benefit from the project's output. They will work with you to spell out exactly what success on the project means. Have them sign off on what they expect at the end of the project and what they are willing to contribute to it. And if the stakeholders change midstream, be prepared not only to respond to the new players but also to include all the others in any decision to redirect the project.

Whether you're managing a project in a corporation or working as an independent consultant, it's critical to have the support of the people you're working for. They may take a blue-sky view and demand an enormous amount of work within an unrealistic time period or expect you to perform miracles with inadequate resources or staffing. As the project manager, you'll need to make sure the requirements and resources line up fairly evenly, or you will set yourself up for failure.

Define project objectives

One of your most challenging planning tasks is to meld stakeholders' various expectations into a coherent and manageable set of goals. The project's success will be measured by how well you meet those goals. The more explicitly you state them at the outset, the less disagreement you will face later about whether you have met expectations. In the planning phase, however, much is still in flux, so you'll revise your objectives later on, as you gather information about what you need to achieve.

When defining objectives, think SMART. They should be:

- Specific
- Measurable

- Action-oriented
- Realistic
- Time-limited

Suppose your HR department has been tasked with identifying potential new providers for your company's health benefits plan because the current ones aren't delivering the level of service they should given how much money employees have to pay for them. The project's SMART objectives may be to:

1. **Survey** *<action-oriented>* at least **six** *<measurable>* providers that meet the department's minimum threshold criteria for service quality.

2. **Recommend** *<action-oriented>*, at the **June** *<time-limited>* board of directors' meeting, the **three** *<specific>* that offer the best and broadest coverage at a cost that is at least **10%** *<realistic>* less than the company's current per-employee contribution.

Keep the following factors in mind as you define your project's objectives:

- **Quality.** Identify quality standards, and determine how to measure and satisfy them.
- **Organization.** Calibrate goals depending on the people and other resources you have available.
- **Communication.** Determine what information each stakeholder needs and how to deliver it.