

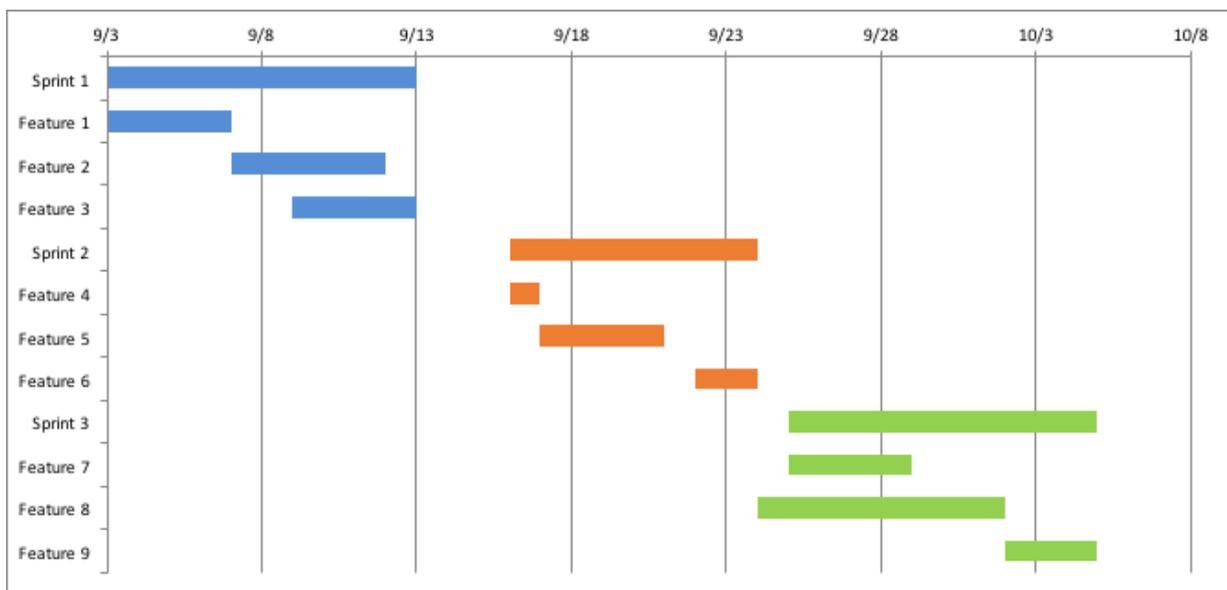
Decide What to do Next

An Agile project plan is based on features, and that plan is always changing based on your backlog. Grooming the backlog helps you integrate the latest insights into your upcoming development iterations, also known as sprints.

Backlog vs. Project Plan

Many Agilists cringe at the phrase “project plan,” especially when it is mentioned in the same sentence as “Scrum”. A project plan is typically a formal document designed to guide the control and execution of a project. Traditional project plans are notoriously inflexible because they contain a great deal of business rules and project dependencies. A product backlog, on the other hand, is a list of user desires that can be quickly prioritized or de-prioritized based on customer feedback and market fluctuations.

The goal of a backlog grooming session is to ensure that the backlog remains populated with items that are relevant. It is understood that a backlog is a dynamic body of information that is fine-tuned on an ongoing basis. The output of your backlog grooming session might look something like this:



Agile Backlog Grooming [Template]

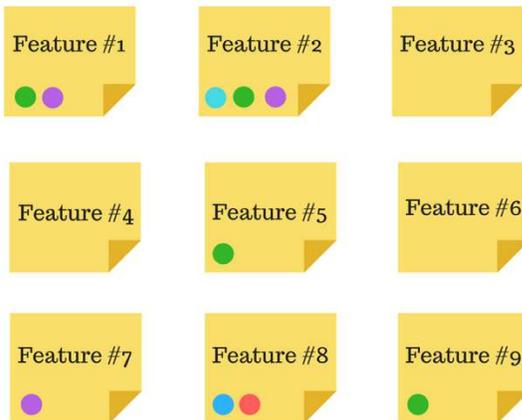


Notice the color-coded charts are organized by sprint. The blue section represents sprint #1. The orange section represents sprint #2. And, the green section represents sprint #3. Each sprint is approximately two weeks long in this example. During each sprint, three features will be developed and released. Sometimes, the feature development time overlaps. In this example, this could be because the code is the same from feature #7 to feature #8 – or maybe they are dependent upon one another and need to be developed in tandem.

Prioritizing Your Backlog

The biggest risk to most projects is prioritizing the wrong features. Technical bugs are an obvious priority, but many struggle to prioritize beyond this. Prioritization is rarely a one-dimensional conversation. For example, should you prioritize based on level of effort required or based on business value? Should you prioritize based on what competitors are doing or based on what users *say* they want?

Microsoft [published content](#) around how to plan, rank, and prioritize your product backlog based on business value, priority, severity, risk, and time criticality. Much of this content is



specific to Microsoft Visual Studio. If you have not yet adopted a platform, such as Visual Studio, you can ‘hack’ your very own analog version with post-it notes and sticky dots. Gather your team and vote on the features in your product backlog using sticky notes as currency.

In this exercise, everyone is given an equal amount of sticky dots. One green, one purple, one red, and one blue. The green might represent business value, the purple might represent level of effort required, the red might represent risk, and so forth. The features with the most dots at the end of your grooming session are prioritized first. From there, each feature is assessed based on your criteria (level of effort, business value, etc.). This exercise will help you prioritize the features to include in your next sprint.