



# AI SIMPLIFIED

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## USING AI GRAPHICS TO COMMUNICATE PROJECT PROGRESS

Modern projects generate large amounts of information, metrics, timelines, processes, risks, and outcomes. However, stakeholders rarely absorb complex information effectively when it is presented only in text or tables. Visual communication bridges that gap. Charts, diagrams, and infographics enable teams to quickly interpret patterns, understand relationships among variables, and communicate complex ideas with clarity.

Artificial intelligence is rapidly expanding the ability to create these visuals. Instead of spending hours manually designing charts or diagrams, professionals can now use AI-powered tools to generate graphics, refine visual layouts, and transform raw data into visual insights within minutes. These capabilities are becoming especially valuable in project environments where teams must communicate results quickly and clearly.

### WHY VISUAL COMMUNICATION MATTERS IN PROJECTS

Research in data visualization consistently shows that people process visual information far more efficiently than large blocks of text. Visualizations help teams identify trends, recognize patterns, and interpret complex relationships within datasets. Reviewing 127 studies, researchers found that interactive, customizable visualizations can support comprehension and decision-making, especially when they reduce cognitive load and align with user needs (Neri et al., 2025).

Artificial intelligence is now enhancing these capabilities by automating portions of the visualization process. AI-assisted visualization systems can recommend chart types, generate visual summaries, and even detect patterns within data that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Recent work in generative AI and visualization suggests that AI-driven tools can significantly improve how individuals explore and communicate data. For example, research examining generative visualization systems highlights how AI can help users automatically generate visual insights and explanations from datasets (Ye et al., 2024). Similarly, emerging research in AI-supported communication systems suggests that AI-assisted visualization improves decision-making and stakeholder comprehension in complex environments (Neri et al., 2025). Reviewing 135 peer-reviewed articles, the authors found that among 81 effectiveness studies, 71 (87.7%) reported that infographics were effective for improving knowledge or changing attitudes/behaviors. However, they also noted that many studies had methodological weaknesses. (Kong, H, 2025).

# AI IMAGE AND GRAPHIC GENERATORS

Image generation systems create visual assets from written descriptions. These tools are particularly useful when teams need conceptual illustrations, presentation graphics, or visual storytelling elements.

Common tools include:

## *ChatGPT Image Generation*

ChatGPT image generation lets users create images directly inside ChatGPT by describing what they want in natural language. OpenAI says it is designed to closely follow prompts, render text more accurately than earlier systems, and leverage chat context to improve results. It can also work with uploaded images for editing or visual transformation. This makes it useful for quick concept art, teaching visuals, diagrams, marketing ideas, and iterative creative work within a single conversation.

## *Midjourney*

Midjourney is an AI image generator widely known for producing highly stylized, visually striking artwork. Its official materials emphasize creativity, exploration, and image generation through prompts, including the ability to guide results with image prompts as references. Many users value it for cinematic, artistic, and imaginative outputs rather than strict realism or document-style precision. It is often chosen when the goal is a strong visual mood, artistic detail, and distinctive aesthetics.

## *Adobe Firefly*

Adobe Firefly is Adobe's generative AI platform for creating and editing images, and it has expanded into video, audio, vector graphics, and design workflows. Adobe presents it as a creator-focused tool that works across creative tasks and integrates with the broader Adobe ecosystem. A major point Adobe highlights is its approach to generating content more safely for commercial use, including statements that it does not train on Creative Cloud subscribers' personal content and that it does not use Adobe Stock editorial content for training. Firefly is especially useful for designers, educators, and marketers who want AI features inside familiar Adobe tools and workflows.

## *DALL·E*

DALL·E is OpenAI's text-to-image system for generating original images from written descriptions. OpenAI describes it as capable of combining concepts, attributes, and styles, while later versions improved prompt adherence compared with earlier image generators. DALL·E also introduced editing abilities such as inpainting and outpainting, which allow parts of an image to be changed or extended. It is crucial historically because it helped establish the modern expectation that users can turn plain-language prompts into detailed visual outputs.

These systems operate using a prompt-based workflow. Users describe the desired image, and the system generates several visual options that can be refined or edited.

### *Example workflow:*

1. Write a visual prompt describing the graphic.
2. Generate multiple variations.
3. Select the best version.
4. Refine or edit the design.

### *Example prompt:*

Create a modern infographic illustration showing the five phases of project management with icons representing initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, and closing.

These tools are especially helpful when creating visuals for presentations, training materials, or conceptual diagrams.

## **PRACTICAL WORKFLOW FOR CREATING AI-GENERATED GRAPHICS**

The following steps are necessary if one is going to use AI to assist in graphical creation. In many project management cases, graphics are linked to specific metrics that require precise measurements and up-to-date data before the graphics are created.

There are five steps associated with graphic creation best practices in project management. Defining the visual objective for the graphic helps AI understand the output and objective. Is this graphic to show metrics, before and after measurements, or a flow diagram through a process? AI can help with any of these, but it must understand the graphical expectations for this output.

### *Step 1: Define the Visual Objective*

Begin by identifying the purpose of the graphic. The purpose can include discussing the process, comparing metrics before and after, comparing budget to actual, examining system architecture or visualizing trends. In each of these, the prompt needs specifics so it can produce what is wanted.

### *Step 2: Prepare the Data*

When creating charts or dashboards, the quality of the dataset strongly influences the resulting visualizations. Poorly structured data often produces misleading or confusing visuals. One of the best ways to reduce confusing visuals is to keep each graphic simple, ensure labeling is large enough to read, and use simple terms. Using a term that is not understandable undermines the graphic's effectiveness and can lead participants to misinterpret it. In addition, when preparing data, the formatting needs to be consistent so that everyone can understand the flow and find the data in areas like those of other graphics.

Only after the data is ready can the project manager and team allow AI to create graphics for the next presentation. If the data is wrong, the graphics are not ready for creation, as they can give readers the wrong impression.

### ***Step 3: Generate Visualization***

Use AI tools to create initial graphics. The graphic can take many forms, from a line chart showing project cost variances over the past 6 months to a process design showing the stages of risk management to an infographic summarizing the 7 steps of change management.

Regardless of the visualization, the graphic will need a detailed prompt explaining to the AI tool what the user wants, all graphic components, and the specific output desired. Each of these areas needs more narrative than a comment or question to get the best results.

### ***Step 4: Refine the Design***

Each prompt can get a response from the AI tool, but how a prompt works one time may not be the same as the next. Most visualizations need refinement to add details they missed or to correct unwanted details. Regardless of what you want to change, leave all the previous information in the AI tool along with the prompt, and create a new prompt to explain what you want adjusted. The AI tool uses both the old prompt and the output to add foundational information to begin the correction. Removing everything and starting over is not the best way to get the correct output, because it erases the AI tool's foundational findings.

### ***Step 5: Clarify for the Viewer***

Ask whether a reasonable viewer would interpret the graphic correctly, or whether the design could lead to confusion, overstatement, or inaccurate assumptions. Does the visualization convey the intended message without leading to false conclusions?

Questions to consider when refining visualizations:

***Does the visualization accurately reflect the source data or information?***

Check whether the numbers, categories, labels, and relationships shown match the original material.

***Are the titles, axis labels, legends, and captions clear and correct?***

A visualization may look polished but still be misleading if the labeling is incomplete, vague, or inaccurate.

***Is the chart type appropriate for the kind of data being presented?***

Confirm that the format fits the message. For example, trends over time usually need a line chart, while comparisons across groups may need a bar chart.

### *Are the scales and proportions displayed honestly?*

Look for distorted axes, uneven intervals, exaggerated sizes, or visual elements that make differences appear larger or smaller than they really are.

### *Does the visualization avoid misleading emphasis or visual bias?*

Review whether color, size, placement, or design choices draw attention in ways that could misrepresent the underlying meaning.

### *Are all visual elements internally consistent?*

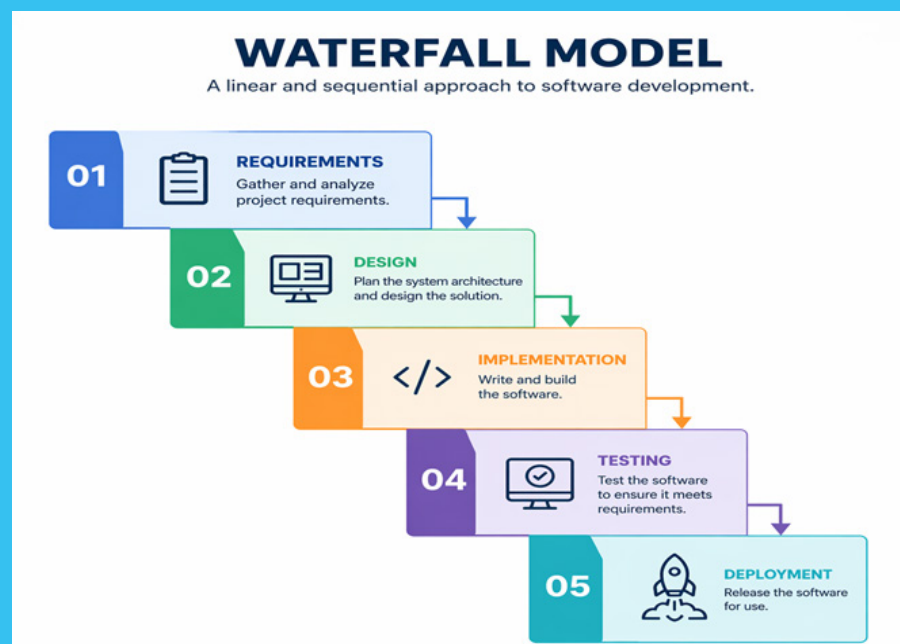
Check whether colors, symbols, icons, category names, and formatting are used consistently throughout the graphic.

## CREATING PROJECT MANAGEMENT GRAPHICS

There are two methodologies for project management: Agile (change-driven) and predictive (plan-driven). Each method supports a specific type of project. Creating models or developing visuals for your process or model can help the group understand the various stages or steps each person must follow. Allow others to see the visuals, not only hear about the process, but also see the various steps in graphic form. An example of this is both the waterfall and Agile models. These two models explain how to run both traditional and iterative projects.

### *Waterfall Model*

Waterfall focuses on a traditional command-and-control mindset, which includes creating a project plan at the beginning of the project and after all requirements are understood. Then baselining that project plan so no changes happen unless everyone understands the change and it is approved, typically with a signed change request. Command-and-control approaches work best on projects with strong constraints and fewer change requests or change orders.



## Prompt for Waterfall Methodology:

Create a professional project waterfall model diagram that clearly shows the traditional sequential phases of project management. Include the following phases in descending order with arrows flowing downward from one phase to the next:

1. Requirements
2. Design
3. Implementation
4. Testing
5. Deployment

Make the diagram clean, modern, and easy to understand for business or academic use. Use rectangular or stepped sections to represent the waterfall flow visually. Include short descriptions under each phase explaining its purpose. Use a professional color palette such as blue, gray, and white.

## Agile Model

Agile or change-driven project management focuses on supporting project changes and building a model that allows for frequent changes. Agile models typically run the project in 2- to 3-week sprints, allowing frequent changes to be planned after each interaction. The customer can discuss the changes with the product owner, and the product owner ranks the user stories or features based on value and priority. Then, from the product backlog, the product owner creates an iteration backlog for the next sprint. The iteration backlog is to be followed by the team for the next sprint.



## ***Prompt for Agile Methodology:***

Create a professional, easy-to-understand Agile methodology model. The model should visually explain how Agile works as an iterative, collaborative, and flexible project management approach. Include the following core elements:

- Product Vision or Goal
- Product Backlog
- Sprint Planning
- Sprint Backlog
- Sprint Execution
- Daily Stand-up
- Increment or Working Deliverable
- Sprint Review
- Sprint Retrospective
- Continuous Improvement

Show the model as a cycle rather than a straight line so participants can see that Agile is ongoing and iterative. Use arrows to illustrate the repeating flow of work through each sprint. Make the design simple enough for teams to understand quickly, but professional enough for seminar presentations and discussion. Use a clean, modern layout with professional colors.

Also include brief explanations for each step so participants can talk about:

- what happens in each stage
- who is involved
- how feedback is gathered
- how improvement takes place over time

## **10 PROJECT MANAGEMENT VISUALIZATION GRAPHICS**

In addition to using AI tools to create the overall project model for training or to explain the overall model in a proposal, the AI tools can also design specific graphics for areas throughout the project. Each graphic can clearly communicate the next steps and outputs in less time than providing a narrative to each person. Below are 10 different visualization graphics one might use in various project sections.

In this section, there are 10 samples of various types of graphics, along with a sample prompt to help you create them quickly with ChatGPT. Readers are encouraged to experiment with the various tools using the provided starting prompts. Each tool will read the prompts and respond differently, so do not hesitate to play with each, let it create the graphic, and see if the output is the one you want.

# 10 Project Management Visualization Graphics

Presentation-ready examples with clear project management use cases

1. Project Timeline

2. Work Breakdown Structure

3. RACI Matrix

4. Risk Heat Map

5. Stakeholder Power-Interest Grid

6. Milestone Dashboard

7. Budget vs. Actual Cost

8. Resource Allocation

9. Issue Escalation Funnel

10. Project Health Dashboard

Use these in slides, status reports, training, and executive updates

## Project Timeline

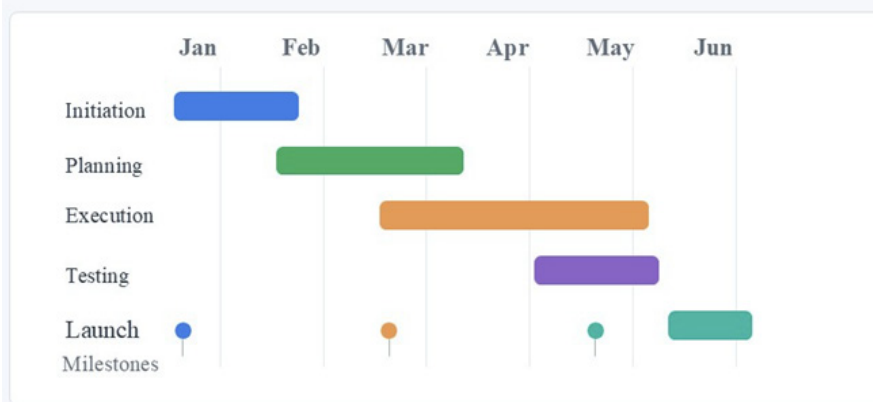
A Project Timeline is one of the most familiar and useful visuals in project management because it translates a complex schedule into something people can quickly understand. It presents activities, milestones, and deadlines over time so viewers can see when work begins and ends, and how major phases connect. This makes it especially valuable for giving stakeholders a broad picture of the project without requiring them to interpret a detailed scheduling tool.

The strength of a timeline is that it makes the sequence visible. Team members can see whether planning must finish before design begins, whether testing overlaps with development, and whether a milestone is approaching faster than expected. A timeline also helps project managers communicate the project's pace. When a sponsor asks, "Where are we in the project?" the timeline visually answers that question, often more effectively than a written status note.

A well-designed timeline also supports alignment and the management of expectations. It can reduce confusion about due dates, show whether tasks are compressed, and highlight slippage when actual progress no longer matches the original schedule. At the same time, a timeline should remain readable. If it becomes overloaded with too many tasks, dependencies, and annotations, it stops being a communication tool and starts becoming a cluttered planning artifact.

## Project Timeline

A visual schedule showing phases, milestones, and dependencies across time.



### ***Prompt for Timeline:***

Design a visually engaging project management timeline graphic that illustrates the full lifecycle of a project from beginning to end. The graphic should help participants understand how project work is scheduled over time and how milestones guide progress. Include these sections:

- ***Initiation*** – project approval, goals, and stakeholders identified
- ***Planning*** – scope, schedule, budget, resources, and risk planning
- ***Execution*** – project work begins and deliverables are developed
- ***Monitoring and Controlling*** – progress is tracked, and adjustments are made
- ***Closing*** – final deliverables are completed and the project is formally closed

For each phase, list a few representative tasks and place them on a timeline, with milestones between major phases. Use a businesslike design with distinct sections, date markers, and milestone symbols.

### ***Best situations to use this graphic:***

- Project kickoff meetings
- Executive schedule reviews
- Client updates
- Milestone planning sessions
- Phase-based reporting

### ***Challenges in using this graphic:***

- Can become crowded when too many tasks are included
- May oversimplify complex dependencies
- Requires frequent updates to stay accurate
- Stakeholders may mistake it for a precise execution plan when it is only a summary view

## ***Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)***

A Work Breakdown Structure is a hierarchical graphic that shows how the total project scope is divided into major deliverables and then into smaller work packages. Its value lies in helping the team define what is included in the project. Instead of talking about the work in vague terms, the WBS forces the project manager and stakeholders to organize scope into visible, structured pieces.

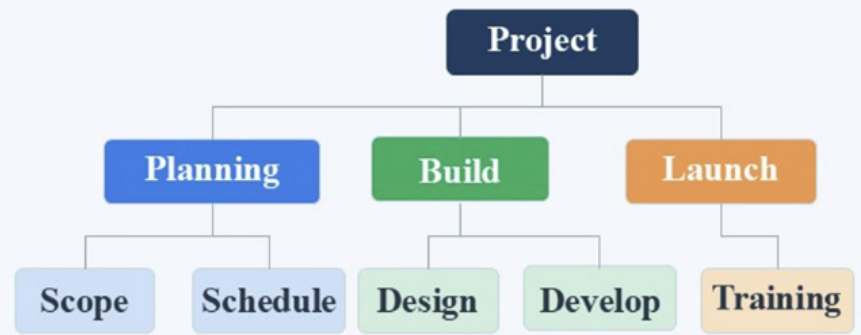
This graphic is particularly helpful in the early planning stage because it anchors scope conversations in concrete deliverables. When teams skip this kind of decomposition, they often discover later that assumptions were not shared. One group may think “training” includes user manuals and classroom

sessions, while another may think it only means a short demo. A WBS reduces this ambiguity by turning broad categories into a structured representation of work.

The WBS also improves downstream planning by supporting budgeting, scheduling, staffing, and accountability. Once the scope is broken into clear work packages, it becomes easier to estimate effort, assign ownership, and identify missing elements. Its weakness, however, is that it is sometimes treated as a decorative outline rather than a genuine scope-control tool. If the WBS is incomplete or too generic, it can foster false confidence rather than clarity.

## Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)

A hierarchical breakdown of the total project scope into deliverables and work packages.



### ***Prompt for Work Breakdown Structure:***

Create a professional and detailed Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) graphic. The graphic should visually break a project into smaller, manageable components so participants can clearly see how the total scope of work is organized from the highest level down to specific deliverables and work packages.

The WBS should be presented in a hierarchical format, beginning with the full project title at the top, followed by major deliverables or phases, then sub-deliverables, and finally detailed work packages at the lowest level. The structure should clearly demonstrate how large project outcomes are divided into increasingly specific parts so teams can understand scope, responsibilities, sequencing, and accountability.

Include the following design and content requirements:

- Place the project name or overall objective at the top of the diagram.
- Break the project into Level 1 major deliverables or phases.
- Under each Level 1 item, include Level 2 sub-deliverables or major work components.
- Under each Level 2 item, include Level 3 work packages or specific tasks that can be assigned, tracked, and completed.
- Show the structure using connecting lines, boxes, or branches so the hierarchy is visually clear.
- Use consistent formatting so each level is easy to distinguish.
- Make the layout clean, professional, and easy to follow for both beginners and experienced project teams.

- Use a business-friendly design with a modern, professional color palette.
- Include enough detail for the visual to support discussion about project scope, delegation, risk areas, and task ownership.

The WBS should reflect the principle that the project is broken down into deliverables and scope components, not merely a simple to-do list. Each branch should represent a meaningful part of the total project effort. The lowest level should identify work packages that are specific enough to estimate time, assign responsibility, and monitor progress.

***Best situations to use this graphic:***

- Scope definition workshops
- Project charter and planning sessions
- Estimating and cost planning
- Team role clarification
- Early-stage project design

***Challenges in using this graphic:***

- Can be too high-level to guide execution if not broken down enough
- Can become too detailed and hard to read
- Requires agreement on scope boundaries
- Teams may confuse deliverables with activities if the structure is not built carefully

## ***RACI Matrix***

A RACI Matrix is a responsibility graphic that clarifies who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed for tasks, deliverables, or decisions. It is especially valuable in projects involving multiple departments, as role confusion is one of the most common reasons for work stalling. When people do not know who must act, approve, advise, or stay informed, decision-making slows and accountability weakens.

The practical benefit of the RACI Matrix is that it makes invisible assumptions visible. In many projects, several people believe they are leading a deliverable, while in other

### **RACI Matrix**

A role-assignment matrix defining who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed.

Task / Deliverable	PM	Sponsor	Analyst	Team
Requirements	A	C	R	I
Plan Approved	R	A	C	I
Solution Design	C	I	A	R
Testing Signoff	R	A	C	R
Go-Live Update	A	C	I	R

cases, everyone assumes someone else owns it. The matrix exposes those gaps. It also helps prevent over-participation, where too many people are involved in decisions that should remain focused. This can reduce meeting fatigue and improve decision speed.

At a deeper level, the RACI Matrix strengthens governance. It does not just show who performs tasks; it reflects how authority and communication flow through the project. Still, it has limitations. A RACI Matrix can create an illusion of clarity if it is built mechanically without real discussion. It may also oversimplify situations where ownership shifts over time or where collaboration is more fluid than a single letter can capture.

### ***Prompt for RACI Matrix:***

Design a professional RACI Matrix for project management that helps learners and team members understand how responsibilities are assigned across a project. The chart should list major project management activities vertically and project roles horizontally. Each intersecting cell should contain the appropriate R, A, C, or I designation to show who is responsible, accountable, consulted, or informed for each task.

Use these roles:

Project Manager, Project Sponsor, Team Lead, Team Member, Stakeholder.

Use these activities:

Define project scope, develop project plan, approve budget, assign tasks and resources, complete project work, monitor progress, manage risks and issues, review deliverables, approve final deliverable, communicate project status, and close project.

The visual style should be simple, modern, and professional. Use color coding or subtle shading to help distinguish the RACI letters, but keep the chart uncluttered and easy to explain. Add a legend at the bottom that defines each letter.

### ***Best situations to use this graphic:***

- Cross-functional projects
- Governance planning
- Role clarification meetings
- Decision-rights discussions
- Projects with multiple sponsors or departments

### ***Challenges in using this graphic:***

- It can become confusing if too many people are listed
- May oversimplify collaborative work
- Requires honest discussion about authority
- Teams may assign labels without changing real behavior

# Risk Heat Map

A Risk Heat Map is a visual grid that plots risks by likelihood and impact. It is one of the most effective graphics for prioritizing risk because it transforms a long list of threats into a visible pattern. Instead of reading a register line by line, stakeholders can quickly see which risks deserve immediate attention and which ones can be monitored with less urgency.

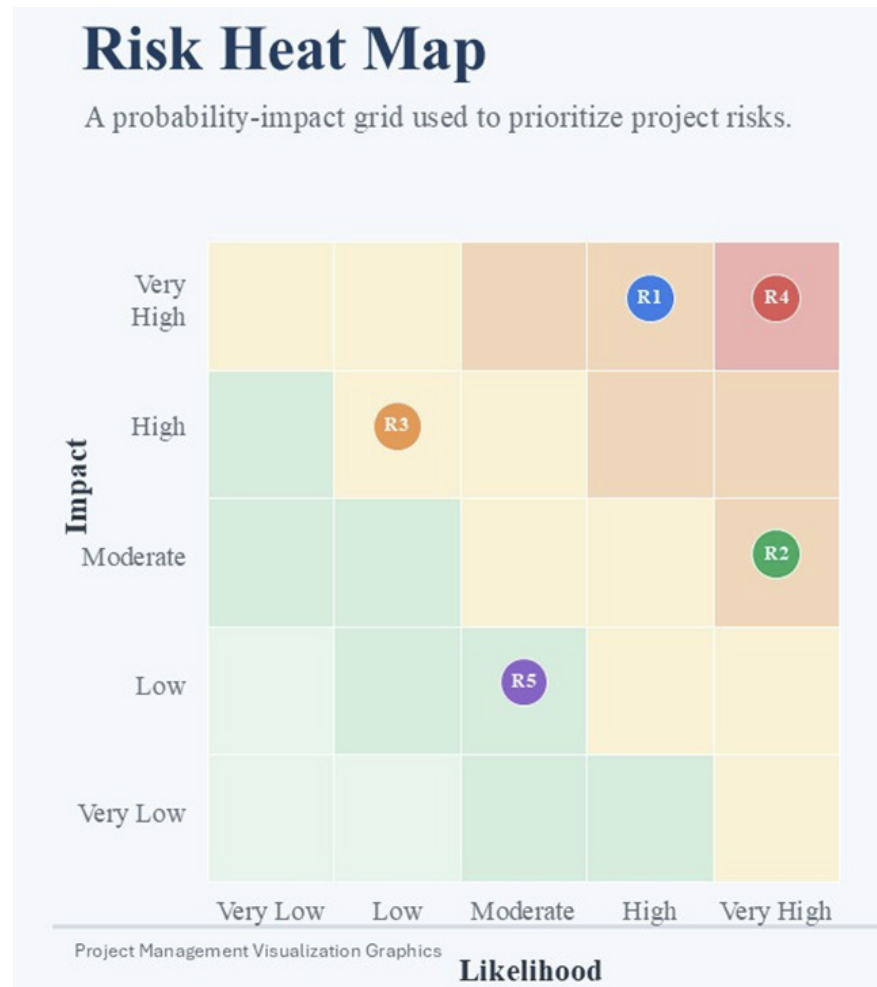
The graphic is useful because it supports prioritization rather than mere documentation. A project may face dozens of risks, but not all require the same level of effort. The heat map helps leadership focus mitigation planning on risks that are both likely and severe. It also enables more strategic discussion. Rather than asking whether a risk exists, the team begins by asking whether its probability or impact can be reduced.

Even so, the quality of the heat map depends on the quality of the scoring behind it. If probability and impact ratings are arbitrary, politically influenced, or inconsistent, the visual becomes misleading. Another challenge is that the heat map may fail to show relationships among risks. Some risks trigger others, and a simple grid may not capture cascading effects or the timing of exposure.

## ***Prompt for Risk Heat Map:***

Design a clear, professional project Risk Heat Map as a 5x5 matrix that visually prioritizes risks by likelihood of occurrence and impact on project objectives. The vertical axis should represent probability from very low to very high, and the horizontal axis should represent impact from very low to very high. Use a traffic-light-style color gradient moving from green in the lower-left corner to red in the upper-right corner, showing increasing levels of concern.

Include several common project risks plotted inside the matrix, such as budget overrun, schedule delay, scope creep, technology failure, supplier issues, staff turnover, stakeholder conflict, and compliance risk. Each risk should be placed in a logical position based on its relative severity. Use concise labels, clear typography, and a polished business style. Include a legend that explains the meaning of each color band and what level of response is expected for each risk category.



### *Best situations to use this graphic:*

- Risk review meetings
- Steering committee presentations
- Governance reporting
- Project health discussions
- Readiness or pre-launch reviews

### *Challenges in using this graphic:*

- Scoring can be subjective
- Does not always show interdependence among risks
- May oversimplify dynamic risk behavior
- Can be misused as a static document rather than a living analysis tool

## *Stakeholder Power-Interest Grid*

A Stakeholder Power-Interest Grid maps stakeholders by their level of influence and interest in the project. This graphic is valuable because not all stakeholders need the same communication strategy. Some require close management because they can affect approvals, funding, or direction, while others mainly need updates and reassurance.

The grid helps project managers think strategically about engagement. A high-power, high-interest stakeholder may need regular briefings and direct involvement in key decisions. A low-power but high-interest group may need consistent communication to maintain support and trust. By contrast, stakeholders with high power but low interest may not need constant detail, but they do need confidence that the project is under control. The graphic, therefore, links stakeholder analysis to communication planning.



This visual is especially effective when projects involve organizational politics, senior leadership, or external partners. It gives the team a practical way to prioritize limited communication time. The challenge is that stakeholder positions can change during the project. A stakeholder with low interest today may become highly engaged tomorrow if the project begins to affect costs, operations, or reputation. That means the grid must be reviewed rather than treated as fixed.

### ***Prompt for Stakeholder Power Interest Grid:***

Design a visually clear, professional Stakeholder Power-Interest Grid to help project managers analyze stakeholder influence and engagement needs. The grid should be a four-quadrant matrix with power shown vertically and interest shown horizontally. Label the quadrants as Manage Closely, Keep Satisfied, Keep Informed, and Monitor. Position sample stakeholders such as executive sponsors, team members, customers, vendors, senior leaders, regulators, and end users in the correct areas of the grid according to their expected level of authority and involvement. Use a modern business style with clean lines, clear labels, and a professional color palette. Include a brief note explaining how the grid supports stakeholder engagement, planning, communication strategies, and project decision-making.

### ***Best situations to use this graphic:***

- Stakeholder analysis workshops
- Communication planning
- Change management initiatives
- Executive alignment meetings
- Projects with complex governance structures

### ***Challenges in using this graphic:***

- Stakeholder placement can be subjective
- Influence and interest can shift over time
- May ignore emotional or informal influence factors
- Can oversimplify relationships if used too rigidly

## ***Milestone Dashboard***

A Milestone Dashboard is a summary visual that highlights major deliverables, due dates, and status. It is especially useful for leaders who want a concise picture of progress without reviewing the full schedule. By focusing on major checkpoints rather than every task, the dashboard helps project teams communicate whether the project is moving as planned.

This graphic is effective because milestones function as visible markers of accomplishment and risk. Completing a milestone provides evidence of progress. When one slips, it signals the possibility of broader schedule problems. The dashboard can also improve discipline by forcing the team to identify

which checkpoints truly matter. Instead of reporting activity for the sake of reporting, the team reports progress against meaningful outcomes.

A Milestone Dashboard works best when milestones are well chosen, clearly defined, and tied to decisions or deliverables that matter. If the milestones are vague or too numerous, the dashboard loses value. Another limitation is that milestone

status alone does not explain the root cause. A delayed milestone may result from scope changes, resource shortages, vendor delays, or quality issues, so the dashboard should be paired with discussion rather than used as a standalone diagnostic tool.

### ***Prompt for Milestone Dashboard:***

Design a professional project Milestone Dashboard for project management reporting. The dashboard should provide a high-level visual overview of milestone performance and schedule progress. Include an executive summary showing total milestones, completed milestones, upcoming milestones, overdue milestones, and percentage completed. Add a milestone timeline that places major milestones in date order and shows whether each is completed, on track, at risk, or delayed. Include a detailed section with milestone cards or a table listing the milestone name, short description, owner, target date, actual date, and current status. Highlight upcoming milestones and identify any that need immediate management attention. Use a clean, modern dashboard layout with professional formatting, clear section headings, readable fonts, and a restrained business color palette. The final product should be visually polished, easy to interpret, and suitable for project reviews, leadership briefings, seminars, or team planning sessions. Include a visual progress indicator and a small section for milestone insights or recommended next actions.

### ***Best situations to use this graphic:***

- Sponsor reviews
- Weekly or monthly status meetings
- PMO reporting
- Executive summary slides
- Phase-gate discussions

### ***Challenges in using this graphic:***

- Can hide the reasons behind the delay or success

## **Milestone Dashboard**

A concise status view of major deliverables, due dates, and progress signals.

Milestone	Planned	Status	Notes
Project charter approved	Apr 10	Done	Baseline approved
Design signoff	May 02	At risk	Awaiting sponsor review
System testing complete	Jun 14	On track	Defects trending down
Go-live	Jul 01	Delayed	Vendor dependency

- Loses clarity if too many milestones are included
- It depends on well-defined milestone criteria
- May create a false sense of control if not supported by deeper schedule analysis

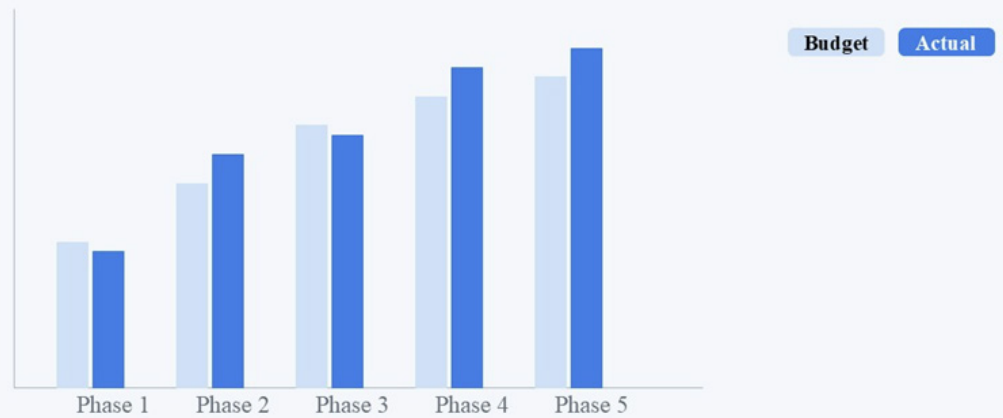
## Budget vs. Actual Cost Chart

A Budget vs. Actual Cost Chart compares planned spending with actual expenditures. It is one of the most important visuals for financial oversight because it shows whether the project is operating within its approved funding boundaries. For sponsors and decision-makers, this graphic can quickly reveal whether cost performance is stable or whether corrective action may be needed.

The chart is useful not only for showing current variance, but also for revealing patterns. A single cost overrun may not be alarming. However, a repeated pattern of actual spending exceeding budget across several phases suggests a structural problem in estimating, scope control, procurement, or execution discipline. In that sense, the graphic supports both monitoring and diagnosis. It can also help project managers explain financial trends before they become crises.

### Budget vs. Actual Cost

A cost-performance graphic comparing planned spending with actual project expenditures.



Its effectiveness, however, depends on good baseline data and disciplined cost tracking. If budget categories are not aligned with actual spending records, the chart may misrepresent the situation. Another challenge is interpretation. Some stakeholders may see any variance as failure, even when the deviation is explainable or temporary. The chart, therefore, works best when paired with forecasting, narrative explanation, and context about what the numbers mean.

### Prompt for Budget vs. Actual Cost Chart:

Design a professional Budget vs. Actual Cost project management graphic that visually compares planned spending with real expenditures across major project categories. Use a clean and modern chart layout, such as grouped bars or side-by-side columns, to show budgeted and actual costs for categories including labor, materials, equipment, software, training, vendor services, travel, and contingency. Add a summary section that displays the total budget, total actual cost, total variance, and percentage difference. Clearly indicate where costs are under budget, on target, or over budget using subtle professional status markers or color distinctions. The layout should be easy to read, visually balanced,

and polished enough for executive presentations, financial reviews, training materials, or project status meetings.

Optional Enhancement:

Include a brief variance analysis section highlighting the top cost overruns and the largest savings opportunities.

**Best situations to use this graphic:**

- Sponsor financial reviews
- Portfolio reporting
- Cost-control meetings
- Phase-end financial assessments
- Executive dashboards

**Challenges in using this graphic:**

- Requires accurate budget and actual cost data
- Can be misunderstood without variance explanation
- May not reflect forecasted future pressure
- Different accounting timing can distort the picture

## Resource Allocation Chart

A Resource Allocation Chart shows how people, teams, or roles are assigned across time and project work. It is extremely helpful for identifying whether the project has enough capacity to meet its commitments. While schedules often show what must happen, resource visuals show whether the people needed to do that work are realistically available.

This graphic becomes especially important in matrix organizations where team members are shared

across multiple initiatives. A project may look feasible on paper until the resource chart reveals that the same analyst, developer, or trainer is allocated beyond capacity. In that sense, the chart protects the project from hidden overload. It also helps the manager make better tradeoffs by redistributing work, negotiating timing, or adding support.

### Resource Allocation Chart

A workload view showing how people or teams are assigned across time and activities.

Res.	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
Analyst	40%	60%	80%	70%	55%	35%
Dev Team	65%	85%	100%	95%	75%	50%
QA	20%	30%	45%	65%	80%	55%
Trainer	10%	10%	20%	40%	60%	75%

**Heat-map style capacity view**

Blue = low load  
Green = healthy  
Amber = heavy  
Red = overloaded

The challenge with resource graphics is that they can quickly become complex. Human capacity is rarely as neat as a grid suggests because productivity varies, interruptions occur, and not all effort is interchangeable. In addition, the chart may create tension if it exposes chronic overallocation that leaders are unwilling to address. Even so, when used honestly, it is one of the most practical visuals for preventing burnout and execution failure.

### ***Prompt for Resource Allocation Chart:***

Create a professional Resource Allocation Chart that clearly shows how project staff and support resources are distributed across project phases. The visual should be clean, modern, and easy to interpret. Include the following elements: title, project phases, assigned roles, hours or percentages, summary section, and indicators for resource gaps. Use sample categories such as initiation, planning, execution, and closing, along with roles such as project manager, analyst, developer, and tester. The final graphic should help viewers understand the balance of workloads and the resource planning needs. Use a polished business style, clear labels, and a professional layout.

### ***Best situations to use this graphic:***

- Capacity planning meetings
- Matrix organization reviews
- Team workload balancing
- Sprint or phase planning
- PMO resource management discussions

### ***Challenges in using this graphic:***

- Real capacity is often harder to measure than it appears
- Shared resources change frequently
- Can become overly technical for executives
- May expose organizational constraints without resolving them

## ***Issue Escalation Funnel***

An Issue Escalation Funnel shows how problems move from identification through review, escalation, and resolution. It is useful because it communicates issue-management flow rather than merely listing open items. This makes it easier for leaders to understand whether the project has a manageable issue stream or whether unresolved problems are accumulating in ways that threaten delivery.

The funnel is particularly good at showing narrowing volume. Many issues may be logged, fewer require escalation, and fewer remain unresolved after intervention. That makes it an effective governance tool because it highlights whether the issue process is working. If large numbers of items enter the funnel but only a few reach resolution, the team may face a decision bottleneck, weak

accountability, or insufficient leadership support.

Its main limitation is that volume alone does not equal severity. A project may have a few escalated issues, but each one may be critical. Conversely, a high number of logged issues may not be alarming if most are minor and rapidly resolved. For that reason, the funnel should be paired with severity or priority information when the stakes are high. Used well, it helps reveal process health, but it does not replace deeper issue analysis.

## Issue Escalation Funnel

A staged process view showing how issues move from identification to resolution.



### *Prompt for Issue Escalation Funnel:*

Design a professional Issue Escalation Funnel for project management that visually represents the flow of issues from identification to executive resolution. Use a funnel diagram to show that many issues begin at the operational or team level, but only a smaller number are escalated to higher levels of authority. Include stages such as issue identification, initial assessment, team-level resolution attempt, project manager review, sponsor or leadership escalation, and executive decision or resolution. Add short labels that explain what happens at each stage, and show the reduction in issue volume as the funnel narrows. Use a clean, modern business style with clear typography, professional colors, balanced spacing, and subtle icons where appropriate.

### *Best situations to use this graphic:*

- Governance meetings
- Operational issue reviews
- Escalation process analysis
- Project recovery discussions
- Leadership reporting on blockers

### *Challenges in using this graphic:*

- Issue counting alone may hide severity differences
- Can oversimplify root causes
- Requires consistent issue categorization
- May be less useful if the organization has weak escalation discipline

# Project Health Dashboard

A Project Health Dashboard is a high-level visual summary of the project's condition across key categories, including schedule, cost, scope, risk, quality, and resources. It is often the most efficient executive communication tool because it brings multiple performance dimensions into a single view. Instead of reading several separate reports, leaders can quickly assess the overall project status.

The real strength of the dashboard is synthesis. It allows project managers to combine structured indicators with narrative insight. A red status in the schedule, an amber status in risk, and a green status in quality can quickly convey a balanced picture. This helps leaders focus their questions. It also encourages project teams to think holistically rather than treating each performance area in isolation.

The danger of the dashboard is that it can become overly superficial. If colors are assigned casually or if the criteria behind "green," "amber," and "red" are inconsistent, the visual can lose credibility. Dashboards also risk becoming political, especially when teams hesitate to report declining conditions honestly. The dashboard is most valuable when its indicators are transparent, evidence-based, and supported by short explanations that connect signal to action.

## Project Health Dashboard

A one-page summary of overall project condition across major performance dimensions.

Schedule  
At risk



Cost  
On track



Scope  
Stable



Risk  
Elevated



Resources  
Tight



Quality  
Good



### **Prompt for Project Health Dashboard:**

Create a Project Health Dashboard that gives stakeholders and executives a clear, at-a-glance view of the current project status. The dashboard should indicate whether the project is on track, at risk, or off track using Green, Amber, and Red health indicators. Include an overall project health summary with key highlights, major concerns, current completion percentage, and a short executive summary of the project's condition. The dashboard should include sections for schedule, budget, scope, risks, issues, resources, deliverables, milestones, and stakeholder communication. Show planned vs. actual progress, milestone status, upcoming deadlines, approved budget, actual spend, forecasted spend, scope changes, open risks and issues by severity, resource utilization, team capacity, delayed deliverables, pending approvals, and escalations needed. Include key performance indicators such as schedule variance, cost variance, risk score, issue closure rate, project completion percentage, and team utilization rate. Design the dashboard in a clean, modern, professional style that is easy to understand at a glance. Use summary cards, progress bars, simple charts, traffic-light status indicators, and concise labels. Use green for healthy areas, amber for items needing attention, red for critical issues, and blue or gray for neutral information. Prioritize clarity, executive readability, and visual organization, and include realistic sample data where needed.

Best situations to use this graphic:

- Executive briefings
- Steering committee meetings
- Sponsor updates
- PMO status reviews
- High-level portfolio oversight

Challenges in using this graphic:

- Can become too superficial
- Status colors may be subjective
- Risks being politicized or softened
- Needs consistent criteria to remain credible

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Artificial intelligence is lowering the barrier to creating professional-quality visuals. Tasks that once required specialized design expertise can now be completed quickly with AI-assisted tools.

For project professionals, these technologies offer an opportunity to communicate ideas more clearly, present data more effectively, and engage stakeholders through visual storytelling.

If you have not experimented with AI visualization tools yet, consider selecting one tool this month and using it to create a chart, diagram, or infographic for your next project report. Even small improvements in visual communication can significantly enhance how information is understood and applied.



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