The 'Parking Lot' Exercise:
A Guide to Conducting a Workload Prioritization Exercise

The Workforce Planning and Analytics Section (WPAS)
Workforce Support and Development Division (WSDD)
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What is the Parking Lot Exercise?

The parking lot exercise is a way to inventory and prioritize the work your organization is doing. This exercise helps you identify the work that is most important to your mission, and whether you have the staffing resources to complete the work. It also helps to identify process improvement opportunities and increase efficiencies with existing staff capability.

By the end of this exercise, you should know…
- ✓ The work tasks/projects that are critical to your organization.
- ✓ Any work tasks/projects you can reduce or defer to a later time.
- ✓ Ways to innovate and process improve current work and possibly new work projects your organization can take on.
- ✓ Whether you need additional staff or reskilling to accomplish your tasks/projects.

Why is it important?

This exercise will help your organization identify work that is critical to your mission so you can plan to have the staff needed to cover mission critical activities, no matter the circumstance. It will also provide an opportunity to prioritize work tasks and identify opportunities to improve existing processes.

Prioritizing your work portfolio can also help you to…
- ✓ Prepare and respond quickly and strategically to change with plans for different future scenarios.
- ✓ Determine whether you have the right staff mix and skills or a need to develop your current staff to meet mission critical task/project needs.
- ✓ Identify tasks/projects that have a lower impact on the mission and redirect those resources to high-impact activities.
- ✓ Identify critical needs to start new innovative tasks/projects.
- ✓ Communicate the organization's priorities to managers and employees.

Who participates?

Identifying and prioritizing your organization's work involves many different levels of the organization. Here are the key roles in this exercise:
- ▪ A facilitator- This person guides the conversation and activities.
- ▪ Leaders and/or managers- They will help categorize and prioritize your tasks/projects.
- ▪ Employees- Depending on the size of your organization, you may choose to include employees in the categorization and prioritization of tasks/projects. At the minimum, employees should be included in task identification.

Step 1: Identify & categorize your organization's current work portfolio

The first thing you'll need to do is determine what your organization's portfolio looks like. Have managers work with their team(s) to identify projects and/or tasks currently in their portfolio. To help you identify your portfolio a few things to consider are:

- The products and services your organization offers.
- Major recurring or ongoing projects.
- The activities that fill your time.

Once managers have a list of projects/tasks, ask them, or your leadership team if applicable, to organize these items into the following 4 categories:

01 Projects to Keep	02 Projects to Parking Lot	03 Projects to Discontinue	04 Projects to Improve	05 Projects to Add
What projects are critical for us to continue?	What projects can we defer to a later time?	What projects should we stop doing?	What projects can we improve upon?	What are some projects we'd like to do in an ideal state?

Use the Workload Prioritization (Parking Lot) Excel template from this toolkit to help you map your projects and tasks to the corresponding categories.

Step 2: Discuss as a team

Schedule a meeting with your managers/leaders or your division, depending on your organization's size and preference. Have each manager/leader present their portfolio items and how they categorized them. This is a great time to discuss the chosen categories as a team and welcome different perspectives on how items should be categorized. As you categorize each item, consider the following:

- Look at future process improvement areas to see if there are commonalities across branches.
- Consider your organization's risk appetite for focusing on too many or too few priorities. If you identify a large number of priorities, what is the risk that you will not accomplish all of them?
- Reevaluate the items in your 'keep' list and see if any can be deferred.

Step 3: Finalize an action plan

Likely in an additional session, meet with managers or your division to create an action plan for how you will move forward with each item in your 5 categories. Use the Workload Prioritization (Parking Lot) Excel template to help you identify action items for each project. Make sure to also consider:

- Who will own the action item(s)?
- What does the timeline look like?
- What resources are required?
- Is there opportunity for cross-collaboration?

Here are a few potential actions to consider for each of the categories:

Projects to Keep	Projects to Parking Lot/Defer	Projects to Discontinue	Projects to Improve	Projects to Add
▪ Create a list of the resources needed to keep these projects running so you can determine whether you'll have enough resources left to improve or add other projects. ▪ Assign roles and responsibilities to monitor critical projects. ▪ Assign and train staff to cover critical projects in the event of turnover or other staffing changes.	▪ Create a plan to pause these projects, schedule time to revisit at a later date.	▪ Create a decommission plan with an end date for the project. ▪ Determine how you will shift staff workloads to other projects if applicable.	▪ Rank improvements by highest impact and level of effort, determine what improvements to start with. ▪ Create a process improvement plan. ▪ Assign champions to manage improvements.	▪ Rank projects by highest impact and level of effort. ▪ Compare projects to the available resources and determine what projects can be started.

Step 4: Revisit priorities and monitor the action plan

Finally, it is important to integrate your action plans into your management activities. To ensure your organization remains focused on its highest priority activities, consider including regular progress check ins to your performance management calendar. During progress reports consider whether your organization has accomplished the following:

- Integrate key milestones and accomplishments into individual performance plans.
- Conduct project check ins during regular progress reports to ensure the project goals are on track.
- Identify risks that could impact projects and have project stewards communicate risks or issues as soon as they arise.

Consider revisiting this exercise every 1 to 3 years or after a major change occurs in your organization to determine whether your priorities have changed. You may find internal and external changes affecting your organization will require shifts in your priorities.

Contact OHR for additional support

For more support with this exercise, or other workforce planning activities, contact the Workforce Planning & Analytics Section (WPAS) of the Workforce Support and Development Division (WSDD).
WPAS Email: NIH-WORKFORCE-PLANNING@od.nih.gov

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