Rutgers Leadership Academy

2022-2023 Capstone Project Proposal Resource Guide

RUTGERS
Center for Organizational Leadership

This Capstone Project Proposal Resource Guide has been developed to assist RLA Fellows in developing a proposal for a project that will enhance or improve an aspect of the work of the university. Information regarding project requirements, time frames, and steps will be discussed in RLA sessions. This document will provide step-by-step guidance to which Fellows can refer when working on the project proposal.

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Project Planning Checklist

- ☑ Develop a problem statement and concept for your project
- ☑ Identify a Project Sponsor
- ☑ Meet with your Project Sponsor
- ☑ Meet with RLA Peer Mentoring Group (first meeting)
- ☑ Submit Problem Statement/Abstract
- ☑ Meet with RLA Peer Mentoring Group (second meeting)
- ☑ Submit Preliminary Proposal
- ☑ Meet with RLA Peer Mentoring Group (third meeting)
- ☑ Submit Final Proposal
- ☑ Prepare and submit Poster for Capstone session

Due Dates for Project Proposal Components

- Deliverable 1. Problem Statement/Abstract due via Canvas by November 16, 2022
- Deliverable 2. Preliminary Proposal due via Canvas by January 25, 2023
- Deliverable 3. Final Proposal due via Canvas by April 5, 2023
- Deliverable 4. Poster due via Canvas by April 19, 2023
- Capstone/Poster Session: May 3, 2023

About the RLA Project Proposal Development Process

As part of the Rutgers Leadership Academy (RLA) experience, Fellows will develop a proposal and conduct preliminary planning for a project that addresses a significant area of need in their department, school, campus, and/or the University. Through this experience, Fellows will learn to further integrate, apply, and develop leadership concepts and competencies, including planning, collaboration, and change management. This exercise will provide you with the opportunity to engage with stakeholders with whom you might not typically interact.

Given the one-year time frame of the RLA, Fellows will complete the project planning process but are not expected to implement their proposal during the program year. Fellows will be required to prepare a poster presentation describing their project proposal to share with program participants, nominators, project sponsors, program alumni, and invited guests at the completion of the RLA program.

Fellows may work individually on the design of their proposal, or in collaboration with other Fellows on projects of shared interests in order to leverage resources, expertise, and individual strengths.

Fellows will identify and work with a project sponsor(s) and have the support of the Center for Organizational Leadership team who will be available to provide advice, guidance, and individual feedback during each stage of the proposal development. Upon conclusion of the RLA program, Fellows who wish to pursue the implementation of their RLA project may request access to limited consultation and support from the Center.

When considering potential project topics, look to identify a project that:
- Could improve your department, school, and/or the university
- Requires you to engage with stakeholders with whom you might not typically interact
- Extends beyond your core job function(s) or scope of responsibility
- Allows you to develop and enhance your leadership competencies

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Benchmarking
Benchmarking can play a significant role in developing your proposal and can help you build a case for your proposal by understanding how others may be dealing with the same or similar issues. Benchmarking can take place at several levels:
- Your program, department, or school
- Other programs, departments, or schools within Rutgers, including any of the four campuses
- Rutgers University as a whole
- Big Ten universities
- Peer Institutions
- Aspirational Peer Institutions

This does not have to be an in-depth analysis, but you should explore and document information that can help inform and support your proposal. It can be a valuable source of information for discussions with your project sponsor.

Anatomy of a Successful Project Plan

To design a successful project proposal, the items below should be carefully considered:
- The need for your project
- How it aligns with the unit's mission, vision, and values
- The ideas and goals (which should be ambitious, achievable, thoughtful, coherent, and compelling)
- Responsibilities (Who does what? Whose help might you need?)
- Resources (What might you need?)
- Communication strategy
- An account of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (context) as well as comparative benchmarking
- Measures of success
- Progress-monitoring plan

Project Concept Generation

The most difficult part of preparing your proposal will be the identification of the concept. With so many possibilities, creative ideas, and organizational needs, it can be difficult to focus on just one idea.

Consider the following when brainstorming potential project topics:
- What problem or issue do you want to address?
- What are your goals for the project?
- Does it align with the mission of the department, school, and/or university?
- What existing or new financial, technical or human assets would it require?
- Will it generate support from department, school, and/or university leadership?
- Is there an existing environmental scan or a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities) that would aid in identifying potential concepts?

Once you have identified a potential concept, try using this framing technique to create a problem statement:
- This is not happening and should be…
- This is happening and shouldn't be…

Describing your proposed project using these phrases can help you to identify both the current condition you are seeking to address and your desired outcome.

Common Problems in Project Identification
- Lack of alignment with mission and goals
- Not future-oriented; too short term or not scalable
- Too broad/not focused
- Difficult to measure
- Focused on something you already do or something already underway

What you don't want to do…
- Overextend yourself or your resources
- Allow scope creep, to expand your project proposal beyond what is necessary or feasible
- Try to solve every identified problem in one project proposal
- Underestimate the power of small wins and how they can enhance one's credibility for future proposals

Project Sponsor Identification

Fellows will identify a project sponsor from within the university community who can offer advice and guidance on their proposal.

Your project sponsor should be someone who has interests related to your project topic, but they do not have to be someone who works in your department or unit. You may think of this as an opportunity to build your professional network.

A strong project sponsor is someone who:
▪ Possesses knowledge and experience relevant to your topic
▪ Is familiar with Rutgers and can help you build connections with others who may be helpful in developing your project
▪ Can support you in future implementation efforts, should you choose to pursue implementation

If you need help in identifying a project sponsor, consider the following:
▪ Asking your supervisor or colleagues
▪ Searching the Rutgers directory for people who work in your area of interest
▪ Reviewing relevant webpages
▪ Consulting with staff from the Center for Organizational Leadership

Examples of Cross-Organizational Sponsors
▪ A proposal to increase enrollment in a graduate science degree program had as a sponsor someone from enrollment management who could speak to graduate student recruitment
▪ A proposal to develop an in-house training program had as a sponsor someone from continuing education

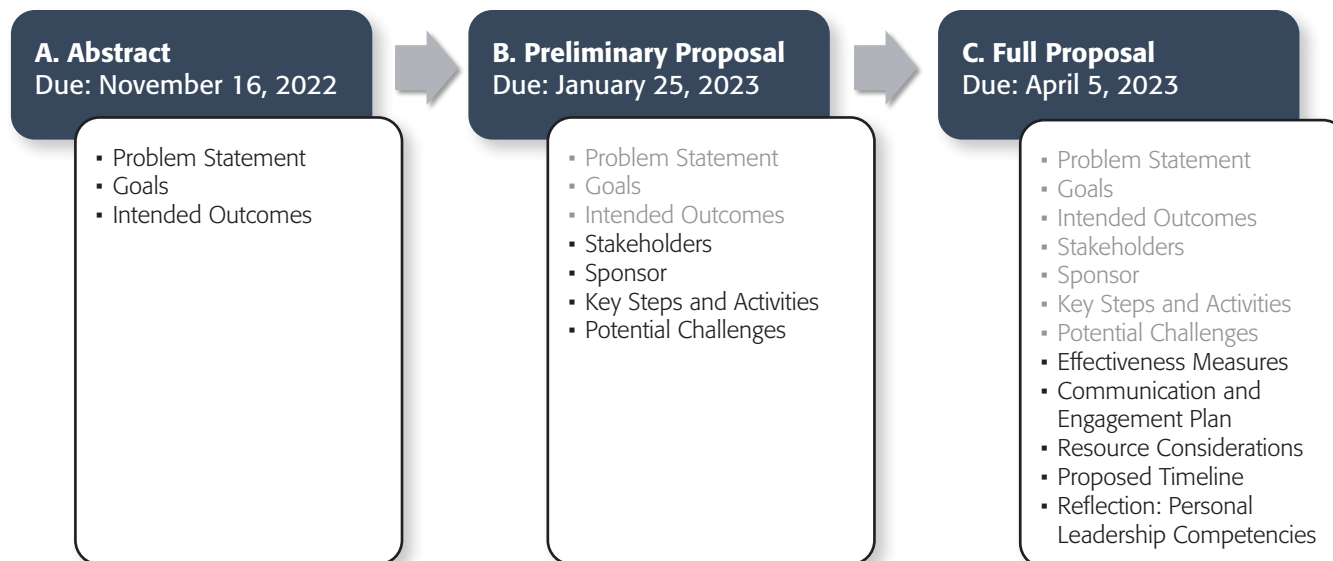# Project Proposal Components and Deliverables

Your completed project proposal will include 12 sections that will address all components of your proposed project, including the goals of the project, the key stakeholders and activities, potential challenges, resource needs, assessment plans, and a timeline. The twelfth and final section is self-reflective and will be focused on your personal leadership competencies and how you believe they have been strengthened through the RLA Project Proposal process.

The sections of the RLA Project Proposal as they are presented in the Project Proposal Planning Template (available for download via Canvas) are:

1. Problem Statement
2. Goals
3. Intended Outcomes
4. Stakeholders
5. Sponsor
6. Key Steps and Activities
7. Potential Challenges
8. Effectiveness Measures
9. Communication and Engagement Plan
10. Funding Considerations
11. Proposed Timeline
12. Reflection: Personal Leadership Competencies

To facilitate the project proposal process, work will be done in stages, with various sections completed by specific deadlines throughout the RLA project year. The overview of this process is depicted below. Each project stage and section are described in detail on the following pages.

Project Proposal Components and Deliverables (continued)

A. Abstract
Due: November 16, 2022

- Problem Statement
- Goals
- Intended Outcomes

B. Preliminary Proposal
Due: January 25, 2023

- Problem Statement
- Goals
- Intended Outcomes
- Stakeholders
- Sponsor
- Key Steps and Activities
- Potential Challenges

C. Full Proposal
Due: April 5, 2023

- Problem Statement
- Goals
- Intended Outcomes
- Stakeholders
- Sponsor
- Key Steps and Activities
- Potential Challenges
- Effectiveness Measures
- Communication and Engagement Plan
- Resource Considerations
- Proposed Timeline
- Reflection: Personal Leadership Competencies

Deliverable A: Abstract

The Abstract is comprised of the problem statement, goals, and intended outcomes (items 1-3 from the numbered list on page 5). The purpose of the abstract is to translate your ideas into a succinct description of the problem you have identified and your proposed approach. It serves as a foundation for reviewing your proposal with your Peer Mentoring Group and the RLA faculty. The Abstract is a 300-500-word description of your project proposal that includes the problem statement, the goals for your project, and your intended outcomes. The Abstract will be submitted to the Assignments tab on Canvas. You will receive feedback and then have the opportunity to refine or update your text, as needed.

As you prepare your abstract, use the questions below as a guide.

Problem Statement and area for improvement
- What problem are you trying to solve?
- Background: Why is this issue considered a problem?
- For whom and in what circumstances or settings does this problem arise?

Primary goals for the project
- What are you trying to do? (ex. Change a process, promote a cause, design a program, implement a new system)
- How does this project address the identified problem?

Intended outcomes
- What would happen if your proposal were to be implemented?
- Would this project achieve greater efficiencies, satisfaction, or engagement?
- What would be improved or changed?

The project that Patricia Findley and I created during the inaugural class of RLA was loved and heavily embraced by all of the participants. It was especially loved and appreciated by the School of Health Professions, the school we partnered with for the inter professional and community outreach project.

—Nancy Cintron, Associate Dean for Student Support Services/EOF Director, Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy

Deliverable B: Preliminary Proposal

The Preliminary Proposal builds on the completed Abstract by adding information about stakeholders, sponsor(s), key steps and activities, and potential challenges (items 4-7 from the numbered list on page 5). The content needed to complete the preliminary proposal will come from your benchmarking work, feedback received from peers and RLA faculty, and discussions with your project sponsor. A template is provided in Canvas. The Preliminary Proposal should be submitted to the Assignments tab in Canvas. Once submitted, you will receive feedback and have the opportunity to refine your document as you prepare for the submission of your full proposal.

As you prepare your preliminary proposal, use the questions below as a guide.

Key stakeholders
- Which stakeholder group(s) should you consider?
- Who will benefit from potential implementation of your proposal?
- Whose help will you need to advance the project?
- How would each stakeholder group describe success of the project?
- Are there competing stakeholder interests/concerns to consider?
- Once submitted, you will receive feedback and have the opportunity to refine your proposal as needed.

NOTE: Your proposal is visible only to you and to the RLA instructors.

Proposed project sponsor
- Who will provide guidance and support for the completion of the project proposal and potential future support should you choose to implement the project?

Key steps and activities
- What kinds of activities, steps, or tasks need to be part of your plan? (Examples include creation of a task force, presentation of data, crafting a communication plan, running a pilot program, presenting findings.)
- How would the work required to achieve your goal(s) occur?

Potential challenges or obstacles
- What are a few key challenges you anticipate with your proposal? (Examples may be competing interests, insufficient resources, leadership support, or a change in priorities or strategic directions.)
- What needs to happen or occur for your project to succeed?

Coaching and Consultation

RLA faculty will be available to provide advice and guidance on proposal development and will provide individual feedback during each stage of the proposal development.

Please contact Dr. Kate Immordino, RLA Project Consultant at kate.immordino@rutgers.edu to schedule a phone call or Zoom meeting.

Peer Mentoring Groups

Early in the RLA program year, you will be assigned to a Peer Mentoring Group. Peer-group mentoring is a component of the program that allows participants to share and reflect on their individual leadership experiences, and to listen, learn, encourage, and share advice with colleagues in the program.

Each Peer Mentoring Group is expected to meet (virtually or in person) three times throughout the program (two times during the Fall semester, and once during the Spring semester).

Deliverable C: Full Proposal

The Full Proposal builds on your Preliminary Proposal with the addition of effectiveness measures, communication and engagement plan, resource considerations, proposed timeline, and the reflection on your personal leadership competencies (items 8-12 from the numbered list on page 5). At this point, your proposal should be a robust explanation of your project concept and should reflect the feedback you have received from your project sponsor, peers, and RLA faculty. A template is provided in Canvas.

The Full Proposal, once completed, should be submitted to the Assignments tab in Canvas. You will receive feedback and have the opportunity to further refine your proposal as needed, before the proposal is considered "final".

As you work on the final sections of your proposal, refer to the following questions as your guide.

Effectiveness measures
- What information will help you assess whether the implementation of your proposal has been successful in reaching your goal(s) and desired outcomes?
- What approach or tools would you use to gather this information?

Communication and engagement plan
- How will you keep others informed of your progress?
- How will you promote two-way communication about the project?
- How will you let others know about your recommendations?

Resource considerations
- What resources (financial, technological, human) are required to make the project a reality? To sustain it?
- What resources currently exist?
- What challenges do you anticipate in obtaining or assigning resources?

Key steps and timeline for implementation
- What are the anticipated timelines for implementation of your proposal? (e.g., expected lead time, start-up, milestones,and target completion dates; keeping in mind operational, academic and budget calendars

Reflection on your personal leadership competencies
- Which leadership competencies, as discussed throughout the RLA year and in the Clifton Strengths Assessment, have been strengthened through this process?

Deliverable D: Poster
- After the Full Proposal (which is only visible to you and the RLA faculty) has been completed and approved by RLA Faculty, Fellows will prepare a poster describing their proposal to share with program participants, nominators, project sponsors, program alumni, and invited guests on May 3, 2023. This poster will be posted to the RLA webpage. The poster will consist of a single PowerPoint slide – Fellows should use the PowerPoint slide template provided on Canvas. The poster will contain information about your proposal in specific categories to be determined by RLA faculty.

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