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PREMIUM



## **Developing a Project Plan**

## Introduction

If you have a great idea for a project you would like to implement in your organization, you likely will need to write a project plan to present it to your fellow workers or your boss. A project plan is a comprehensive plan about what you want to do and how. It is a great chance to show that you are familiar with the topic and that you have thought through what you want to propose. It also gives you a chance to see if you have thought of everything you will need and if there are any risks or problems you might have overlooked before.

In this resource guide we guide you step by step through the elaboration of a project plan. The amount of details that you include in your plan depend a lot on the time and resources you have available to develop your project plan. But no matter if your result is three pages or 50, if you answer all the questions we guide you through, you will have collected the majority of important information that you will need to present your project and make plans.

## Why you have to write a project plan

Writing a project plan is a very helpful tool to get your thoughts organized and develop a good outline for the planned project. The project plan can be used in different circumstances, presenting it to your own organization, to your target group or even use it to write a proposal for funding based on it. It is also the first step to identify possible challenges and to see if your project idea has the potential to be implemented.

If you want to convince somebody to do something with you, it is always the best way to show that you exactly know what you are talking about and that you are an expert in the area you want to work in. Writing a project plan is the perfect way to show all of this, because it covers all bases and paints the full picture of the idea you want to explain.

Secondly, it is also a great way for yourself to learn more about what you want to do. Maybe you have this great idea, but are not sure if it is feasible. If you write a project plan, you will learn a lot about what will be needed to implement it and if there are risks or problems to be expected. It is a great way to prepare yourself and gather all the information you need, to actually move towards a successful implementation phase.

## How to develop a project plan

There are seven questions or areas that you need to cover in writing your project plan to put together a comprehensive plan (see figure 1). They are the following:

**Where are we?** What is the baseline situation? Which resources and information do we have?

**Why?** Why do we want to implement the project? Justification

**What?** What exactly do we want to do?

**Who?** Who is needed to implement and plan the project?

**How?** How do we want to implement?

**What is the timeline?** How long will it take? When do we want to start?

**What is the budget?** How much do we have to spend on it? How much do we want to spend on which task?

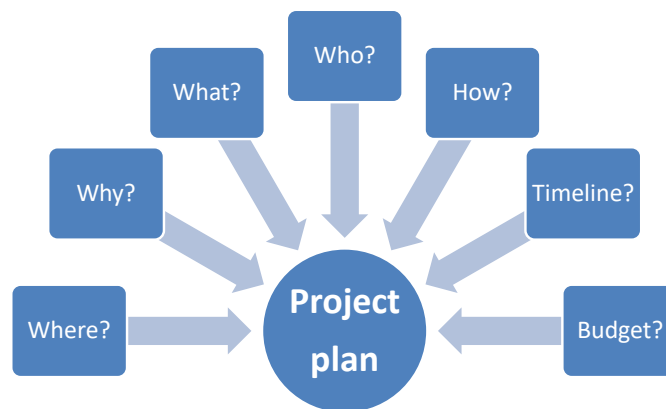


Figure 1: The seven questions that determine a project plan

On the following pages, we will go through all the questions and the important implications that come with them. If you follow this guide and put together all the suggested information, in the end you will have a comprehensive project plan which you can use to move forward.

## Where are we?

This is the first step of developing a project plan. Before you go ahead you need to analyze the baseline situation in the area in which you want to implement a project. Which resources and which information do you already have? What is your organizations position? Some further questions you can ask yourself to determine your current situation are:

- What information do you already have?
- Which points are clear and which are unclear?
- Who is already involved in the project?

- What did already happen?
- Which strengths and weaknesses should be considered?

This stage of preparing a project plan is particularly useful to analyze in depth your organizations current status and the position on the matter you want to tackle. If you do your job well, you will have collected a lot of information and will have the knowledge you will need to present the project to others. Don't be too fast about it and really find out which resources you already have at your disposal, so that you don't have to make unnecessary investments.

Many times, your organization will already have expertise in the field you are proposing a project in and thus you can rely on a body of work that has already been done. Remember that you do not have to invent the wheel again, it is always good to learn from experiences that you already have at your hands in your organization.

## Why this project?

The question about why this project is the justification question. In this part you have to explain the reasons for the project. Why is the project necessary? Which benefit will the project have? Which positive effects will the project have? Which new chances could open up because of the project?

If you want to convince a donor or your own boss or board of directors of a project, this might be the most important part of the project plan. Here you can show that you exactly know the situation and the current needs of your beneficiaries and thus are able to develop a plan that exactly caters to these needs. If you can explain that there is a good reason to carry out your project and that there is an imminent need that it will address, your project plan is going to be a winning one.

Furthermore, as you probably already know the justification is a part that you need to elaborate in every proposal that you will ever send. Of course, if you ask someone for money, they will want to know exactly why they should give it and why it is necessary. If you do good work on this part, if you ever have to turn your project plan into a proposal, you are almost good to go and save a lot of extra work.

Look at the question "Why" from different angles and also make sure to include effects and benefits that this project will have for your own organization and where it will bring it forward.

## What do we want to do?

The question what you want to do or achieve with your project is another very important one. It is of core importance that you make very clear which are your goals and interests from the first step onwards, so that there is no room for misunderstandings or misconceptions. After reading this part of your project plan, everybody should be very clear about what your expected outcomes are and what you want to achieve with the project. If you feel like there is room for misunderstandings, it

might also be a good idea to sketch out a little bit what will not be a goal of your project to make to scope of it a bit clearer.

Particularly if you want to propose a project that is new to your organization and would be a first experience, it makes a lot of sense to go into detail here to not raise any false expectations. The main reason for tensions at the end of project between the project leader and the board is if expectations were different and the two parties expect different outcomes. Clarity is therefore of core importance.

Also keep in mind that – even it is tempting sometimes – overselling a project and what it can achieve is not a good idea exactly because of that reason. If you want to convince your board or your coworkers that your project plan is a good idea, sometimes you might get too enthusiastic and promise things that cannot realistically be achieved by the project. Try to avoid that, because even though it might help your pitch, it will only lead to conflict and disappointments in the later stages of the project.

Depending on the time and the resources allotted to you while developing your project plan in this part you should formulate different degrees of expected outcomes and outputs and formulate the goals you want to achieve with the project. If you feel like there is room for misconceptions, it might make sense to particularly state what will not be achieved by a project with the scope you describe in your project plan.

## Who will be involved?

In this part of the project plan you have to explain in detail who will be involved in the project. This includes people from your organization and their roles as well as people in the target community or other stakeholders that will have a part in the proposed project.

Questions that will help you formulate this part of the project plan are the following:

- Who will be part of the project?
- What is your target group?
- Which other concerned or interested parties have to be taken into account?
- Who is supporting the project?
- How is the team organized?

In this part of the project plan you can show that you know your target group and also your organization very well. You can prove that you know who you will work with and who would be fit to take over an important role in the process.

When identifying all concerned stakeholders, be careful to really take into account everyone. Even though your target group might be easy to identify and to limit, there are other people who are

stakeholders in the project. Entrepreneurs of the area, government representatives, other organizations and also people outside of your direct target group might have a stake in the project and need to be taken into account (see figure 2). If you do not include everybody in the planning process, this might jeopardize your projects success later on.



Figure 2: The identification of all stakeholders is of core importance for the success of the project

## How do we want to do it?

This step of the development of the project plan is one of the most practical. Here you identify detailed task that have to be tackled to actually achieve the projects goal in the long term. If necessary, you can split up bigger tasks in smaller ones in this step and organize everything in a useful way.

Once you identified all tasks that need to be done you can organize this in a graphical form and a flow graph. This is a good way to show everything that it will take to achieve your projects goal and to make it comprehensible for your audience.

This is also the step where you identify potential risks for your project and how you can avoid them. You can also develop a strategy to deal with problems that might occur during the implementation phase

## What is the timeline?

In this part of your project plan you have to develop a realistic timeline. You decide overall when your project will end and finish and develop milestones that should be achieved until a determined point in time.

In this part you also decide if there are different phases of the project and how they will be ordered along the timeline.

It depends a lot on how much time and resources you can and want to invest into the development of your project plan how many details you include in here. It is a good way to make your plan comprehensible. If it is split up into different phases and maybe even work packages that are ordered along a timeline and maybe even have significant milestones along the way, it is much easier for your audience to imagine how you plan to implement your project and what will be achieved by when.

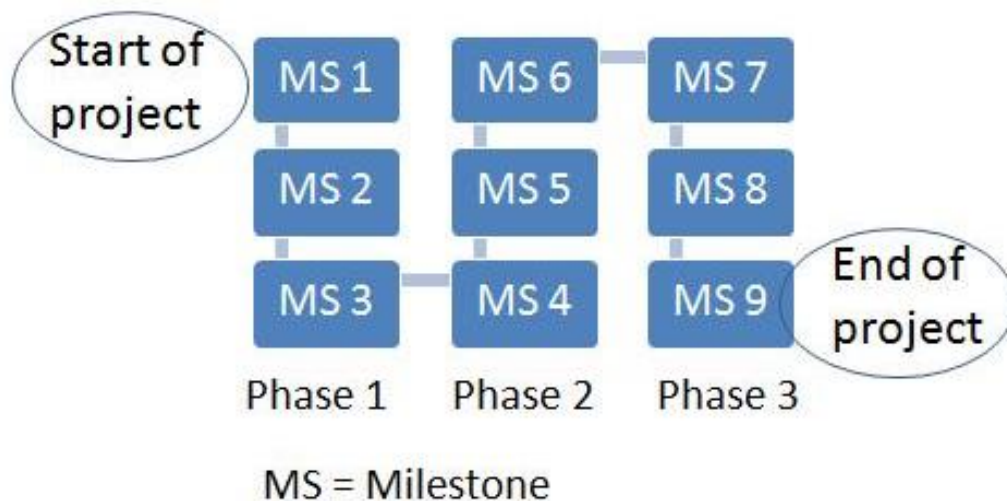


Figure 3: Graphic representation of a timeline

The representation of this part of your project plan can also have a graphic component like an arrow showing the passing of time or something similar (see Figure 3).

## What is the budget?

Whoever you present your project to – your boss, a potential donor, your coworker – eventually they will want to know how much it will cost to implement it. So, in this last part of your project plan, you have to show the budget for the project.

Again, it depends a lot on the time and resources you can invest in developing your plan how detailed you can make your budget. Finding out exact numbers and prices can be very time

consuming and might be more adequate in a later stage of the project planning. Nevertheless, it is of core importance to give an overall idea about how much money this project will cost and which other resources will need to be used during its implementation.

Sometimes you are tied to an existing budget, so the question is not really how much you will spend (because that is predetermined), but how you will spend it. This part is again a chance to show your audience that you are very familiar with the area your project will take part in and that you exactly know what you are talking about. Always plan with a small buffer though, to make room for unexpected expenses and occurrences.

If there is no money yet in your organization that is allotted to your proposed project or to the area you want to work in, this is also the space where you can propose sources of funding for the project. You should carefully research grant opportunities or other ways of funding to show to your audience that it will be possible to actually implement your ideas.

## Conclusion

With the seven questions described in the last paragraphs, you will be able to put together a comprehensive project plan to present to your organization or even to a potential donor. The questions help you to logically think everything through and thus help you to identify potential pitfalls and problems and show you a way how to prevent them. If you have to write a project proposal at some point, the project plan already has all the information you will need for that. Even though the project plan stands at the very beginning, it is the foundation for further planning and further details can be based on it.

With a good idea and a comprehensive project plan, you will be able to convince your organization and eventually potential donors to support you and the implementation of your project.

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