

# RFCUNY APPS WEDNESDAY BROWN BAG RESEARCH WEBINAR

Writing Competitive Grant Applications  
Focusing on Project Summaries and Project Descriptions



November 8, 2023



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# Preliminary Planning Prior to Writing a Proposal



Develop a plan of what you want to do and why you want to do it



Consider how your plan can achieve positive results



Find the right sponsor (you can use our searchable databases (Pivot and GrantForward))



Your project's goals need to match the mission and goals of the sponsor's programs

Check out our website, [www.rfcuny.org](http://www.rfcuny.org). There are useful resources including a set of webinars that you can review.

# Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Start Writing

## **Audience**

Who is your audience?

What are your sponsor's mission and goals?

Do they match your goals?

How is your project aligned with the sponsor?

Can you persuade the sponsor and their reviewers to support you?

Do you have colleagues that have been awarded by the sponsor?

## **Expectations**

What does the sponsor require from you in the proposal?

Can you meet these expectations?

Can you get access to copies of successful abstract/proposals?

Are these previously funded efforts similar to your proposed project?

## **Credibility and Eligibility**

Does the solicitation indicate that you are eligible to apply?

Do you have a track record of accomplishments in the subject area of your proposal?

How about partnerships with individuals or organizations in the proposal's subject area?

Can you demonstrate in the proposal the importance and value of your skills and knowledge?

# Major Phases of Any Type of Project



Project Initiation and Conception- definition of goals, objectives, and development of project's purpose, needs assessment, gaps that the project fills.



Project Planning- scope of work, estimation of costs, workflow requirements, defining team roles and responsibilities, schedule of meetings, number and type of deliverables.



Project Execution- budget management, resource management, initiation and conveyance of deliverables, communication structure, meeting management, institutional and sponsor reviews, protections of intellectual property, data security.



Project Monitoring and Evaluation- project goal assessment, timeline assessment, quality of deliverables, level of team performance.



Project Closure- final report, final reviews, notifications to sponsor, dissemination of final project results, (products, books, patents, reports, analyses, data).

# Broad Introduction to Writing Project Descriptions



**Broad guidance**- covering all types of grant proposals, purposes, audiences, and expectations.



**Limitations**- this general approach has some serious limits because most grants are unique entities and more tailored advice is needed.



**More work**- you will need to adhere to grant writing practices within your own disciplines and grant agencies to which you are applying.

Many sponsor solicitations specify what you need to include in your project description.

# Definition of a Project Description

A project description outlines the details of a project, including all its phases and processes, in a single write-up.

It addresses the problem that the project has undertaken and the desired goals, objectives, methods, and the overall approach.

It should include lists of tasks, an extensive background on the topic, and proposed analysis.

The project description includes all plans, including the activities that the team will execute, the timeline and even the location of the project.

The benefits that will emanate from the project are also outlined in the project description.

The project manager (principal investigator) is responsible for writing the project description and helps guide the team throughout the life cycle of the project.

Think of the project description in a proposal as the project setup, and once the award is executed then think of the project execution as a project delivery effort.

# A Common Project Description Outline

**Project Title-** short, unambiguous, and memorable title.

**Project Summary-** high-level summary (no more than one page).

**Project Justification-** explain the problem or opportunity and why the project is necessary.

**Project Goals and Objectives-** set specific and measurable project goals and objectives.

**Phases of Work-** break down the project into tasks that describe the desired outcome for each task.

**Metrics for Evaluating and Monitoring-** include the metrics you'll use to evaluate the project's success.

November 29 webinar- *How to Develop an Evaluation Plan for your Grant Application.*

**Milestones and Timelines-** outline the timeline for each phase, including the basic tasks that you and other team members will accomplish, with start and end dates for each task.

**Estimated Budget-** include the budget and projected costs.



# Project Title

Advice on creating the right title:

**Understand the Title's Purpose:** Determine the main objective of your project. What are you trying to achieve or convey?

**Keep it Clear & Concise:** Avoid jargon unless it's common knowledge in your target audience's field. Stick to the point. A title should be brief yet informative.

**Include Keywords:** Incorporate significant keywords or phrases related to your project's content. This can help in making your project easily searchable or relatable to the topic once its awarded.

**Be Descriptive:** The title should provide a hint about the project's content, methodology, or results. e.g., "Assessing the Impact of Urbanization on Local Bird Species" is descriptive and indicates the project's focus.

**Avoid Overly Complex Language:** A title should be accessible to a broad audience, even if the content is specialized.

**Test It Out:** Share your title with fellow investigators, peers, mentors, or friends. Feedback can help identify if it's clear, compelling, and free of ambiguity.

**Consider Creativity:** Depending on the context (like academic research versus a creative venture), it might be suitable to add a touch of creativity or intrigue to your title. e.g., "Green Skies: Exploring the Future of Urban Sustainability".

# Project Summary

- Usually a one-page document that consists of 3 sections:
  - a short high-level overview of the project (including objectives, approaches, methods, and goals);
  - the contributions, enhancements, and added values generated by the effort; and
  - the project's social and organizational advances (impacts and outcomes).
- Each of these three elements should be included in the project summary and must be clearly defined.
- The project summary is one of the most important parts of the proposal. It is likely the first thing a reviewer will read, and is your best chance to grab their interest, and convince them of the importance, and quality, of your research before they even read the proposal.
- Sponsors use the Project Summary to recruit reviewers.
- Though it is the first proposal element in order, many applicants prefer to write the project summary last, after writing the project description. This allows the writer to better avoid any inconsistencies between the two.

# Project Justification

The justification is the reason for addressing a particular problem in your proposal and proposing a set of solutions.

In your proposal provide the reasons why you are conducting the study.

The justification should explain:

- (a) What you hope to find out;
- (b) The significance of this project for your field;
- (c) What gaps will be filled by this project or this research; and
- (d) How do you plan to do the work.

## Examples of Justifications

"To the best of our knowledge, no analysis of data has been published regarding how successful hospitals perform on pain care. Publicly evaluating data on clinical performance has catalyzed improvements in optimizing patient care in hospitals. Evaluating this data specifically focusing on the level of patient satisfaction with pain control will provide valuable insight into how specialists in pain medicine may be able to improve pain assessment and treatment."

"Television has become the most influential medium in the development of behavior and thought patterns in children and adolescents around the world, some of them quite disruptive (violence, aggressiveness, lack of respect towards teachers and other adults). The relationship between television and youth behavior is suspected, but no clear causal link had been identified. Our research aims to review the evidence, trying to understand more fully the effect of this means of communication on younger audiences, its repercussions at a social level, and suggestions on how it should be a more responsible."

# Setting a Realistic Scope for the Project

**Understand the client's needs and goals.** The sponsor's solicitation will provide information on what the amount of funding should be and how long it should take to complete the project-follow sponsor's guidance.

**Define the project outcomes and deliverables-work backwards.** Once the project has been completed what outcomes do you expect to have and what deliverables will be required to achieve these outcomes.

**Then break down the project into tasks and milestones.** Manageable activities and tasks that you will need to perform to complete the deliverables.

**Create a realistic project timeline.** This will demonstrate to the sponsor that your project will be delivered on time and within budget.

**Communicate the feasibility of the project scope and timeline.** Present your project scope in a clear, concise, and persuasive way.

# Considerations in Selecting Project Problems and Challenges

Identification and formulation of a problem or challenge is one of the most important steps of the process.

Selection of problem depends on several factors such as team's knowledge, skills, interest, expertise, motivation & creativity with respect to the subject of inquiry.

Generally, a broad area can be selected and then narrowed down to a problem that addresses sponsor's needs. Limitations imposed by the budget, and the project teams strengths.

**Interest-** One should select topic of great interest to investigators in the subject's disciplinary area. If there is very little interest in the problem by the project team it will be difficult to convince the sponsor and the reviewers of its importance.

**Magnitude-** It is extremely important to select a topic that you can manage within the time and resources at your disposal. Narrow the topic to something so it becomes manageable, specific and clear.

**Measurement of Concepts-** Make sure that you have the tools, methods, indicators that can answer the problem (if used) in your study.

**Level of Expertise-** Make sure that you have adequate level of expertise for the project's tasks. If not, add them.

**Relevance-** Ensure that your study adds to the existing body of knowledge, bridges current gaps, and is useful in the community of the subject.

**Availability of Data-** If you need data to address the problem make sure that data are available or include the data collection tasks in the project.

**Ethical issues-** If ethical issues affect the study population and cannot be overcome, you should reevaluate the problem that is being studied.

**Over researched subjects should be avoided-** It will be difficult to convince reviewers that more funding is needed to address the problem.

## Project Goals and Objectives

Project Goals are high-level, broad, long-term outcomes on what a project will achieve. What will be achieved?

Project Objectives are specific, structured, concrete, short-term, smaller, measurable tasks that support project goals. How will you achieve it?

**A goal is a target, whereas an objective is a task to reach the target.**

# Examples of Project Goals and Objectives

**Project Goal:** We commit ourselves to achieving the goal of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth.

**Project Objectives:** Doing this by the end of the decade, establishing the Apollo mission (moon mission) at NASA, developing a rocket engine with the thrust and power to get to the moon, designing and building a lunar landing module that can carry astronauts from the spacecraft to and from the moon, training astronauts to achieve this mission.

**Project Goal:** By 2030, we will reduce breast cancer deaths by 25%.

**Project Objectives:** Increasing and educating patients on the importance of early diagnosis, increasing research and treatment on the slowing or stopping the growth of the cancer, reducing risk by informing patients that they need to follow a healthy lifestyle (avoiding being overweight, limiting alcohol, eating fruits and vegetables).

**Project Goal:** We will establish a worldwide community of students, teachers, scientists, and citizens working together to better understand, sustain, and improve Earth's environment at local, regional, and global scales.

**Project Objectives:** Creating a platform where researchers can upload data that they have gathered on the earth's environmental processes, establishing agreements with countries and international organizations to provide funding and activities for the program, setting up formal and informal mechanisms for training and supporting educators and students.



# SMART Project Objectives

**Specific:** Define your objectives clearly, in detail, leaving no room for misinterpretation. Think of the five w's (who, what, when, where, and why).

**Measurable:** State the measures and performance specifications you'll use to determine whether you've met your objectives.

**Achievable or Attainable:** Choose objectives that the team has a reasonable expectation of successfully completing.

**Realistic:** Set objectives the project team believes it can achieve. Relevant objectives align with group, project, sponsor and/or institutional goals.

**Time-bound:** Include the date or specific period by which you'll achieve the objectives.

**The goals and objectives are the foundation of the project without a solid foundation the project is on shaky ground.**

# Project Milestones

A project milestone is a project planning tool that's used to mark a point in a project schedule. Project milestones can note the start and finish of a project, mark the completion of a major phase of work or anything that's worth highlighting in a project, such as the production of project deliverables.

Important  
Dates

Completion  
Dates of  
Significant  
Tasks

Key  
Deliverable  
Dates

Expected Dates  
of Major  
Achievements

Sponsor  
Approval Dates

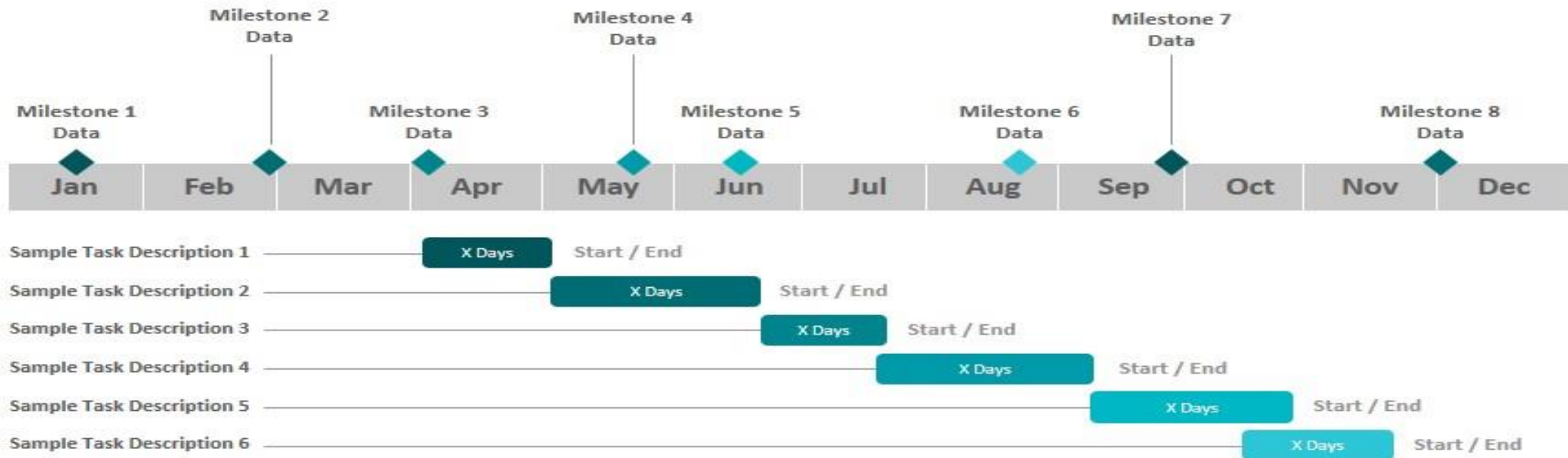
Sponsor  
Review  
Submission  
Dates

# Project Timelines

A project timeline is a visual list of tasks or activities placed in chronological order, which lets project managers view the entirety of the project. It provides an overview of the entire project showing when each task starts and when it ends.

## Project Timelines -12 Months

Enter your subhead line here



# Selecting the Right Team

**Define your needs-** Before you start selecting a team you need a clear idea of what kind of skills, qualifications, and roles you need for your project. Once you have identified the research questions, methods, outputs, resources and timeline you are ready to identify team members. In research and training projects you can add faculty and researchers from your or other institutions . Don't forget research assistants, analysts, consultants, or subject matter specialists.

**Search for candidates-** You can obtain referrals from your colleagues, mentors, or network, post job ads or recruitment ads on relevant platforms, websites, or forums. You can browse online databases and directories of researchers or organizations, attend conferences, workshops, or events to meet and network with others in your field, or contact authors of publications, reports, or articles that interest you or relate to your topic. These are all viable sources and strategies for finding potential research staff and collaborators.

**Evaluate their suitability-** Once you have a list of potential candidates, you need to evaluate their suitability for your project. You can review their resumes, portfolios, or publications to check their background, education, and experience. Finally, assessing their personality, communication style, and work ethic can help determine if they are compatible with you and your team.

**Select the best ones-** Once you have evaluated the candidates, you must select the best ones for your project. To make your decision, compare their strengths, weaknesses, and potential contributions to your project. Additionally, weigh their costs, benefits, and risks to your budget, timeline, and quality. You should also consult with your team to get their input and approval.

**Manage the relationship-** Once you have selected your research staff and collaborators, it is essential to manage the relationship with them effectively. You should set clear and realistic goals, roles, and responsibilities. Additionally, establish regular and open communication channels and feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, providing adequate support, guidance, and recognition to them is necessary. Resolving any issues, conflicts, or challenges that may arise is also important. Finally, evaluating and acknowledging their performance and outcomes is essential.

# Management Plan

A blueprint on how the project will run day-to-day and over the long term.

Defines roles and responsibilities so everyone knows what is expected of them.

It creates structure, accountability, and clarity, to project, participants, sponsors, stakeholders, and sponsors.

Lists key personnel with their responsibilities and assignments on the project.

Identify expected interactions, collaborations, and responsibilities between each part of the project.

Should include a chart outlining reporting requirements in each of the aims, tasks, projects, and/or subprojects.

For large projects, an advisory committee is recommended with a schedule of meetings to provide guidance to the project.

A management plan is not needed if there are less than 3 investigators and a few students on the project.

# Proposal Budgets

- READ THE SOLICITATION.
- Sponsor cost allowability.
- **Contact your campus Grants Office.**
- Align the budget with your Program Narrative.
- This assures that the budget items are specifically related to activities described in the proposal.
- Consider what personnel you need to perform the work.
- Outline what other resources you need to complete the tasks indicated in the proposal.

## Proposal Budgets Continued

- Direct Costs are costs which are directly attributed to the costs of the project or program. The direct costs can be specifically and easily identified with a particular project or activity and are allowable under the sponsoring organizations guidelines.

- Indirect costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives and cannot be easily and specifically identified with a particular sponsored project, an instructional activity, or any institutional activity. These costs are also sometimes called “facilities and administrative costs (F&A)” or “overhead.” The terms indirect costs, overhead costs, and F&A costs are synonymous. These indirect costs are different than direct costs.

# Proposal Budgets Continued

**People:** Who is doing the work? What project roles are needed?; collaborators; faculty effort or how much time in each year does each person need?; consultants

**Place:** Where is the work being performed? Do you have sites away from your institution? Collaborators at other institutions? Where are they located? Do you need to travel? If so, where to and for how long? Do you know what a per diem is?

**Things:** What else do you need: Supplies, Equipment, Software, Lab analysis? Animals and their maintenance? Human subjects? Research incentives? Etc.

Two additional considerations:

- 1) Follow each question above with: Does the sponsor or this specific solicitation allow this cost in my budget?
- 2) Also ask: Have I budgeted what the sponsor requires?

Read the Solicitation: Identify sponsor budget requirements and restrictions.

Contact the grants office as soon as possible: Unlike other sections in the proposal, budgets very often require institutional approval- your grants office can help you get this approval.

Outline your budget needs along a simple People, Place and Things: Based on the activities you propose in the application.



# Contact Information

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