



**Getting to Know  
Commonly  
Required Elements  
of a Grant  
Proposal Narrative**



**This document is intended to serve as a guide to help you understand commonly required elements of grant proposals.**

**The categories discussed here should not be used to prepare a grant proposal.**

**The sponsor's guidelines should ALWAYS be followed specifically.**

# Common Components of a Grant Proposal

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Need or Problem
- Statement
- Background and Literature Review
- Goals & Objectives
- Methods
- Evaluation Plan
- Management Plan
- Dissemination Plan
- Sustainability Plan
- Bibliography
- Letters of Support
- Budget\*
- Budget Justification\*
- Agency Forms \*

\*Covered in later modules

# Title

---

- Your first chance to make a good impression
- Make your title obviously fit with the funding opportunity.
- Choose a title that is specific to your project and try to avoid generic titles that may be used by other applicants to the same funding opportunity.
- Avoid being too short, too long, or too cute.
- Find a good balance – provide enough, but not too much detail.
- Create an acronym when appropriate.

# Title Examples

- Too brief:
  - “A Program to Help the Homeless”
- Too long and convoluted:
  - “A Program to Understand the Health Care Needs of Those Who are Homeless by Working with Four Homeless Shelters and Developing Educational Materials for Students in Dental Hygiene, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy Programs”
- Just right:
  - “A Community and Academic Partnership: A Program to Train Interdisciplinary Health Care Teams for Services to the Homeless Population”



**Take a few  
minutes to draft a  
title for the  
project you have  
in mind.**

# Table of Contents

---

- As a courtesy to reviewers, include a table of contents unless instructed not to do so.
  - Proposal sections
  - Page numbers
- Follow sponsor's guidelines and format if provided.
- Some online systems will create a table of contents automatically as you enter information/upload attachments.

# Abstract

---

- Self-contained ready-for-publication description of the project
- Written for a non-scientific audience as much as possible
- Concise, yet comprehensive
- Important elements
  - Context and significance of project - Why the project is important
  - Goal of project
  - General strategy
  - Impact of project
- Last section written, first section read



# Abstract

---

- Roles
  - Informs reviewers' initial determination of whether a proposal is worthy of a closer analysis
  - Used in assigning proposals to review panels
  - Circulated as a separate item to key funding officials
  - Published online for public viewing
  - Shared for information purposes within the University

# Model Abstracts

---

- Many sponsors publish abstracts online as part of a list of award recipients.
- Some Federal agencies have searchable databases of award that include abstracts.
  - [National Science Foundation Award Abstracts Database](#)
  - [National Institutes of Health Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tool \(RePORTER\)](#)

# Introduction

---

- Engage readers
- Usually an opening paragraph
- Begin to set up a context for your project
- Provide short overview of project and its importance
- Describe the University/Department mission as related to the project and to the sponsoring agency's mission
- Some sponsors will specify information to include.

# Need or Problem Statement

---

- Be descriptive – do not assume the reader already knows about the problem
- Avoid stating the problem as “the lack of” or “the need for” the solution you are proposing for funding
- Clearly explain why you have chosen the problem
- Provide concrete evidence

# Need or Problem Statement

---

- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the problem
- Be compelling and establish significance
  - Discuss the cause and long-term effects of the problem.
- Be sure the scope of the need you describe is in scale with the project you propose.
  - Be careful about making the problem seem so bad that the reviewer will doubt your project's ability to make an impact.

# Assessing the Need

- From a sponsor's perspective:
  - Does the project focus on an external need rather than on the needs of the applicant?
  - Will the project truly benefit society?
  - Will the project address a problem that really matters?
  - Will the project benefit enough people to justify the resources it will cost?
  - Will the project duplicate other projects addressing the same need?
  - Is the project an innovative approach to the need?

# General Data Sources

---

- [U.S. Census Data](#)
- [Kentucky State Data Center](#)
- [Kids Count Data Center](#)
- [Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education](#)
- [EKU Institutional Research](#)
- Program-specific data



- **What is the need or problem you plan to address with your project?**
- **What are some data sources you plan to use to document the need/problem?**
- **Are you doing anything now to address the need or solve the problem? If so, what data are you collecting?**

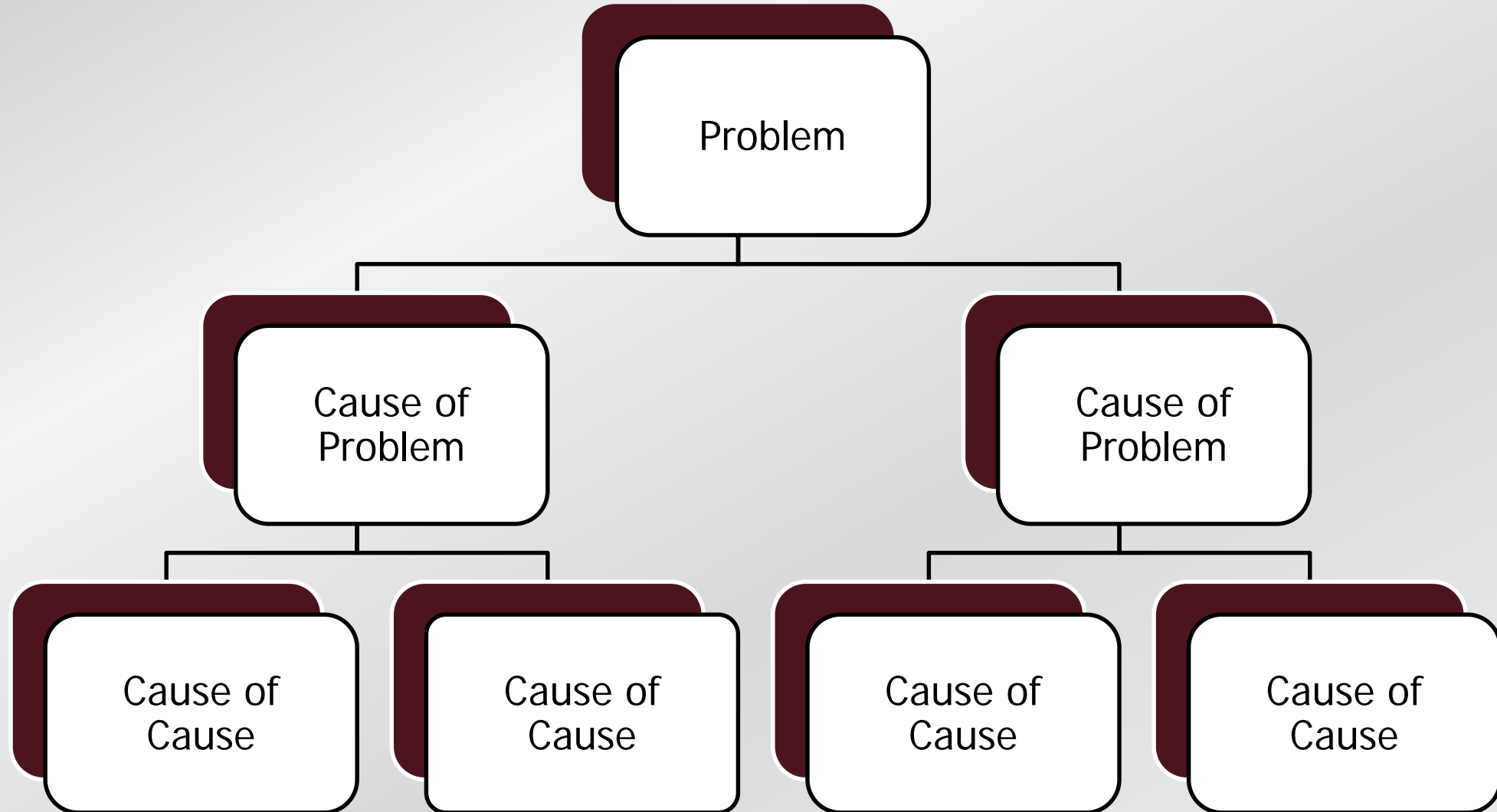


# Problem Tree

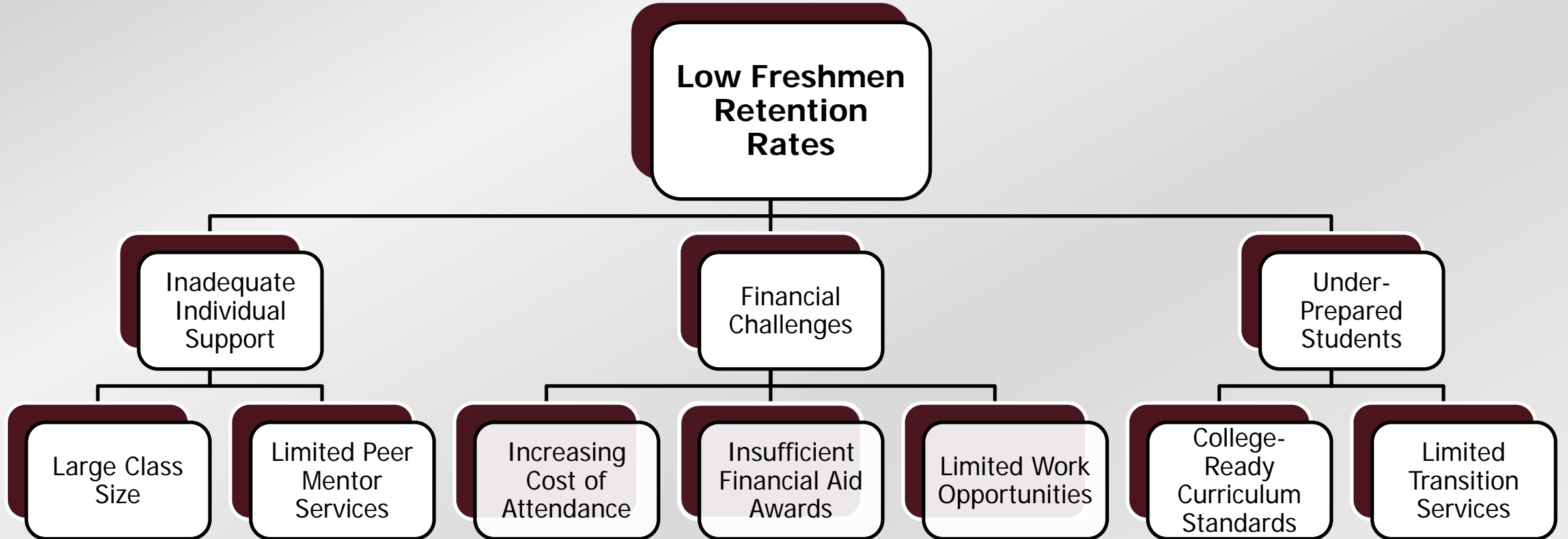
---

- A Problem Tree can be a useful tool to help you thoroughly understand your problem.
- By considering the causes of the problem (and the causes of those causes), you can really get to the heart of designing a project that will address the causes and impact the problem.

# Problem Tree



# Sample Problem Tree





After reviewing the sample, download the [Problem Tree Template](#) and give it a try.

# Purposes of a Literature Review

---

- Determine the extent to which your topic has been addressed
- Support the rationale for the importance and innovativeness of your project
- Help determine the best strategy to use in carrying out project

# Background/Literature Review

---

- Demonstrate a clear understanding of the subject
- Establish the current status of the field
  - Reference and discuss the relevant work of experts
  - Discuss any prior work you have done in relevant areas
- Use the most current sources available and update with every proposal you write
- Show how your project will fill a gap in existing knowledge

# Goals

---

- Identify what you plan to accomplish with the project
- Broadly define overall purpose of project
- Reflective of the sponsor's goals
- Usually will have one or two goals for a project with more specific objectives tied to each goal
- May include discussion of long-term goal for project beyond current funding request

# Sample Goals

---

- To enhance pre-service and in-service training for K-12 education professionals
- To provide undergraduate students in the STEM disciplines with authentic research experiences
- To reduce the dropout rate among college freshmen
- To determine the distribution and relative abundance of three fish species in the Upper Barren River



# Objectives

---

- More specific and measurable than goals
- State how success will be measured
- Goal-focused, not budget-oriented
- Focus on outcomes

# SMART Objectives

**S**

## Specific

The objective should clearly define what the project will set out to achieve.

**M**

## Measurable

The objective should define a measurable outcome as an indicator for success.

**A**

## Achievable

The objective should be realistic to achieve within the scope of the project.

**R**

## Relevant

The objective should be consistent with the project's goals.

**T**

## Time-Bound

The objective should specify when it will be achieved.

**“  
Being realistic with objectives  
is important. It is always  
better to under-promise and  
over-deliver than to over-  
promise and under-deliver.  
”**



SPONSORED PROGRAMS

# Process Objectives

---

- Measure process accomplishments
  - The provision of service
  - The offering of training
  - The completion of identified procedures



**Process objectives are not generally an indication for measuring whether the need has been addressed.**

# Examples of Process Objectives

- To hire a full-time project coordinator within 3 months of award
- To purchase 25 computer workstations and open lab facility by May 1, 2022
- To offer 5 faculty professional development sessions during each semester of the project
  
- Such information is better suited to the project design or management plan (timeline) sections.

# Outcome Objectives

---

- Reflect quantitative or qualitative accomplishments
  - Example: the number of students with improved test scores as a result of services
- Give more credibility to your project
- Show a clear connection to how the problem is being solved
- For research proposals, the objectives may also include hypotheses or research questions to be explored

# Objectives Questions

---

- What do you anticipate will change as a result of the successful completion of your project?
- How much change do you predict as an indicator of your success?
- What measurement indicator will you use to document the change?
- How long will it take to implement your project and measure the change?

# Outcome Objective Model and Example

- To **[action verb & statement]** by **[performance standard]** as measured by **[measurement indicator]** by **[time frame]**.
- To **decrease the number of college freshmen required to take developmental courses** by **at least 10%** as measured by **performance on the ACT assessment** by **May 2022**.



# Sample Programmatic Objectives

---

- At least 80% of participants served in each academic year will earn a bachelor's degree within four (4) years of initial enrollment
- At least 75% of student mentees will maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher during their 8 semesters of participation

# Sample Research Goal and Objectives

- Goal:
  - To explore the forest and fire history of Mongolia
- Objectives:
  - To test hypotheses about climate forcing of fire and forest dynamics by developing a regionally extensive network of fire and forest histories across Mongolia
  - To determine whether recent climatic changes in Mongolia have affected changes in fire regimes, and if so, to identify the degree of temperature or hydroclimatic change required to push these systems into alternative states



- **What is the overall goal of your project?**
- **Write a draft objective or research question for your project.**

# Methods

---

- Might also be called Project Design or Approach
- Usually the longest section of the proposal
- Carries the most weight in the review process
- Describe what you will do to accomplish goals and objectives.
- Consider organizing by objectives.
- Some sponsors require specific formats.

# Methods

---

- Describe your research design and explain why the design is appropriate for your project.
  - Independent and dependent variables, sampling size, selection procedures, number of testing occasions, etc.
- Identify any new methodology and explain its advantage over existing methodologies, citing research if available.
- Address issues related to human and animal research subjects.
- Provide a timeline for project activities.

# Methods

---

- Anticipate and address concerns reviewers might have during the review process.
  - Discuss potential difficulties and limitations of proposed procedures and offer alternative approaches to achieving aims.
- Be realistic with regard to your resources and the time frame for the project.
  - Having someone with experience in your type of work review your application can be very helpful in evaluating whether your proposal is realistic.

“

**One of the most common mistakes of new applicants is proposing more work than can be done with the amount of time and funding requested.**

”

***EKU***<sup>®</sup>

SPONSORED PROGRAMS

# Using a Logic Model

---

- Conceptual model to help understand
  - Project's structure
  - Connection between activities and expected outcomes
- Typical components
  - Input: sources of support (\$ or other resources)
  - Output: activities, procedures
  - Outcomes: results, impact of project



# Logic Model Template

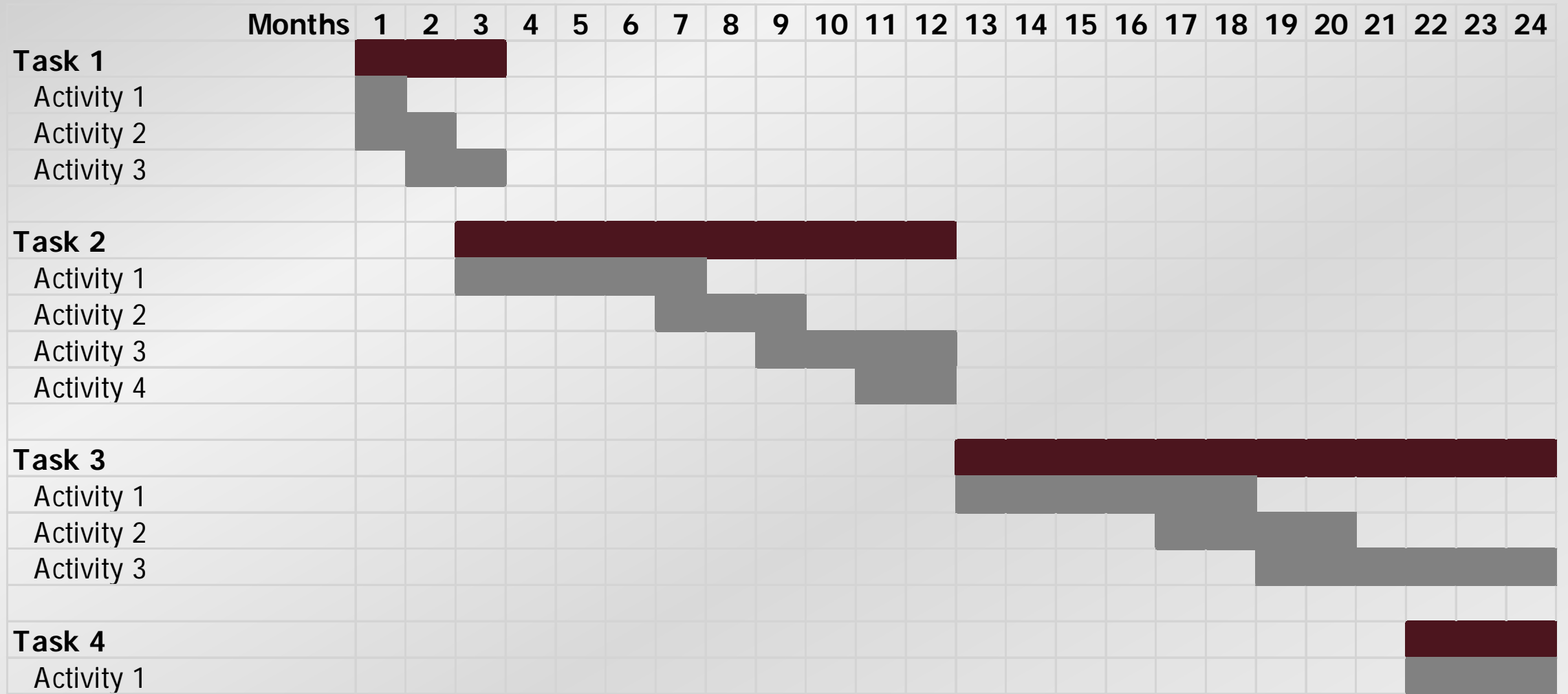
<b>Inputs</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Grant Funds</li><li>▪ Other Resources</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Project Activities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Results</li></ul>

# Using a Gantt Chart

---

- Conceptual model to present timeline for project tasks
- Typical components
  - Tasks
  - Subtasks
  - Time required to accomplish each

# Gantt Chart Template



# Evaluation Plan Purposes

---

- Goal to improve the way a project works, not just prove that it works
- Guide program implementation
- Document impact, determine effectiveness
- Lead to increased effectiveness
- Generate new knowledge about effective or best practice
- Provide information for communicating to a variety of stakeholders

# Evaluation Plan

- Based on consistent, ongoing collection and analysis of data used in decision-making
- Should answer
  - How are we doing? What needs to be fixed? (formative phase)
  - Did we succeed? (summative phase)
- Should include both qualitative and quantitative measures
- Usually part of the methods section for a research project and a separate section for other types of proposals

# Evaluation Plan

---

- Internal vs. External
- Defined by sponsor and can vary
- External evaluator may be defined as either
  - someone not involved in the project or
  - someone not connected to the university
- Be sure to comply with sponsor evaluation requirements.

# Evaluation Plan

- Describe sources of data and method of collection and analysis.
- Develop a process for ongoing evaluation.
- Clearly explain how success will be defined for each objective and the overall project.
- Describe or include samples of test instruments, forms, or questionnaires that will be used to collect data (if permitted).
- If using an external evaluator, describe credentials, experience, and roles.

# Evaluation Plan Design Process

1. What will you evaluate and why?
  - Performance targets
  - Purpose and audience
2. What information is needed and how will you collect it?
  - Data needed to answer evaluation questions
  - Source of data
  - Method and timeline for collection
3. How will you analyze the data and report results?
  - Analysis process
  - Reporting format
4. What resources do you need?
  - Roles and responsibilities
  - Cost of evaluation activities



**Understanding why a project achieves its goals is as important as knowing that it does.**



SPONSORED PROGRAMS

# Qualifications/Management Plan

---

- Convince reviewers of your ability to effectively conduct the project
- Describe
  - qualifications of key personnel and their
  - responsibilities in the proposed project
  - past experience with similar projects
  - any preliminary studies you have done related to the proposed work
  - aspects of project oversight and management
  - facilities, equipment, and other resources that are available for the project

# Dissemination Plan

---

- Selling point with sponsors
  - Support will impact more than one project
- Highlight aspects of the project with potential to be replicated by others
- Develop a plan to share results
  - With the sponsor
  - With other agencies
  - In publications (formal reports, journals, newspapers, newsletters, websites)
  - At meetings (professional conferences, workshops)

# Sustainability

---

- A plan for continuing the project after the grant funding ends, if appropriate
- Ideas:
  - Reallocate funds from internal sources (not usually an option)
  - Seek community involvement and volunteerism
  - Consider charging for services when appropriate
  - Pursue other grant opportunities (difficult to secure)
- Many projects will have a pre-determined end without the need for sustainability
- Do not include a sustainability plan unless required

# Bibliography

---

- If references are cited, include a bibliography.
  - Footnotes can be used to cite sources if a bibliography is not required and space is not available to include one.
- Use the formatting style recommended by sponsor.
  - If no style is specified, use the style most common to your field.
- Pay attention to whether the bibliography counts toward page limitations.
  - If it is not a separate section, assume it counts as part of the project narrative.

# Letters of Support

- Should be included only if allowable by sponsor
  - ◆ Are attachments permitted?
  - ◆ Are letters forbidden?
  - ◆ Is a specific format or content template provided?
- If letters from specific agencies are required, be sure to include them.
- Seek letters from individuals who can convince sponsors of:
  - the need for the project
  - their support for the project
  - your ability to effectively operate the project
- Make contact and request letters early.

The logo for Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) is centered within a large, light gray circle that has a white border. The letters 'EKU' are rendered in a bold, italicized, maroon serif font. A small registered trademark symbol (®) is located to the right of the letter 'U'.

***EKU***®

A horizontal maroon bar spans the width of the image, passing behind the central circle. Below the 'EKU' logo, the words 'SPONSORED PROGRAMS' are written in a maroon, all-caps, sans-serif font.

SPONSORED PROGRAMS