

A photograph of a traditional stone building with a grass-covered roof, likely a turf-cutting hut or a small dwelling in a rural setting. The building is constructed from rough-hewn stones and has a simple wooden door that is slightly ajar. The surrounding landscape is lush with tall grass and some wildflowers. The sky is overcast with soft, grey clouds. The overall mood is serene and rustic.

Proposal and Project Development

MNL Economic Development Toolkits



Doing Your Homework

Developing ideas, projects and proposals is all about planning ahead. Before you start to write your plan, ask yourself the following questions:

Where are we going?

At the initial stages of an idea, it is critical to research the issue or opportunity in detail to ensure a clear understanding of where it is you want to go.

Why do we want to go there?

It is important to identify why your municipality wants to go in a certain direction. This will assist you in evaluating the feasibility and value of the issue or opportunity, and in ensuring the objectives of your project are clear and consistent.

Who should be on board?

It is crucial to have the right stakeholders at the table to best complement and advance your objectives. Consider who you should be consulting with to help further refine your project (e.g., community organizations, potential users, businesses, community sponsors, and advocates).

In addition, the municipality should consider not only who will be needed to develop and implement the project, but also who will support its ongoing operations (e.g., other municipalities, associations, not-for-profit organizations, etc.).



Doing Your Homework

Who can provide funding?

Funding is always critical for most projects and proposals. Focus on and target potential funding agencies that are best positioned and most appropriate to your idea.

You may also wish to contact the Canada Business Service Centre (CBSC) to discuss your idea with an information officer and obtain direction and information on funding programs

It is important to consult potential funding organizations in advance to make sure your municipality's idea around a project or proposal a "fit" with their programs. The most important question to ask is –

What will success be for the idea/project/proposal?

Part of doing your homework will be developing an appropriate business case for the idea/project/proposal. However, this initial question – what is success – is crucial for ensuring that the idea/project/proposal works for your municipality and what you want to achieve!



What is Success?

First, success for a municipality project or proposal is hard to define.

Usually, personal abilities and motivation will impact what is defined as success in an organization – especially in the private sector.

In for-profit businesses, success may not just be about growth, revenue, other financial criteria, employee turnover, return on investment. There could be a combination of all these criteria. Moreover, these objective criteria are even harder to identify, measure, and manage within a municipality.

Objective criteria are easy to measure, control and are therefore popular – but what about other criteria?



How should we measure success?

Businesses have to be profitable/financially viable – but beyond that what is success especially for municipalities?

For municipalities, what is success? For example, do you have to be ‘big’ to be successful? When considering success - work backwards.

For the most part, we probably measure the wrong thing. Most organizations, including municipalities, measure revenue – not profitability/return on investment/other measures. Use your municipality’s strategy and resource allocation to achieve your goals. Not just about intuition – also about reality – what will help your municipality achieve its goals?

What are those critical success factors to your municipality’s goal(s)?



First Question – How Successful Do You Want to Be?

In the first step in developing your idea/proposal/project consider ***where do you want to be? What will success look like?*** This involves you evaluating your municipality from a strategic lens.

Step 1 - Evaluate Your Municipality

Strengths and Weaknesses – what the strengths and weaknesses of your municipality?

- Site
- Image
- Product/Service Mix
- People and expertise
- Financial position

Opportunities and Threats – what are the opportunities and threats facing your municipality including:

- Legislation/Regulations
- Demographics
- Competition
- Technology



First Question – How Successful Do You Want to Be?

Step 2 – List your major assumptions or beliefs about the opportunities and threats facing your municipality especially as they relate to your idea, project, proposal.

Step 3 – Research the approaches to test your assumptions – test the hypothesis about why, how, and when you are going to develop your idea, project, proposal.

Step 4 – Make the decision to go forward (or not) with a proposal or project – once you commit, you need to look at your exit strategy



Objectives and activity

In developing your project, proposal, or project there should be specific objectives and deliverables. These need to be in writing and explained in how they:

- relate to the community need or opportunity;
- enhance community or regional capacity through the development of competitive, productive, strategic industry sectors;
- strengthen community infrastructure and improve upon the community's economic development capacity;
- relate to the economic development plan for your region or community; and/or
- enhance the community's capacity to overcome an economic development challenge and take advantage of the unique strengths, assets and opportunities of the community.



Objectives and activity

– Projects/Proposals

As well, there are a high-level issues to consider when ensuring successful projects and proposals. Some of the issues include:

- Time
- Capacity – can you deliver?
- Who is the funder? Can you meet their standards?
- Service standards for your municipality
- Can you follow-up on the project?
- Risk and issue management

One of the keys to mitigating these issues developing a good proposal or project, and recording objectives and activities, is a well-written project plan.



Well-Written Project Plan

The following are some of the key elements of a well-written plan:

Description:

The project team and the project objectives, including all community partnerships and support for the project;

Dates:

The project start date and end date, as well as all steps to be taken and their estimated timelines;

Deliverables:

The project deliverables (outputs) and ultimate impact (outcomes); and

Resources:

The human and financial resources (inputs) required and where those resources will come from.



What your project plan/proposal include?

Written successfully, your plan/proposal will answer the following questions clearly and concisely:

- Why should your project be undertaken?
- How will your project be implemented?
- Why should a private or public partner invest in it?
- Who will the beneficiaries of the project be?
- What measurable impact(s) will the project have?
- How will the project successes (impacts) be measured and communicated?
- How will the project be sustained beyond the initial funding stage?
- How does your project relate to the community's overall development/strategic plan?

Much of this information can be included in a business case document which is a good practice in developing any idea/proposal/project.



Developing the Business Case

A **business case** captures the reasoning for initiating a project or task. It is often presented in a well-structured written document. It may also sometimes come in the form of a short verbal argument or presentation.

The logic of the business case is that, whenever resources such as or effort are consumed, they should be in support of a specific business need.

A business case answers the question: "What happens if we take this course of action?"

For example, if your municipality is considering expanding your core operations to another area, such as subsidized housing, your business case might address, "Which of three alternative markets should we invest in to create the most value—and should we even make this investment?"

In the private, not-for-profit and public sectors, managers at all levels create business cases to gain support for all manner of decisions, to initiate action, or to obtain resources for an initiative.



Business Case Development

A business case can have many elements including: Project Description, Strategic Alignment, Environment Analysis, Alternatives, Business & Operation Impacts, Project Risk Assessment, Cost / Benefit Analysis and Implementation Strategy.

One of the success factors is don't over detail the development of your business case. Avoid paralysis by analysis. Building a business case is hard work. You may feel tempted to explain every detail of all that work to your decision makers/funders etc. while presenting your case to them. Resist that urge. In presenting your case, you want to deliver a short, focused sales pitch, not a lengthy, detailed lecture—even if your written business case contains rich detail.

Consider - Who will decide whether to approve your idea/proposal/project? You'll need to sell your case to the decision makers—and to those who influence them.



Influencing – Ideas, Proposals, and Projects

It is important for municipalities to leverage their reputation and position to promote projects and proposals. Use your municipality's influence to have people promote your municipality and/or promote the people who have influence your municipality.

There are many ways that a municipality can develop its reputation around projects and proposals:

- Disclose identifying information about your municipality, such as its physical location and profile of the municipality
- Use a tried and trusted systems of management that the funder will understand in the proposal – ISO, Lean, PMP methodology etc.
- Highlight the fact that your municipality has worked on/and delivered on projects before – what types, funding sources, outcomes, benefits delivered etc.

Another key element of influencing is developing a realistic implementation plan



Implementation Plan

In developing your idea/proposal/project consider how your municipality will implement if successful. Demonstrating the ability to implement is a way not only to influence, but also to manage risk and overcome change related issues.

An implementation plan is the primary way of demonstrating this ability to implement. The plan may need to include:

- The primary milestones
- The individuals responsible/accountable for each milestone
- The resources required to reach each milestone
- Dates when the municipality or broader region will see the benefits of your recommended course of action
- Impacts on the municipality's expense and headcount budgets as well as anticipated increases in revenue from tax base (if applicable)
- Your plan for demonstrating that the solution's intended results have been realized

Once you have considered implementation, the next phase will be considering how you will communicate your proposal or project.



Communicating Your Idea/Proposal/Project

Consider the following tactics in communicating your idea/ proposal/ project:

What do you want them to do? What do you want from each stakeholder in your audience? Do you want them to approve resources? Do you want them to talk up your proposal to others? Clearly state your need.

What do they value/care about? Do they care about return on investment? Service delivery standards? Some other measurement of business performance? Tailor your pitch to highlight the expected results and metrics that are most important to each decision maker.

What do they stand to gain? Explain how your audience will benefit if your idea is implemented.

What is their level of risk tolerance? Demonstrate that you've considered the risks inherent in your proposed course of action and explain your plan for mitigating them.



Communicating the Idea/Plan/Proposal

Demonstrate that the members of the team within your municipality have the necessary qualifications and experience to carry out the work. Include details such as:

Qualifications – team members' résumés, references and related credentials;

Experience – any supporting information highlighting the municipality's capability to coordinate and manage the project;

Representation – evidence that the management is well represented by department or function within your municipality; and

Roles – explain how each member of the project team will contribute to the work to be carried out.

Also consider what other organizations you may have to partner with in order to ensure success.



Partnership Development

Partnerships are key, whether they be with other municipalities or provincial/federal agencies or even community and business groups. Some of the items to consider in developing and documenting the partnerships to be included in your proposal or project:

- Does your project involve more than one targeted community (i.e., industry sector/geographic location/community of interest)? If so, specify the type of groups and the industry sectors, including:
- People and/or organizations in a specific geographic location (specify the type of geographic location, such as municipality, group of municipalities, region, province, etc.);
- Communities of interest (e.g., linguistic and visible minorities) and/or sectors;
- Linkages to your region's strategic work plans and/or initiatives;
- Contact information; and
- Any other information that is relevant to your project.



Partnership Development

Considering future opportunities around partnership development and collaboration is also important. For example, can future partnerships with community groups be established? Include written confirmation related to anticipated support from relevant community-based organizations.

Elaborate on the networking process you undertook and the organizations with which you consulted to develop this proposal or project. Include information such as the number of public meetings and/or structured consultations held, the number of people at the meetings and/or the people involved in the consultations.

Explain how the project supports the regional economic development plans within:

- The geographic area where you wish to implement the project.

- Provide a list of all partners (financial and non-financial) and their confirmed or anticipated roles/contribution to the project.



Reporting economic impact and results of your idea/proposal/project

Reporting of impact, benefits, and results is also an important element of proposal and project development. Reporting should consider:

How will your project make a difference? Describe the lasting economic impact your proposal or project will bring, particularly as it relates to the original issue or opportunity you seek to address.

Explain how your project will contribute to a viable and more diversified community. When preparing your proposal or project, be sure it addresses the following questions:

- Is your plan part of a regional or community plan?
- How do its anticipated results relate to that plan?
- What are the long-term development goals of your project?
- How, specifically, do you plan to achieve these goals?
- What direct economic impact do you anticipate from this project?



Reporting and Sustainability

In considering how you will report about your proposal or project consider its potential impact in terms of the economy, the environment, society, and culture – the four key elements of sustainable community development.

Also detail how your project will improve the economic health of your community. Specifically - how your project will impact the environmental, social, and cultural integrity of your community.

Sustainability also includes ensuring that you identify change issues or opportunities as well as risks in not achieving your stated objectives in bringing forward the proposal or project.



Change and Risk Management

How your municipality will manage change is an important part of any project or proposal. From a proposal or project standpoint, you should consider how you will over resistance to change if your proposal or project is successful. Some of the tactics you can use in addressing change include:

- Explaining the reasons for the change and soliciting feedback
- Explaining the desired outcomes and rationale
- Championing the change process
- Empowering the appropriate individuals to institutionalize the changes
- Investing in training necessary to support the changes

Finally, addressing how your municipality will address risk in developing the proposal or project is also an element to consider. Managing risk may include qualifying a project's chances of success, assessing exposure to risk, setting appropriate budgets for proposals, prioritizing which projects/proposals to develop.



Biases - Why do we not manage success well?

It is also important to recognize that there are a number of human based biases that may relate to why projects and proposals are not successful within your municipality in the past. Some of these include:

Overconfidence

Deep confidence in judgment and abilities is often at odds with reality

Availability

What other successful examples come to mind – how available are they to us? Do we benchmark against Toronto or Twillingate?

We tend to overestimate the importance of information that we've encountered recently, that is frequently repeated, or that is top of mind for other reasons

Failure to ask why?

Status Quo

Tendency to stay the course – avoid losses rather than seek big gains

Failure to distinguish between skill and luck

Consider the role of biases and how they will affect your proposals and projects.



Summary - How do you manage project and proposal success well?

1. Define why your municipality want to take on the specific project proposal and proposal and how you will measure success – work backwards
2. Develop a theory of cause and effect to understand why you are successful – what are the critical success factors?
3. Ensure that you have engaged funders and have their support
4. Identify the specific activities your municipality (and your employees) can do to help achieve the governing objective
5. Evaluate your measure of success and change if necessary
6. Celebrate success but examine it as whether it helps your municipality in the long term
7. Institute systematic reviews around past projects and proposals
8. Use the right time horizons for your project or proposal
9. Realize that replication is not learning (from your success or your failures)



Checklists for Implementation

The final step in developing your proposal or project is to consider whether it is worth doing and if it is achievable? These two final questions should be considered before taking forward any projects or proposals to implementation.

Is it worth doing?

- What contribution to the strategic objectives of the municipality?
- What benefits to the municipality?
- What added value to the municipality?

Is it achievable?

- What level of stakeholder buy-in is needed for success?
- How well are success factors understood?
- What dependencies need to be identified?
- What level of change and risk will the proposal or project create?
- How accurate and complete is the scope?
- How adequate are resources and processes to deliver it?



Final Tips and Tricks

Keep in mind that the supply of funding for community initiatives is often outweighed by demand.

Also, remember that an assessment will be made by funders of the strength of the plan and the benefits of the project to the municipality.

Given today's competitive and demanding environment, municipalities should ensure their ideas/project/proposals provide:

- **Clarity of purpose** – outlining clear objectives, outcomes and scheduled time frames.
- **Value for money** – establishing a realistic budget/cash flow and making every cent count.



Final tips and tricks

Accountability – ensuring strong internal controls and governance practices (organizational and financial).

A committed community – pulling together an effective board of advisors for the idea/project/proposal, committed volunteers, and qualified staff.

Strategy and coordination – articulating that the project addresses an existing need and has a clear link to local, regional and national plans and priorities.

Real results and future continuity - describing an evaluation plan and final report on results, and confirming sources for continued resources for the future sustainability of the project.