

Work design helps prevent overextension and burnout. This guide is designed to support ongoing conversations about workload and organizational practices. Use it in collaboration with staff when:

- Reviewing workload concerns
- Staffing changes occur
- Teams feel stretched or unclear about priorities
- Planning cycles (monthly/quarterly)

These steps are not meant to be completed once. It is intended to support ongoing work design conversations.

1. Task visibility (Work mapping tool)

Purpose: To make all work visible, including hidden, informal, and distributed tasks.

Prompt: What work is actually happening?

List:

- Daily, weekly, monthly tasks
- Programs or caseloads managed
- Number of community members supported
- Seasonal or periodic responsibilities
- Crisis-driven or unpredictable work
- Interruptions to planned work
- Administrative and coordination tasks
- Informal or “hidden” tasks (e.g., follow-ups, recovery from emotional labour)
- Tasks absorbed over time but not formally assigned
- Recurring meetings and standing commitments

Additional check: Where is the work switching between different types of tasks?

2. Role clarity and boundaries tool

Purpose: To clarify role boundaries, determine escalation pathways and ownership and prevent uncontrolled expansion of responsibilities.

Prompt: “Where does my role start and end?”

- What are you responsible for?
- What are you NOT responsible for?
- Where do responsibilities overlap with others?
- What decisions can you make independently?
- What requires referral outside the organization?
- What decisions require escalation?

Escalation = passing a decision or issue to someone with greater authority, expertise, or capacity when it exceeds your role.

3. Capacity and prioritization tool

Purpose: To align workload with realistic capacity and make trade-offs explicit.

Prompt: “What can realistically fit within capacity?”

- What is essential vs discretionary work?
- What work must be done vs can be delayed?
- What is currently exceeding capacity?
- What must stop if new work is added?
- What is the level of task variety and switching required?

For each task, ask:

- Is it **urgent**?
- Is it **important**?
- What happens if it is delayed?

Rule: Not all work can be treated as equally urgent. When capacity is limited, something must be paused, delayed, or removed.

4. Work redistribution tool

Purpose: To manage workload shifts during change (e.g., staffing changes, absences).

Prompt: “Where does this work go now?”

When someone leaves or capacity changes:

- What tasks were they doing?
- Which tasks are essential to continue immediately?
- Which work can be paused temporarily?
- Who is best positioned to take each task?
- What needs to be removed rather than redistributed?

Transition checklist:

- ☐ Task list completed with departing staff
- ☐ Temporary redistribution agreed
- ☐ Workload impact assessed for remaining staff
- ☐ Recruit and next steps clarified

5. Workload monitoring tool

Purpose: To identify early signs of overload before burnout occurs.

Prompt: “What signals are emerging?”

Track:

- Overtime or after-hours work
- Delays in core tasks
- Increasing backlog of work
- Tasks being “done later” repeatedly
- Staff reporting fatigue or overwhelm
- Work spilling into personal time
- Skipping lunch breaks

6. Work review and adjustment tool

Purpose: To create ongoing adaptation of work structure.

Prompt: “What needs to change?”

- What workload pressures have emerged since last review?
- What tasks are no longer necessary?
- What should be reprioritized?
- What should be stopped?
- What should be redesigned?

Review cycle questions:

- What has changed in demand?
- What has changed in capacity?
- What is no longer sustainable?
- What needs formal adjustment (not informal coping)?