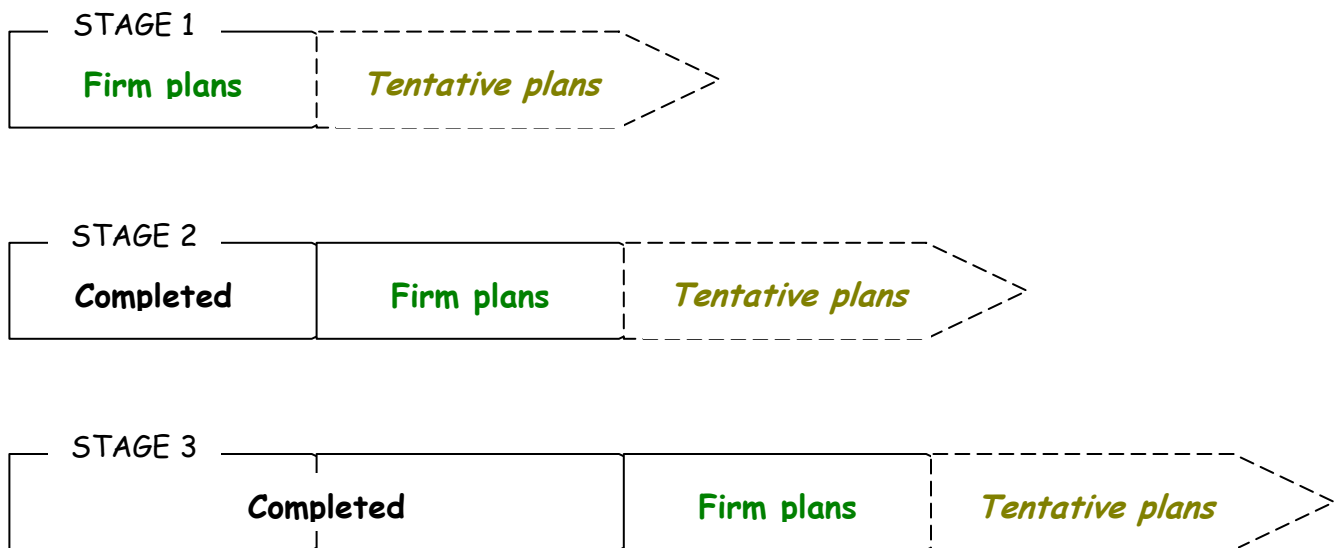


Rolling plans

How to have a targeted sense of direction and still be able to adapt to the unexpected?

To have a plan for mapping out what you want to achieve these coming 12 months, the next three years, and maybe even the next five or ten years can be a great way to keep your program well focused and resources used wisely. A plan enables you to tell others where you're headed. And to deflect proposals that might get you off onto tangential side roads. But you don't want the plan to lock you in too rigidly. You need enough flexibility to respond to unexpected setbacks, and also unexpected opportunities, that might show up.

One way to deal with this is to have a "rolling plan." This pins down near-future activities quite firmly, but is tentative about what happens next. The firm plans are rolled forward periodically—maybe as seldom as every six months for a long-term project, or as often as every week for a special intensive campaign.



This may make it desirable for your funding sources and governing bodies change the ways they do things. It's common for an annual (or whatever) plan of work to be mandated by a specific date, and for year-end reports and evaluations to be geared strictly to that original plan. Plans for next year often are not made until the end of the current year. Activity projections for longer periods of time sometimes become "locked in concrete," even when there's lots of uncertainty about future needs, human responses, and funding.

If such rigidities are impeding your effectiveness, why not give some constructive feedback to those who are imposing these planning mandates? They may not have really thought about this and might welcome your ideas. It's worth a try!