is the best current understanding of how the work will unfold — and the baseline against which change is recognized and managed.”

Module 5: Executing, Monitoring, and Controlling

Execution is where the plan becomes reality: the team performs the work, deliverables are produced, and the project manager's attention shifts from designing the plan to enabling the team, removing obstacles, managing stakeholder expectations, and keeping information flowing.

5 lessons · 10m

5.1 Directing and Managing the Work

Execution is where the plan becomes reality: the team performs the work, deliverables are produced, and the project manager's attention shifts from designing the plan to enabling the team, removing obstacles, managing stakeholder expectations, and keeping information flowing. Most of a project's budget and effort are consumed here, and most of a project manager's day-to-day time is spent here as well — in status meetings, one-on-ones, vendor coordination, and problem-solving.

5.2 Monitoring Performance with Earned Value Management

Monitoring & Controlling compares actual performance against the plan and decides whether corrective action is needed. Earned value management (EVM) is a widely used technique because it integrates scope, schedule, and cost into a single analysis rather than looking at cost alone.

Term	Definition	Formula / Meaning
Planned Value (PV)	Budgeted cost of work scheduled to date	The value work should have to date
Earned Value (EV)	Budgeted cost of work actually completed to date	The value of work actually done
Actual Cost (AC)	Actual cost incurred for work completed to date	What was really spent
Schedule Variance (SV)	$EV - PV$	Positive = ahead of schedule; negative = behind
Cost Variance (CV)	$EV - AC$	Positive = under budget; negative = over budget
Schedule Performance Index (SPI)	$EV \div PV$	> 1.0 = ahead of schedule
Cost Performance Index (CPI)	$EV \div AC$	> 1.0 = under budget

5.3 Integrated Change Control

No plan survives contact with a real project unchanged. When a change is proposed — new scope, a schedule shift, a budget increase — it should go through a formal change control process: the change is documented, its impact on scope, schedule, cost, quality, and risk is assessed, and an authorized body (often a change control board for larger projects, or the sponsor for smaller ones) approves, rejects, or defers it before the baseline is updated. Skipping this process is one of the most common causes of scope creep — the uncontrolled expansion of scope without corresponding adjustments to time, cost, or resources.

5.4 Quality Assurance and Quality Control in Practice

During execution, quality assurance activities include process audits and reviews designed to confirm the team is following the agreed approach, while quality control activities include inspections, testing, and statistical sampling of the actual deliverables. A control chart, for example, is a quality control tool used to determine whether a process is stable by tracking a measurement over time against upper and lower control limits.

5.5 Managing Issues and Escalation

Not every problem is a risk that was foreseen in advance; some are issues — problems that have already occurred and need resolution now. Maintaining a simple issue log (description, owner, priority, target resolution date, status) keeps problems visible and assigned rather than lost in email threads, and gives the project manager an evidence base for status reporting and escalation. “You cannot manage what you do not measure — but measuring the wrong things is just as dangerous as measuring nothing at all.”

Module 6: Closing a Project

Closing formally finalizes all activities across all process groups.

2 lessons · 4m

6.1 What Closing Involves

Closing formally finalizes all activities across all process groups. It is often rushed or skipped entirely once the deliverable ships and attention moves to the next initiative — but skipping closure has real costs: unresolved contracts, un-released resources, and lost organizational learning that the next project will have to relearn the hard way. Confirm all deliverables were accepted by the customer or sponsor against the criteria in the charter and scope statement. Close out any procurements and contracts, including final payments and formal contract closure documentation. Release team members and other resources back to their functional managers or to other projects. Archive project records — the charter, plans, risk register, change log, and reports — in an accessible, organized location. Conduct a lessons-learned session and document findings for use by future projects. Celebrate and recognize the team's contribution — closure is also an emotional milestone, not only an administrative one.

6.2 Lessons Learned

A lessons-learned session captures what worked, what did not, and what should be done differently next time — ideally gathered throughout the project, not only at the very end, since memories fade and turnover happens. A simple, non-blaming structure — what went well, what could have gone better, and what we will do differently — keeps the conversation constructive and future-focused rather than a search for someone to blame. “A project that is never formally closed is a project that never fully teaches the organization anything.”

Module 7: Leadership, Teams, and Professional Responsibility

Technical competence gets a project manager in the room; leadership is what makes a team willing to follow. Increasingly, effective project managers adopt a servant-leadership stance — prioritizing the growth, autonomy, and success of the team over command-and-control direction — while still being decisive when decisions are needed.

5 lessons · 10m

7.1 Leading, Not Just Managing

Technical competence gets a project manager in the room; leadership is what makes a team willing to follow. Increasingly, effective project managers adopt a servant-leadership stance — prioritizing the growth, autonomy, and success of the team over command-and-control direction — while still being decisive when decisions are needed. Emotional intelligence — self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skill — consistently distinguishes highly effective project leaders from technically strong but interpersonally weak ones.

7.2 Stages of Team Development

Bruce Tuckman's widely used model describes teams moving through four (later five) stages, and understanding which stage a team is in helps a project manager choose the right kind of support. Stage — What's Happening — PM's Role Forming — Team members are polite, cautious, and unclear on roles — Provide clear direction, structure, and introductions Storming — Conflict emerges over roles, approach, and priorities — Facilitate open discussion; do not suppress disagreement Norming — Team agrees on ways of working and starts to gel — Reinforce agreed norms; step back slightly Performing — Team works interdependently and effectively with minimal oversight — Delegate; focus on removing external obstacles Adjourning — Team disbands as the project closes — Recognize contributions; support transition to new work

7.3 Managing Conflict

Conflict on a project is normal and, handled well, often improves decisions. Five common conflict-resolution approaches vary in how much they satisfy each party's concerns versus preserve the relationship: withdrawing/avoiding (postponing or sidestepping the issue), smoothing/accommodating (emphasizing agreement to preserve harmony), compromising (each side gives up something), forcing/directing (imposing a solution, appropriate mainly when speed or safety is critical), and collaborating/problem-solving (working together to find a solution that satisfies both parties' underlying interests — generally the strongest approach when time allows).

7.4 Communication and Influence

Much of a project manager's leadership is exercised through communication rather than formal authority, especially in matrix organizations where team members report to functional managers and only work on the project part-time. Active listening, tailoring messages to the audience, and choosing the right channel (a quick conversation for a sensitive issue rather than an email, a written summary for a decision that needs a record) all directly affect how much influence a project manager can exert without positional power.

7.5 Professional and Ethical Responsibility

Project managers routinely have access to sensitive information, control over budgets, and influence over people's careers — all of which carry ethical weight. Widely referenced codes of professional conduct for project managers, such as the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, converge on four core values: Value — In Practice Responsibility — Owning the decisions we make and the consequences that follow, including admitting mistakes Respect — Treating stakeholders, team members, and competitors with dignity, regardless of position or culture Fairness — Making decisions impartially, disclosing conflicts of interest, and not favoring personal gain over the project's interest Honesty — Reporting status and risk accurately, even when the news is unwelcome “Trust is the currency of project leadership. It is earned slowly, through consistent honesty, and lost quickly, through a single convenient exaggeration.”

Final Assessment & Certificate

The final test draws on questions from every module. The pass mark is 80%. When you pass, Tapi Learn issues a certificate of completion bearing your name, the course title, your final score, a unique certificate number and the signature of the CEO of the Pan African Network for Climate Action (PANFCA). Each certificate carries a verification URL (acla.io/verify/<number>) so employers and partners can confirm its authenticity. You can download the certificate as a PDF directly from the app at any time, and your progress and certificates are backed up to the cloud under your email address.

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