

# Smartsheet in Action: Boosting Visibility and Improving Transparency

## Identifies Barriers to Reduce Study Activation Timelines

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### BACKGROUND



National Cancer Institute Comprehensive Cancer Centers (NCI-CCC) have an obligation to improve access to innovative oncology clinical trials within their catchment area. Study Start Up (SSU) teams are responsible for opening trials, requiring extensive coordination across multiple regulatory, contractual, and operational domains; susceptible to delays due to bottlenecks at various stages. Monitoring key metrics and timelines is essential for identifying holdups that delay activation, where there is an opportunity to intervene. Project management tools enhance visibility by revealing trends, diagnosing delay drivers, and highlighting areas for identifying improvement needs, enabling more efficient and coordinated clinical trial start up.

### GOALS



The goal is to assess the impact of implementing Smartsheet within the regulatory SSU team on reducing study activation timelines and maintaining target deadlines.

This evaluation examines whether Smartsheet's real time visibility, automated alerts with predefined timelines for each task, defined task ownership, and early identification of bottlenecks support more consistent adherence to activation timelines.

### SOLUTIONS & METHODS


Smartsheet includes customizable templates that can be adjusted to meet varying operational needs. We developed our regulatory SSU tracker using the Project Schedule template, adapting it to include all required activation tasks and 77 workflow steps. Custom formulas were added to calculate task durations, enabling us to measure consistent performance across studies and generate project level and portfolio level metrics, including specific timelines for key activities.

We focused on industry-sponsored trials and transitioned from Microsoft Excel to a Smartsheet Project Schedule in July 2025 to improve the accuracy and consistency of activation metric tracking. All SSU tasks, milestones, and deadlines were entered into Smartsheet for each new study. Study-specific variables are tracked in the Smartsheet.

-  Estimated task specific timelines are assigned based on our historical data, supporting our overall goal of completing study activation within 90 days of PRMC submission.
-  The template provides a centralized view of all tasks and their timelines, allowing ongoing activities to be monitored in one location, visible to leadership.
-  Real time updates through status fields, comments, and automated notifications enhance transparency and support timely communication.
-  Smartsheet's reporting features allow tasks and timelines to be aggregated across studies, enhancing tracking of performance and trends, allowing for earlier interventions and more automated reporting.

### KEY INTERVENTIONS IMPLEMENTED (JULY 2025)


 **Transitioned to Smartsheet Project Schedule**  
Replaced Microsoft Excel with Smartsheet to improve accuracy and consistency of activation metric tracking.


 **Centralized Task Management**  
All SSU tasks, milestones, and deadlines entered into Smartsheet for each new study with study-specific variables tracked.

 **Real-Time Visibility & Automation**  
Status updates, task-level comments, and automated notifications keep assignees on track and support timely completion.

 **Data-Driven Insights & Reporting**  
Dashboards and reports aggregate data across studies to identify trends, bottlenecks, and support earlier interventions.

### LESSONS LEARNED & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- LESSONS LEARNED**
-  Consistent task structures, clear dependencies, and built-in reporting maintain reliable activation metrics.
  - Reduced manual study-metric tracking burden.
  - Dashboards and reports across multiple studies are effective for spotting bottlenecks and understanding where delays commonly occur.

- FUTURE DIRECTIONS**
-  Build dashboards to visualize activation progress.
  - Increase automation to help identify delays earlier.
  - Continue evaluation across a broader set of studies, including additional sponsor types.
  - Determine long term impact on achieving the 90 day activation goal and guide ongoing refinement of activation processes.

### OUTCOMES

 Implementation of the Smartsheet Project Schedule improved visibility into study activation progress. All start up tasks, timelines, and updates are consolidated into a single platform.

 **IMPROVED VISIBILITY**  
Stakeholders can quickly assess current status and identify areas requiring attention and intervention.

 **REAL-TIME UPDATES**  
Real time status updates and task-level comments help keep assignees on track.

 **AUTOMATED ALERTS**  
Automated notifications support timely communication and help ensure deadlines are met.

 **TIMELY COMPLETION**  
These capabilities supported timely completion of start up activities.

