# 3. [FRONT-END PLANNING: BREAK THE RULES, PAY THE PRICE (RS213-1)](https://www.construction-institute.org/front-end-planning-break-the-rules-pay-the-price)

**Report Summary:** Front-end planning is often considered the single most important and valuable process in a capital project life cycle. Also known by such terms as pre-project planning and front-end loading, front-end planning represents the critical underpinning to any capital project. It is focused on a strong, early link among the business or mission need, project strategy, scope, cost, and schedule, and maintaining that link throughout the project life cycle. Front-end planning mainly covers three subphases: feasibility, concept, and detailed scope.

Upfront investment is required for front-end planning, but the resultant savings are more than worth the investment. The critical steps of front-end planning are as follows:

* Develop and consistently follow a defined front-end planning process.
* Ensure adequate scope definition prior to moving forward with design and construction.
* Use front-end planning tools.
* Define existing conditions thoroughly.
* Select the proper contracting strategy early.
* Align the project team, including key stakeholders.
* Build the project team, including owner, stakeholders, and consultants.
* Involve both owners and contractors.
* Staff critical project scoping and design areas with capable and experienced personnel.
* Identify and understand risks of new project types, technologies, or locations.
* Address labor force skill and availability during planning.
* Provide leadership at all levels for the front-end planning process, including executive and project leadership as well as owner and contractor leadership.

**Key Takeaways:**

## (1) Thoroughly define existing project site conditions.

## (Project Phase: Feasibility through Detailed Design and Procurement)

* Conduct a thorough site evaluation to investigate and document geotechnical, hydrological, environmental, permitting, as-built conditions, and other local information that is needed to plan the job.
* Gather all available data for the project site, including historical records, surveys, and reports, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the existing conditions.
* Engage experts or consultants if necessary to provide specialized knowledge or services for specific aspects of the site's existing conditions.
* Develop a detailed report that outlines the findings from the investigation and documentation process to serve as a reference guide throughout the project.
* Verify that all stakeholders have access to and understand the defined existing site conditions to ensure alignment across teams and minimize potential conflicts.

## (2) Select the proper contracting strategy early in the project.

## (Project Phase: Feasibility through Detailed Scope)

* Determine the project’s requirements and risks to identify the most suitable contracting approach.
* Evaluate different contracting strategies (e.g., design-build, construction management-at-risk) based on factors such as scope complexity, budget constraints, and stakeholder expectations.
* Consider partnering with contractors or consultants who have experience with similar projects to leverage their expertise and reduce risk.
* Develop a comprehensive Request for Proposal that outlines the project’s requirements, contracting strategy, and evaluation criteria.
* Carefully review proposals from potential contractors and select the best fit based on factors such as qualifications, pricing, and approach.

## (3) Identify and understand the risks of new project types, technologies, or locations.

## (Project Phase: Feasibility through Detailed Design and Procurement)

* Assign experienced professionals to lead the project teams responsible for scope definition and design activities.
* Conduct thorough research into the unique characteristics of new projects, technologies, or locations to mitigate potential risks.
* Foster collaboration among team members with diverse expertise to leverage collective knowledge and experience.
* Provide training and support to staff about new project types, technologies, or locations to ensure their adequate understanding and the mitigation of associated risks.
* Develop a comprehensive risk assessment plan that considers all aspects of the project, including scope, schedule, budget, and stakeholders.

## (4) Refer to the following Best Practices sections for other takeaways in this report that are relevant to project risk assessment: 2. Alignment and 7. Front-End Planning.

## (Project Phase: Feasibility through Detailed Design and Procurement)