Develop Plan
| Premortem Tool

Frame and explore your problem by imagining a future scenario in which the proposed activity fails to achieve its objective, describing the failure, then identifying the causes of the failure. Give your team insight into priorities and success criteria, uncover hidden assumptions, and identify potential pitfalls.

WHEN

This tool is helpful at the beginning of an activity, or any time the definition of success is being determined or assessed.

WHY

This tool can help provide clarity about "what success looks like"; uncover hidden assumptions about activities, outcomes, success, and failure; and identify potential causes of failure.

HOW

Assemble the project team, and give each member a copy of the Premortem Canvas. Invite everyone to imagine it is two years in the future. Your current project, activity, or initiative has utterly failed. Spend a few minutes writing down answers to the questions in the canvas, then discuss answers with the larger group.

STEP 1: Describe the failure. Using vivid detail, describe what it would look like if your project failed completely. Focus on outcomes and attributes, not behaviors or causes. Don't hold back or self-edit. Use extreme language and explore the worst-case scenarios.

STEP 2: List the causes. Assemble a list of potential causes for the failure. Consider a wide range, including action, inaction, assumptions, priorities, distractions, people, organizations, and processes. Include anything that might be a contributing factor.

STEP 3: Update goals and risks. Compare the failure description with the team's current definition of success (goals, objectives, etc.) and the team's current action plans. Discuss whether accomplishing the team's goals and activities would prevent the future failure scenarios. Adjust goal statements as needed.

STEP 4: Examine the list of causes and identify the most likely failure drivers. Discuss which causes are avoidable and whether the team is taking appropriate steps to mitigate or prevent them from occurring.

INNOVATION **TOOLKIT**

Premortem Tool | Worksheet

Describe the Failure

What important stuff did we not do?

What unimportant stuff did we do?

What current problems remain?

What new problems emerged?

Symptoms

How will we know we failed?

Whn did we realize we'd failed?

Why do these outcomes consistute failure?

If we don't do _____ it's a fail.

If the only thing we do is _____ it's a win.

Project X-RIP
Premortem Canvas

Who knew we'd fail?

Who is surprised we failed?

Who is glad we failed?

Who is sad we failed?

Was there something we lacked?

Was it not well coordinated? Communicated? Supported?

What got in the way?

List the Causes

What did we do to cause us to fail?

What did we not do to cause us to fail?

What did others do that caused failure?

What incorrect assumptions did we make?

Updated Goals

Risk Mitigation

INNOVATION TOOLKIT