Overview

This chapter discusses how to write project plans in proposals and grants. The chapter will meet the following objectives:

1. Discuss the purpose and importance of the Project Plan section.
2. Illustrate how to set a top rank objective and secondary objectives.
3. Show how to answer the “how question” by mapping a solution.
4. Show how to invent and organize the plan.
5. Discuss the importance of answering the “why questions” in the plan.
6. Illustrate the writing of the Project Plan section.
7. Comment on how to describe a research methodology.

The Importance of the Project Plan Section

A thorough description of the project plan is the heart of any successful proposal, including grant proposals. A proposal’s Project Plan section—sometimes called the Approach, Methodology, Project Plan, Research Program, and Solution, among other titles—typically offers a detailed step-by-step process you will follow to solve the problem or take advantage of the opportunity. When describing your plan, you are going to tell the readers how the problem should be solved and why the problem should be solved that way. You will also identify the deliverables, the tangible results of your proposed plan.

When writing the Project Plan section, the hardest task you face is the creation of something new. In other words, the project you are proposing does not currently exist, so you need to look into the future and use your imagination to see your plan in action. In some cases, writing the Project Plan section might mean simply adapting a previous plan to the new situation. In other cases, writing this section will require the invention of a whole new product, organization, or approach from the ground up. That is why writing the Project Plan section can be exciting and challenging—and also frustrating. In this chapter, you will learn how to avoid some of that frustration by setting objectives, answering the how and why questions, and writing a well-organized plan that will attract your readers.
Refining Objectives for the Project Plan Section

In Chapter 3, you learned how to set objectives for your proposal or grant, including a top rank objective. Now that you are working on the Project Plan section for your proposal, you should revisit and refine your understanding of these objectives.

Earlier, you were primarily concerned about your objectives. Now you should look closely at your readers’ objectives to determine the key places where your needs and their needs line up. You need to sharpen your top rank objective and then establish a list of two to five secondary objectives that you and your readers’ can agree upon.

Start by listing out the client’s or funding source’s objectives. You can find their objectives in a couple different places:

- The Request for Proposals—Clients and funding sources will often spell out their objectives in the RFP. Look for key words, like goal, aims, targets, ends, intentions, purpose, and of course objectives.
- The Point of Contact—When communicating with the POC, listen carefully for any objectives that are priorities or didn’t appear in the RFP. For example, the POC might say something like “Above all, here are the three things we need accomplished.” These kinds of verbal objectives may or may not be listed in the RFP.

Now, merge together your original list of objectives with your readers’ objectives to create one set of objectives for the project. In almost all cases, it is wise to use the readers’ words where possible to phrase to your plan’s objectives. By using their words, you will demonstrate to them that they are getting what they asked for.

When you have merged your objectives with your readers’ objectives, you will have written down a top rank objective and a list of two to five secondary objectives. Now, you can use these objectives to help you design the project. Then, these objectives will be inserted directly into your Project Plan section, usually early in the section. These stated objectives are the goals that your project will be designed to achieve.

Refining Objectives for the Overture Designs Project

Formally and informally, Overture Designs had already furnished Lisa Miller with a list of objectives that her plan would need to meet. The original RFP provided a clear idea of the plan’s top rank objective when it stated that the plan should “manage the physical growth of [Overture’s] architectural design operations.” This top rank objective, Lisa noted, was the antithesis of the problem—lack of office space—that she had already discussed in the Current Situation section.
A couple secondary objectives also stood out in the RFP. For one thing, the RFP mentioned that the plan should "cause the least disruption to our current operations." The RFP also mentioned cost, giving Lisa the impression that a less expensive solution would strongly appeal to the decision makers at Overture.

Looking over her notes from her meeting with Grant Moser, Lisa further identified a few other secondary objectives:

- She sensed that the clients wanted to find a way to retain Overture’s award-winning Michigan Avenue office, even though they had reluctantly conceded that their office space shortage might require them to relocate.
- Another unstated secondary objective Lisa picked up from Mr. Moser was the client’s wish to avoid overextending the firm’s revenues. Mr. Moser seemed to suggest that the Chicago architectural market would not always be this strong, so the firm did not want to chain itself to an expensive office that would be a burden when the market weakened.
- A final secondary objective, Lisa noted, was the desire to maintain high employee morale at Overture. In her Current Situation section, she had pointed out that employee morale would suffer if Overture did not address the office space problem. On the other hand, the employees also seemed resistant to relocating the office to the suburbs. Maintaining morale would be an important objective, Lisa felt, even though the RFP and Mr. Moser had not mentioned it directly.

On a worksheet, Lisa wrote down her top rank objective and secondary objectives (Figure 5.1). Where possible, she tried to rephrase these objectives in positive terms that implied action and progress.

As you will notice, Lisa’s objectives are all somewhat abstract. They are not solutions to the problem. Rather, they are milestones that any successful plan would be able to meet. This simple act of identifying objectives creates some boundaries for a potential solution while providing a method for determining which plans are suitable and which are not.
Answering the *How* Question

With the objectives set, we are faced with a question that has followed us since we started the proposal writing process: *How* are we going to solve the problem or take advantage of the opportunity? *How* are we going to achieve the top rank objective and secondary objectives? One way to answer the *how* question is to begin mapping out a solution on your computer screen or a sheet of paper. In the last chapter, you learned how to map out the current situation for the readers. We can use this same mapping technique to invent a plan for solving the problem.

To begin, it is important to recognize that objectives are met when people take specific steps to reach them. A plan is like a roadmap of steps that will take us from the current situation to a preferable situation in the future. So, when mapping out the solution to a problem, you want to identify all the steps, some larger and some smaller, that will allow you to meet the goals you have set for yourself.

**Step 1: Identify a Possible Solution to the Problem**

To begin the mapping process, you first need to identify a solution that might achieve the top rank objective and secondary objectives you have identified. Fortunately, while writing the Current Situation section, you more than likely will identify one or two possible solutions that might work.

On the first try, you do not need to identify the right solution. You might even list a few possible solutions. Then, you can map them out separately, seeing which one best meets your top rank objective and secondary objectives.

**Step 2: Map Out a Possible Solution**

As we discussed in the last chapter, mapping allows you and a team of others to highlight the logic behind your ideas. In this case, we can use mapping as a logical method to construct the steps in a plan:

1. Place your most promising solution in the center of your computer screen or a piece of paper. Circle it. (When working with a team, you’ll find that a whiteboard is an especially useful tool.)
2. Ask yourself and your team, “What are the two to five major steps needed to make this solution a reality?”
3. Write down those major steps around the solution, circle them, and connect them to the solution (Figure 5.2).
4. Map each major step separately. Ask yourself or your team what minor steps are needed to make each major step a reality.

As you map further out, each level of the plan should be supported by levels of smaller steps. For example, let us say one of your major steps is to “collect information.” Some smaller steps connected to this major step might be “survey client’s customers,” “interview client,” and “study client’s marketing plan.”
Each of these smaller steps might have further substeps attached to them. The step “survey client’s customers” might branch out with even smaller steps like “create survey,” “secure a mailing list,” and “administer user-test survey.”

Of course, you and your team could probably keep mapping out indefinitely, identifying even the minutest steps that might be required. However, there comes a point in the mapping process when you begin generating too much detail. When you begin identifying steps that probably will not be mentioned in the proposal, it is time to stop.

During the mapping process, you will often find yourself and your team coming up with steps that might never have occurred to you otherwise. This added creativity is the advantage of the mapping process. Because you are working visually and spatially, not linearly, your mind can more freely develop new ideas.

A rule of thumb, again, is to try to limit your plan to five or fewer major steps. A plan that includes too many major steps will become unmanageable for the readers, because it will force them to wade through a seemingly never-ending list of tasks. When you are finished mapping, if your map of the solution includes more than five major steps, consider whether some of the less-significant major steps could be consolidated with one of the other major steps. If consolidation will not work, then you should sort the major steps into two or three larger phases that bundle larger steps together.

**The Importance of an Evaluation Step**

One step that should appear in almost all proposals is an outcomes assessment or evaluation phase, in which the results of the project are assessed after completion. The purpose of an evaluation step (i.e., customer satisfaction surveys, product testing, or impartial evaluators) is to reassure the clients or a funding source that your work met the objectives listed in the proposal. The strongest outcomes assessment tools yield quantifiable ways of measuring whether the project was a success. In most cases, the evaluation step is the last step in the plan.
In grant proposals, usually the evaluation step includes the names of two or more impartial outside reviewers who will look over the project when it is completed. These reviewers typically write a report back to the funding source, and they usually receive an honorarium, which is paid for out of the grant budget.

**Step 3: Review Your Top Rank Objective and Secondary Objectives**

When you are finished mapping, look back at the objectives you identified earlier. Does your mapped solution meet those objectives? Are there any objectives, especially secondary objectives, that are not being met? When reviewing your objectives, you may find yourself adding some new major and minor steps to your map. In some cases, you may cross out major or minor steps because they go beyond the needs specified by the objectives. You may even find that your map does not meet your objectives at all. In these cases, try mapping out another solution to see if another plan will achieve them.

In the end, mapping will allow you to answer the *how* question. Your map of the solution illustrates roughly how you are going to achieve the top rank objective and secondary objectives you identified, thus solving the problem or taking advantage of the opportunity.

**Mapping a Project Plan for the Overture Proposal**

Lisa Miller knew that there were several possible solutions to Overture’s office space problem. However, her company, Insight Systems, could only offer Overture one particular type of solution, a local area network (LAN) and intranet that would allow Overture’s employees to telecommute from home.

To help her rough out a solution, Lisa called a planning meeting that included other engineers at her company. She gave each of them a copy of her proposal’s Current Situation section, which they read and discussed. Then, on a whiteboard, she wrote “Telecommuting” and circled it. With a marker in hand, she asked the engineers to help her identify the major steps needed to develop a telecommuting system at a company like Overture.

As the group brainstormed, Lisa wrote on the whiteboard some of the major steps needed to achieve that solution. Around the solution, she wrote, “Build computer network,” “Study telecommuting needs,” “Train Overture employees,” and “Conduct outcomes assessment.” She was already beginning to visualize the plan through the map developed with her team (Figure 5.3).

Once they had roughed out the major steps, Lisa and the other engineers began mapping further to identify the minor steps required to achieve each major step. For instance, under “Train employees,” they wrote smaller steps like “Offer workshops,” “Develop training materials,” and “Create a help desk for new telecommuters.” Their map began to fill the sheet of paper.

After mapping the plan with her team of engineers, Lisa looked back at the top rank objective and secondary objectives she listed out before (Figure 5.1). For the most part, she felt their mapped plan was meeting those objectives. Even in its
rough form, their plan seemed to show how Overture could manage its office growth while minimizing disruption, reducing costs, and fostering a dynamic workplace. Best of all, their plan would allow Overture to keep its Michigan Avenue office—an unstated objective that she thought would be appealing to the readers. Lisa was ready to begin organizing and drafting her Project Plan section.

**Organizing the Project Plan Section**

After mapping out the logic of your plan, you need to arrange the major and minor steps into a pattern that the readers will understand. Sometimes, it is helpful to think of the Project Plan section as a recipe for solving the problem. For instance, baking a cherry pie requires four major steps: (1) make the cherry pie filling, (2) prepare the crust, (3) pour the filling into the crust, and (4) bake the pie. Once you have partitioned the process into larger steps, you can describe the minor steps under each of these major steps. Instructions for making the pie filling would require some smaller steps like (a) combine cherries, sugar, and cornstarch, (b) heat mixture until thickened and bubbly, (c) cook for one more minute, and (d) remove from heat and allow to cool.

Organizing your proposal’s Project Plan section is a similar process. List the major steps in the order they will be followed. Then, fill in the minor steps under each of these major steps. You should begin to see an outline of your Project Plan section emerge out of the logical map you created earlier.

For example, Lisa Miller might outline her plan as shown in Figure 5.4. In this outline she organizes the major steps into the order in which they will be taken. Of course, like any outline, Lisa’s description of the plan is still rather crude and skeletal.

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**Figure 5.3**

A Map of the Telecommuting Solution

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Nevertheless, turning the logical map into an outline allowed her to see the basic structure of the plan. Now Lisa could begin putting some muscle on that skeleton.

### Answering the Why Questions

When studying a proposal, the readers’ overriding question is always why? Why should we do it this way? Why is this step necessary? Why not try doing it a different way? As the proposal writer, your job is to answer these why questions as you explain the various steps in your plan. Answers to the why questions are the
FIGURE 5.5
A Why Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Step:</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor Steps</td>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deliverables?

muscles that hold the plan together. One way of developing answers to the readers’ *why* questions is to chart them out in a Why table like the one in Figure 5.5.

In this table, write down one of your major steps on the top line and offer a short answer to the *why* question. Then, write down the minor steps that support this major step and provide answers to the *why* questions next to each smaller step. Finally, looking over the contents of the table, ask yourself whether there are any deliverables that will result from these steps.

Deliverables are the tangible results of each major step. They are what you will “deliver” to the readers as your project progresses and after it is completed. In some cases deliverables are finished products of some kind (e.g., a machine, a building, a software package, or some noticeable physical change). In other cases, a deliverable might be some form of communication to the readers (e.g., a completion report, a progress report, or even just a regular summary at a meeting). Whenever possible, though, you should try to come up with some kind of deliverable for each major step. After all, your clients should be able to observe the tangible results of your work as you finish each step. They should feel as though they are receiving something they could see or touch in return for their investment in your project.

In grant proposals, clearly identifying deliverables is one of the tricks of a professional grant writer’s trade. Grant writers know that funding sources don’t like to fund projects that evaporate when the money runs out. By showing the reviewers that each major step in the project leads to a tangible deliverable of some kind, you will show them that their money will be used to create something that lasts beyond the grant itself.

When you are finished with the *why* tables, you will have created the basis for a well-reasoned argument. When you turn these *why* tables into paragraphs in your Project Plan section, you will be answering both of the readers’ main questions (i.e., *how* and *why*). Also, you will have specified the tangible results of your work. To illustrate, Figure 5.6 shows how Lisa Miller might fill out one of these *why* tables.

The advantage of a *why* table is that it helps you invent answers to the *how* and the *why* questions that the readers will be asking of your plan. Essentially, each of the *why* tables tells the readers *how* you are going to achieve a particular part of the plan, *why* you are taking particular steps, and *what* deliverables will
result. Of course, you still need to track down sources, statistics, or facts that support your answers to the *why* questions. But when you have finished filling out the *why* tables, you are ready to start writing your plan into its final form.

Writing the Project Plan Section

In Chapter 4, you learned that each body section in a proposal typically has three parts: an opening, a body, and a closing. All three of these parts are found in a good Project Plan section. An *opening* is needed to tell the readers the purpose and main point of your Project Plan section. The *body* of the Project Plan section will describe the steps in your plan. And the *closing* will round off the Project Plan section by summarizing some of the deliverables you are promising the readers.

The Opening of the Project Plan Section

Like the opening of any larger section in a document, the opening of the Project Plan section is designed to set a framework for the information in the body of the section. But the opening of the Project Plan section is especially important, because here is where your readers need to make the critical transition from your description of the *situation* to your description of the *plan*.

This transition is difficult, because the Current Situation section sometimes sets a negative tone. After all, in your Current Situation section, you just told the readers that they have a problem and that some rather unpleasant consequences will occur if they avoid taking action. Even in a Current Situation section that describes a golden opportunity, you will probably close your discussion by mentioning some of the

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**FIGURE 5.6**

*A Why Table for Overture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Step: Study telecommuting options</th>
<th>Why? To identify specific workplace needs of employees and management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor Steps</td>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Survey employees</td>
<td>To determine which employees might be eligible for telecommuting and why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interview management</td>
<td>To understand management’s strategies to adapt telecommuting system to management’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Research architects’ work patterns</td>
<td>To determine what telecommuting system would best suit the needs of the principal employees of the firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverables?</td>
<td>A report that summarizes the results of our research and describes the best telecommuting system for Overture’s needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
negative effects of not taking advantage of the opportunity. The Project Plan section, on the other hand, needs to be as optimistic as possible. From this point forward in the proposal, you will leave the problem and its consequences behind, concentrating instead on the advantages and benefits of solving the problem a particular way.

Essentially, your opening paragraph in the Project Plan section needs to shift the readers from a negative viewpoint to an optimistic one. To negotiate this tricky transition, the opening of the Project Plan section should make most, if not all, of the following important moves:

- **Transition**—signals to the readers that you are starting your discussion of the plan
- **Statement of the Purpose of the Section**—tells the readers that the purpose of this section is to provide a detailed step-by-step plan
- **Statement of the Plan’s Objectives**—lists the objectives that any successful plan would be able to meet
- **Naming of the Overall Solution**—in a sentence or phrase, identifies your overall strategy for solving the problem
- **Forecast of the Plan**—briefly lists the major steps of your plan

Of course, these moves need not be made in this order, and some of them might not be made at all. However, if the opening paragraph or paragraphs of your Project Plan section accounts for these moves, you will have established a clear framework for the detailed plan that follows.

To illustrate, let us return to Lisa Miller’s proposal for Overture Designs. As she drafts the opening of her Project Plan section, she tries to address each of the opening moves separately. For her transition, she writes, “Let us now turn to our strategy for managing Overture’s limited office space.” It’s a crude transition, but it will work for now. She then writes, “The purpose of this section is to describe a plan for providing suitable working space for Overture.” Then, she states her main point: “We propose that Overture implement a telecommuting program that allows employees to work at home, thus freeing up space in the current office.” And finally, she forecasts her plan: “We will follow a four-part process that studies Overture’s telecommuting options, develops a computer network to facilitate telecommuting, trains employees to be effective telecommuters, and assesses the outcomes of the telecommuting program.” Putting all these sentences together, she writes the text shown in Figure 5.7.

In Lisa’s opening to the Project Plan section, all of the opening moves are accounted for. The heading “Our Plan: Maintaining Flexibility through Telecommuting” signals the transition into the discussion of the plan. In the first paragraph of the Project Plan section, she tackles these issues:

- She identifies the subject of the section (the plan).
- She states the purpose of the section (to offer a plan for managing Overture’s limited office space).
- She expresses the section’s main point (telecommuting is the solution).
- She forecasts the structure of the plan (four steps).

In addition to these moves, the opening also states the objectives that any successful plan should be able to meet, establishing a set of criteria that the readers can use to measure the success of the plan that will follow.
The Body of the Project Plan Section

The body of the Project Plan section is where you are going to describe your plan and tell the readers why you believe the problem should be solved a particular way. The Project Plan section’s body will be built around the major steps you identified earlier. For example, if you have four steps in your plan, the body of your Project Plan section will likely have four major parts. Each part will describe one of the steps in detail.

Writing each of these parts should not be difficult at this point. Start by looking over the why table that describes the first step in your plan. State the major action up front and then support that major action with a discussion of the minor steps needed to achieve it. As you describe these major and minor steps for the readers, flesh out the discussion by answering those why questions that the readers will be asking at this point. Finally, at the end of the discussion of each step, you might discuss some of the deliverables that will be the end results of this part of the plan.

To illustrate, Figure 5.8 shows how one of Lisa’s why tables (shown in Figure 5.6) can be developed into part of her plan. This description of the plan’s first step is...
Phase One: Analyze Overture’s Telecommuting Needs

Before moving forward, we believe it is important to analyze the specific workplace needs of Overture’s employees and management. This analysis would allow us to work closely with Overture’s management to develop a telecommuting program that fits the unique demands that a dynamic architecture firm like yours would put on such a system.

In this phase, our objective would be to collect as much information and data as possible, so the transition to telecommunication would be smooth and hassle-free.

- First, we would conduct thorough surveys of your employees to determine which people might be willing and able to telecommute. These surveys will tell us about their work habits and the way in which a telecommuting system might be adapted to their needs.
- Second, we would interview Overture’s management. These interviews will help us tailor the telecommuting system to your corporate culture and your managers’ specific needs.
- Third, we will conduct empirical studies to identify and understand the office dynamics at Overture. These empirical studies will help us replicate those office dynamics in a virtual environment.

We estimate this phase will require thirty days. At the end of that time period, we will submit a report to you in which we analyze and discuss the findings of our surveys, interviews, and empirical studies. In this report, we will also describe the various telecommuting options available and recommend the option we believe best suits the needs of Overture.

rather concise. Lisa could expand it considerably by describing in greater detail how her company will conduct and analyze the surveys, interviews, and empirical studies. Or, she might spend more time answering the clients’ *why* questions in greater depth.

In the end, though, the length of any part of the plan—and the plan altogether—depends on the amount of information your clients will require to say yes to your ideas. If your clients are unfamiliar with you, your techniques, or your field of expertise, you may need to spend more time explaining your methods and the reasoning behind your plan. If your clients are familiar with you and your methods, the description of the plan can be more concise and to the point. In Lisa’s case, she decided to keep the discussion of each step concise because the RFP imposed a fifteen-page limit on the pre-proposal. Also, she needed to save room for the other sections of the proposal.
Developing a Project Timeline

The text in Figure 5.8 also demonstrates how answers to the clients’ *why* questions can be interwoven with the steps in the plan. As you compose your plan, you should imagine your readers asking you “why?” as you describe each aspect of the plan. If you can answer these questions while you describe the steps, you will help the readers understand the rationale for your plan. Meanwhile, you will immediately address any potential objections the readers might have toward your methods.

Finally, Lisa also mentioned a deliverable (a report) that would be provided to Overture when this step is completed. Not all steps need to include deliverables, but if possible, you should try to come up with ways to deliver something tangible to the readers at the end of each major phase. They will feel they are receiving something concrete for their money. Clients want updates and information. They want to feel like they are part of the plan, not just the recipient. By identifying deliverables clearly, Lisa hoped to bring the clients into the process as active participants.

The Closing of the Project Plan Section

In the closing of the Project Plan section, you should not offer any new information to the readers. You should summarize the section’s major points and stress the importance of your plan. You might also summarize some of the major deliverables you promised your clients in the body of the plan. Your aim in the closing is to concisely round off the discussion, giving the readers an overall view of your plan and the tangible results that will come about if they say yes to the proposal. Some proposal writers use the Project Plan section’s closing to show that their plan satisfies the objectives mentioned in the opening of the section.

The closing of the Project Plan section is not the proposal’s conclusion, so this is not the place to pour on the persuasion. The closing merely puts an endpoint on your description of the plan and prepares the readers to make a transition into a discussion of your company’s or organization’s qualifications.

Developing a Project Timeline

Your proposal’s Project Plan section should describe a clear project timeline. To create a timeline, each major step should include the date when that step will be completed. A timeline provides your clients or a funding source with milestones to track your progress.

To develop a timeline, start at the project’s completion date and work backward toward its starting date. Assign a specific date to each major step in the project plan. Specialists in time management call this “backward planning.” Scheduling backward will help you scale the project’s timeline to fit the completion date. By working backward from the completion date, you will avoid the temptation to be unrealistic about the time requirements of the later steps (and often the most important steps) in your project plan.
Even if you aren’t exactly sure about dates, you should include them. Real dates will make your project seem more realistic, and they will give the readers a clear sense of when you expect the project to start and be completed. If, for some reason, you are unable to start the project on time, the dates on the timeline can be adjusted accordingly. In these situations, you will need to discuss the new dates with your clients or the funding source.

Larger proposals and grants often use graphics to illustrate the project timeline. You might include a list of dates and events or a chart that shows important dates and the major steps that will be completed by those dates. Gantt charts, like the one shown in Chapter 10, are especially popular in proposals, because project management software programs can draw them automatically.

A Comment on Research Methodologies

If you are writing a research proposal, especially one aimed at securing grant funding, the process described in this chapter might not seem exactly suitable to your needs. But when you recognize that a Methodology section is really just a description of a plan, you will see that this process actually works quite well.

A Methodology section in a research proposal describes how and why a subject will be studied in a particular way. This part of your proposal needs to do more than simply describe the procedure of your study; it should also tell the readers why your approach is the most appropriate for this subject (Penrose and Katz 1998, p. 45). After all, the reviewers of your proposal will scrutinize your methods closely to determine whether they will yield useful results. If you are using a methodology adapted from other studies, you should carefully describe and cite it. When inventing a new methodology, you need to justify your decision to blaze a new path.

In a research proposal, the methods section often begins with a list of objectives that the study will strive to achieve. In most research proposals, this list of objectives is specific about the kinds of quantifiable results that would mark whether the research project was a success. Indeed, much like a business proposal, the objectives of a scientific methodology establish the aims of the study and the benchmarks for success.

A Methodology section should define the subject that will be studied and the conditions under which it will be observed. If the subjects are animals, insects, places, or people, the Methodology section should be clear about their characteristics and the environments and circumstances (e.g., time, temperature) in which the subjects will be studied.

After defining the subject, a Methodology section usually offers a step-by-step description of the process that will be used to study the subject. The description should be exact and complete, mentioning any materials, tools, formulas, and calculations that will be used during the study. Essentially, the description should be exact enough that other researchers could replicate the study and calculations to test its results.
Methodology sections often close with a discussion of the analysis tools that will be used to study the data generated by the experiment or observation. Any statistical procedures or software packages that will be used to process the data should be mentioned here. Some researchers even mention the types of computers that will be used to analyze the results of the study. That way, other researchers can exactly replicate the analysis of the results.

In most cases, Methodology sections in research proposals are written in passive voice, because who did what is often not important. For example, the passive sentence “The herons will be observed for 30 days from April 10 to May 10” would work just fine, because it is probably not necessary to say “Mandy Jervis will observe the herons from April 10 to May 10.” Nevertheless, methodologies are increasingly being written in active voice, especially from a “first person” perspective (e.g., “We will measure the PCB level of the lake every two days at 8:00 A.M.”). Active voice reinserts the researchers into the study, reminding the readers that the researchers were part of the experiment and may have influenced the results.

Researchers should always remember that the Methodology section is the most scrutinized part of any funding proposal, because it establishes the validity of any results that will be generated by the research. If the proposal’s reviewers have any doubts about the methodology of a study, they will more than likely choose not to fund the project. After all, a questionable methodology will invariably lead to questionable results. Consequently, it is crucial that the Methodology section answer all of the reviewers’ how and why questions in exact detail.

Looking Ahead

The Project Plan section is the heart of your proposal. It explains how the problem should be solved and why it should be solved a particular way. Most proposal writers see the Project Plan section as the most challenging part of the proposal-writing process. From here, they usually find, the writing is a bit easier. In the next chapter, we will discuss the writing of the Qualifications section. There is definitely a sense of relief that comes when the plan is finished; however, a good plan is only as strong as the people who will put it into action.

CASE STUDY  Developing the Project Plan for the Cool Campus Project

Describing the current situation at Durango University was hard work for the Cool Campus team. As they began to better understand the problem, though, they grew increasingly eager to come up with a solution that would solve it. So, when they turned to developing the Project Plan section, they were energized. “Now it’s time to start figuring out what we need to do,” Tim said as the group began brainstorming solutions.

George picked up the marker and stood at the whiteboard. “OK, let’s go back over our objectives.
What would we like our plan to achieve? What goals would any successful plan need to meet?”

Anne said, “Earlier, we said our top rank objective was to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for converting the campus to sustainable forms of energy.”

George wrote that down.

Karen spoke up, “It also seems important that we get people talking about energy issues on campus and global warming. Right now, it seems like a lot of people simply aren’t talking about it.”

“I agree,” George said, and wrote “Begin conversations about energy and global warming” on the whiteboard.

After a pause, Calvin added, “I would add to Karen’s point by stressing that people in the local community need to be involved. Speaking as a member of the community, I can honestly say that working with this group is the first time I’ve ever talked about environmental issues with someone from the university.”

“Good point,” said George, as he kept scribbling. “We definitely need to begin a dialogue between the university and the community.”

Anne added, “One of my major concerns is that our plan will get tossed out after a couple of years. We need to think about the future and create a plan that will guide future decisions. We need something that will last, or people will simply lose interest in it or forget about it.”

“Umm-hmmm,” George agreed as he wrote. “We certainly need a plan that will be realistic and useful in the long run, or all of our efforts will be wasted.”

“I know we want to emphasize our own campus,” Tim said, “but it would be cool if we came up with something that could help other campuses figure out what to do about converting to renewable energy as well.”

“That’s a good point, Tim,” Anne responded. “Plus, if we could figure out how our project can be used beyond our campus, that would make it much more attractive to the Tempest Foundation.”

“OK, this list of objectives looks pretty good so far,” said George, as he finished adding, “Create plan that will help other campuses” to his list. “Now comes the hard part. What kind of project would allow us to achieve all these objectives?”

Calvin spoke. “I’ve been giving that a great amount of thought. Last year, I participated in something called a ‘charrette’ that was used to do urban planning to renovate a neighborhood in Albuquerque. We could probably do something like that here.”


“Yeah,” Calvin replied. “It’s an urban planning tool that brings all the stakeholders into the planning process. Everyone is invited, like people from the community, administrators, customers, business owners, and politicians. They get together for a night or a weekend and work in design teams to develop their own plans for a neighborhood. That way, everyone gets input into the process. In Albuquerque, I was amazed at some of the creative ideas that came out of the charrette.”

Anne said, “Something like that would really encourage people to buy into the process. Here on campus, we usually meet resistance when we just make decisions without input from the community. Something like a charrette would allow us to get people involved at the grassroots level.”

Karen was still skeptical. “But how are a bunch of regular people going to do urban planning, especially when they don’t know much about how to do it?”

“In Albuquerque,” replied Calvin, “urban planners were hired to facilitate the meeting. They gave us all the information we needed and explained the process. Then, we worked all afternoon on our plans. That evening, they had us present our design plans to the whole room. There were about a hundred people there. We all discussed and debated the best ideas. Then, we voted on the best plans. It was very exciting to see all those people decide together how they wanted to change their own neighborhood. People got really excited.”

Tim asked, “But what happened then? Who followed up? Who wrote the final plan?”

“That’s the cool part,” said Calvin. “The urban planning firm took all those plans and comments back to their office. In a month, they called a meeting to present a draft of their strategic plan for rebuilding the neighborhood. I thought it was amazing how they took the ideas of amateurs..."
and turned them into professional drawings and schematics.”

Anne said, “I think this charrette idea sounds great. I really like how it gets people involved from the community.”

Karen added, “OK, I was skeptical, but it sounds like this charrette idea might work.”

George wrote in the center of the board, “Use charrette to develop the Cool Campus Strategic Plan.” He circled it and said, “All right, what are the two to five major steps we need to take to achieve this objective?”

The group began brainstorming by mapping out their project plan on the whiteboard (Figure 5.9). Some of the larger steps included, “Gather information for charrette,” “Host charrette,” “Hire an urban planning firm,” and “Present the strategic plan.” They also agreed that a steering committee would need to be formed to oversee the whole process. The Steering Committee would also be in charge of hiring the urban planning firm.

They were amazed at how quickly their plan grew in depth and detail. Their map of the Project Plan showed their answers to the how questions and explained how their plan would work.

They then turned to answering the why questions by filling out why tables for each major step of their Project Plan. George drew the why tables on the whiteboard, and they filled them in. They wrote down deliverables for each major step. Figure 5.10 shows a why table for one of the major steps, “Host charrette.”

An hour went by quickly, and a few of them needed to leave, so George and Calvin agreed to draft the Project Plan section for the grant proposal. They worked on it for a couple weeks and
Chapter 5  Developing a Project Plan

FIGURE 5.10
A Why Table for a Major Step

| Major Step: Host charrette to allow members of the community to participate in developing Cool Campus Strategic Plan | Why?: To involve people collectively in planning process and gather the best ideas available |
| Minor Steps | Why? |
| 1. Reserve ballroom in Student Union | We need plenty of room to work and big tables |
| 2. Order food for participants | To encourage people to commit to project |
| 3. Form diverse design teams | To bring out a wide variety of ideas and experiences |
| 4. Present plans to audience | To give people a chance to comment and pull the best ideas from a variety of plans |

Deliverables?: Design will be placed on the Cool Campus website for public viewing. A podcast will be placed on the website. A progress report will be sent to the Tempest Foundation that shows the charrette in action (lots of pictures needed).

then e-mailed the team a draft, which is shown in Figure 5.11 (pages 95–97).

“Wow,” Tim wrote back. “This is amazing. We just pulled this stuff out of thin air. It looks great!”

Anne replied, “That’s what proposals are all about. They give us a chance to be creative and come up with something new. We are definitely finished with the hard part.”

Questions and Exercises

1. Find a proposal or grant on the Internet, and analyze its Project Plan section. Do the writers of the proposal provide a step-by-step process for achieving some stated (or unstated) objectives? Do they answer the how questions and the why questions in each part of their plan? Do they identify some deliverables at the end of each step or the end of the plan? Write a memo to your instructor in which you evaluate the effectiveness of this Project Plan section. Offer recommendations for improvement.

2. Using the proposal you found for Exercise 1, reconstruct the map the writers may have used to invent this section. Put the solution in the middle of a sheet of paper. Then, map out the major and minor steps that make up their plan. Looking over this map, does their solution seem logical and reasonable? Are there any gaps in content or organization you would like to see filled? Would you write the section differently?

3. Look closely at an RFP in your area of interest. With a team, identify the top rank objective and secondary objectives that the readers would like submitted
Our Plan: A Cool Campus Charrette

Converting a college campus to renewable energy will take careful planning and time. Therefore, our primary aim is to develop a comprehensive Cool Campus Strategic Plan that will guide our campus's transformation into a net-zero carbon emission campus. To create this plan, we will host a charrette that would invite the whole community into the planning process.

A charrette is a weekend retreat, facilitated by professional urban planners, that puts citizens and stakeholders into design teams. These teams develop separate plans, drawing from their collective wisdom and their knowledge of the community. Then the urban planners use the ideas generated by these teams to create professional designs, and they present them back to the community. The advantage of a charrette is that it works from the grassroots up, drawing on the knowledge, desires, and experiences of the community, while encouraging all stakeholders to participate and buy into the project.

Our objectives in the Cool Campus Charrette would be the following:

- Develop a comprehensive Strategic Plan that would guide Durango University's efforts toward energy conservation while shaping future decisions about renovation and construction.
- Create and foster a community dialogue about renewable energy that extends beyond the campus.
- Develop a new model of campus planning that shows how other campuses can use this kind of planning to work toward converting to renewable energy sources.

Step One: Create the Cool Campus Steering Committee, May 2008

To achieve these objectives, our first action would be to create a Cool Campus Steering Committee that would be responsible for making initial decisions about the charrette.

The members of the Steering Committee would hire an urban planning firm that has experience with issues of renewable energy and facilitating charrettes. Specifically, we would look for a firm that has experience meeting LEED standards (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

The purpose of the Steering Committee would be to lay a solid foundation for the charrette. The members of the Steering Committee would include a range of people, including executive-level university administrators, faculty and staff, student leaders, and local citizens. We envision a planning committee of about twelve people that would meet weekly for two months until the charrette was planned and scheduled.

When the charrette is scheduled, the Steering Committee will write a report to the Tempest Foundation and the university president that describes its actions and decisions. The Steering Committee would welcome any feedback from the Tempest Foundation regarding the report.

Step Two: Create a Charrette Library and Website, July 2008

Once the urban planning firm has been hired, its first action will be to work with the Steering Committee to assemble information about the campus and identify options for renewable energy, conservation, and public transportation.

Working with librarians from Durango University, the urban planning firm will help create a library that brings together any information that might be useful during the charrette. That way, people participating in the charrette would have the necessary information already at hand. The library would include documents, books, information from websites, archival materials, and any other documents that people participating in the charrette might need. Durango University's librarians would set aside a separate room for these materials and organize them into an accessible system that is cross-referenced and electronically searchable.

With the charrette library in place, the urban planning firm will then work with Durango University's webmaster to create a website that would offer information and updates on the Cool Campus Project, as well as provide opportunities for the public to participate through weblogs and electronic bulletin boards.
Documents from the Cool Campus library would be made available through this project website. The website will be accessible through a link on Durango University’s homepage. When this step is concluded, we will have developed a library of materials that can be accessed by anyone through the Internet. We will also have created the Cool Campus website, which will serve as a forum for the public as well as an information clearinghouse.

**Step Three: Host the Charrette at the Student Union, September 2008**

In the Fall of 2008, we will host a weekend charrette that will bring together stakeholders and any others who might be interested in the project. We expect about a hundred people to attend, and we will reserve the Student Union’s Chandler Ballroom and breakout rooms for the weekend. We will also order lunches and refreshments, so participants in the charrette can stay focused on the planning process.

At the Friday evening kickoff meeting, we will introduce the urban planning firm that will lead the charrette. Facilitators will explain the Cool Campus project, discuss how the charrette will work, and make the Cool Campus library available to participants. We will then divide into design teams of six people and let members of the teams introduce themselves to each other.

On Saturday, each design team will develop its own plan for converting the campus to renewable energy sources. Experts from the urban planning firm and the Environmental Engineering Department will work with teams to explain technological abilities and limitations, while answering any questions that might arise. The experts, however, will only serve as resources for the teams, not leaders. Our aim is to maximize the creativity of the design teams by offering guidance while not limiting their ability to be innovative.

On Sunday afternoon, each team will have two hours to finish its plan and create a PowerPoint presentation. Then each team will be asked to present its plan to the assembly. Members of the audience will be allowed to ask questions, identify the strengths of each plan, and probe any weaknesses. This Sunday meeting will be videotaped, and the urban planning team will take close notes on the proceedings. At the end of this meeting, all of the plans will be submitted to the urban planning firm.

Our expectation is that the design teams will develop plans that incorporate a variety of renewable energy sources, like wind, solar, and geothermal power, as well as offer ideas for conserving energy and improving public transportation. We will ask the design teams to develop plans that have both long-range and short-term features: (1) a long-range plan that eliminates or offsets all greenhouse gases produced on campus, and (2) a short-term plan that allows us to make immediate changes to campus that will help us conserve energy and reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases.

Ultimately, the aim of the charrette will be to draw on the collective creativity of the participants. Charrettes used for urban planning have been shown to bring out more creativity and knowledge than would be gathered by an urban planning firm alone. Moreover, charrettes like this one bring more stakeholders into the planning process, encouraging more buy-in and less resistance to change. The community participates in the planning process.

When this step is completed, we will put copies of the designs and a podcast of the Sunday meeting on our website. We will also write a progress report to the Tempest Foundation that highlights the events of the weekend.

**Step Four: Presentation of the Strategic Plan, October 2008**

Using the plans from the charrette, the urban planning firm will develop a comprehensive Cool Campus Strategic Plan for converting the campus to renewable forms of energy. They will also identify any limitations that might keep us from achieving the goals discussed in the charrette.

At a Saturday meeting one month after the charrette, the urban planning firm will present the draft of their Cool Campus Strategic Plan to the participants of the charrette. They will explain their version of the plan and solicit feedback from the audience. These proceedings will be videotaped, and all comments will be recorded by the university and the urban planning firm.
Our goal for this meeting will be to reach consensus among stakeholders. If the charrette process is successful, people will rally around the plan because they helped make it. When this meeting is over, we will put a copy of the design on the Cool Campus website, as well as a podcast of the meeting. We will write a progress report to the Tempest Foundation that shows and discusses the plan developed by the urban planning firm.

**Step Five: Finalizing the Plan, December 2008**

Using the comments from the meeting, the urban planning firm will then develop a final version of the Cool Campus Strategic Plan. The full version will be due within two months. The final plan will be submitted by President Wilson to the university’s Board of Regents for consideration.

The purpose of the Cool Campus Strategic Plan will be to provide a blueprint for converting the campus to renewable energy sources while minimizing the campus’s emissions of pollution and greenhouse gases. Upon approval by the Board of Regents, the Cool Campus Strategic Plan will be used to guide all future decisions about building and renovating the campus. All campus budgeting, construction, and renovation decisions will be required to satisfy the guidelines described in the Cool Campus Strategic Plan.

We will present the Cool Campus Strategic Plan to the Tempest Foundation at its January 2009 meeting. At that point, we can answer any questions and discuss our plans for implementing the plan.

**Dissemination**

One of our goals is to blaze a path that other universities can follow. For this reason, we will disseminate our plan through the Cool Campus website, at national conferences, and in a variety of publications. The website will make the Strategic Plan available to anyone who requests it. That way, other universities can use it to help them develop their own charrettes and strategic plans. Meanwhile, at conferences, our administrators and faculty will present the results of the charrette. These conference presentations will lead to publications in academic journals and magazines.

The Tempest Foundation will be prominently mentioned on our website and in any printed materials related to this project. At conferences and in articles, the Tempest Foundation will be warmly thanked for its support of this project.

**Assessment**

To assess the program, we will retain two outside evaluators who are experts in urban planning and renewable energy. We will submit their credentials for consideration and approval by the Tempest Foundation. Funds from the grant will be used to pay their expenses and an honorarium of $500 each.

The evaluators will observe all aspects of the Cool Campus Project and have full access to any participants, meetings, and materials. When the project is completed, the evaluators will write a report to the Tempest Foundation that discusses their impressions and their appraisal of our efforts.

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4. Working with a team, find a problem on your campus, at your workplace, or in your community that needs a solution. Identify some objectives that a successful solution would need to meet. Then, map out a plan to solve the problem. Carefully look over your map to determine whether your plan would be able to meet all the objectives you identified.
5. Follow up on Exercise 2 by writing a two- to three-page Project Plan section in which you answer the *how* questions and the *why* questions and identify some deliverables.

6. The Cool Campus proposal’s Project Plan section still has some gaps in it. What are some major and minor steps that might still be missing? Do you think all the current steps in their map and Project Plan section are necessary? What would you do differently? Write a memo to the Cool Campus team in which you identify the strengths in their Project Plan section and make suggestions for improving it.

7. You have been asked to develop a mentoring program at your college or workplace. The current problem is that new students or employees often feel overwhelmed by the immediate onslaught of work. As a result, they often drop out or quit within a couple of months. Your task is to set some objectives, map out a solution, and write up a two-page description of your mentoring plan. Your plan should answer the *how* and *why* questions while providing some tangible deliverables.