



SESSION 2 PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Keeping Control

Scope, Schedule & Budget — Your Desk Reference

March 26, 2026 | Rural Capacity Assistance Program

How to Use This Handout

Keep this document at your desk. It is built as a reference, not a transcript. Each section pairs a plain-language explanation with a checklist, table, or process you can apply to your own project. Keeping control comes down to four disciplines: managing scope, managing schedule, managing budget, and knowing when a change needs a formal amendment. This handout walks through each, then points you to planning funds that help you build realistic scopes and budgets from the start.

What You'll Be Able to Do

- Recognize the early warning signs of scope creep
- Apply a structured, four-step change control process
- Build and maintain realistic project schedules
- Track budget against actuals and respond to variances by size
- Know when — and how — to request a funding agreement amendment

Additional Support

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Part 1: Scope Management

Warning Signs of Scope Creep

Scope creep rarely arrives as a formal request. It shows up in small, reasonable-sounding moments. Watch for these:

- “While you're at it...” requests that expand the work
- Verbal agreements to add features, with no paper trail
- Unclear or shifting requirements
- Contractor suggesting alternatives that change the deliverable
- Community stakeholders adding wishes mid-project

Change Control Process — Four Steps

When any change is requested — no matter how small — run it through these four steps before acting on it.

- 1. Identify** — Document exactly what is being requested, and why.
- 2. Analyze** — Assess the impact on cost, schedule, and scope before you decide.
- 3. Decide** — Get the appropriate approval, internal or from your funder.
- 4. Document** — Update the project files and communicate the decision to the team.

The Discipline That Prevents Most Problems

A change is not approved until it is documented and approved in writing.

“Yes” in a hallway or on a phone call is not a change order — it is a future dispute.

Part 2: Schedule Management

Building a Realistic Schedule

Most schedule overruns are baked in at the start, not caused at the end. Build these in from day one:

- Start with the required milestones from your funding agreement
- Build in weather delays — especially for Oregon winters
- Account for permit and approval timelines
- Add 10–20% contingency time for the unknowns
- Coordinate around contractor and subcontractor availability

Schedule Recovery Techniques

When you fall behind, you have four levers. Each has a trade-off — choose with eyes open.

Crashing — Add resources to the critical path. Gets you back on track, but costs more.

Fast-tracking — Overlap activities that were planned in sequence. Saves time, but adds risk.

Scope reduction — Cut non-essential work. Requires funder approval.

Timeline extension — Request an amendment. Plan ahead; these take time to approve.

Part 3: Budget Management

Variance Response — Match the Response to the Size

Track budget against actuals every period. When a line drifts, the size of the variance tells you what to do:

Variance Level	Action Required	Communication
Under 5%	Monitor and document	Internal tracking
5% – 10%	Analyze the root cause	Notify your project manager
Over 10%	Prepare an amendment	Contact your funder

The 2 CFR 200 Cost Test — Every Cost Must Pass All Three

Allowable — Permitted under your award terms and federal regulations.

Allocable — Directly benefits the funded project.

Reasonable — A prudent person would pay this amount for this thing.



Part 4: Amendments

When a change crosses a threshold, you need formal approval before you spend. Use this as your first check — and when in doubt, ask your project manager before acting, not after.

Usually OK Without Approval	Requires a Formal Amendment
Line-item changes under 10% Moving funds within the same cost category Using contingency as originally intended	Line-item changes over 10% Adding new budget categories Changing the total award amount Moving funds to or from personnel Any scope change Any time extension

When in Doubt, Ask First

Spending against an unapproved change is the fastest way to create a disallowed cost. A two-minute email to your project manager is cheaper than repaying an ineligible expense at closeout.

Part 5: Planning & Pre-Development Funding

The surest way to keep control of scope, schedule, and budget is to plan the project well before construction starts. These programs pay for the feasibility studies, preliminary engineering, and planning that produce realistic scopes and budgets — and prevent the surprises that drive change orders and amendments later.

Program	Best Fit For	Award Size	Cycle
USDA Predevelopment Planning Grant	Feasibility studies, preliminary engineering reports, and environmental work for water/waste projects (population ≤ 10,000)	Up to \$30K (or 75% of cost)	Rolling intake
USDA SEARCH Grant	Predevelopment feasibility, design & TA for very small, financially distressed communities (water/waste)	Up to 100% of cost	Rolling intake
Business Oregon SPWF (Planning)	Forgivable loans for planning utilities and public facilities projects	Varies	Year-round — contact RDO
Business Oregon SIPP	Sustainable Infrastructure Planning Project — drinking water system planning	Varies	With DWSRF cycle
USDA RCDI	Capacity-building for nonprofits & public bodies serving rural areas (population < 50,000)	Varies; match required	Watch FY2026 NOFO



Three Things to Remember

- 1. Document everything — even small changes.** If it is not written down, it did not happen.
- 2. Communicate early when problems arise.** A small variance flagged now is easier than a large one explained at audit.
- 3. Get approval before spending on changes.** Unapproved spending is how eligible projects end up with disallowed costs.

Resources

- RCAP Resource Page — oregon.gov/biz/programs/RCAP/project-management
- 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Guidance), cost principles Subpart E — [ecfr.gov](https://www.ecfr.gov)
- Business Oregon Infrastructure Finance — oregon.gov/biz
- USDA Rural Development Oregon — rd.usda.gov/or
- Grants.gov — grants.gov

Part of the four-session Rural Capacity Assistance Program series: Getting Started Right · Keeping Control · Procurement, Risk & Quality · Finishing Strong.

Technical Assistance

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