

Gantt Charts

Introduction

Gantt Charts are a tool used in project planning – and are probably the most useful of all project planning techniques. Project planning is used when there is a definite start and end to an exercise. You plan because you want to ensure that you do not forget anything – and to help you manage the project efficiently and effectively

Project planning sheet

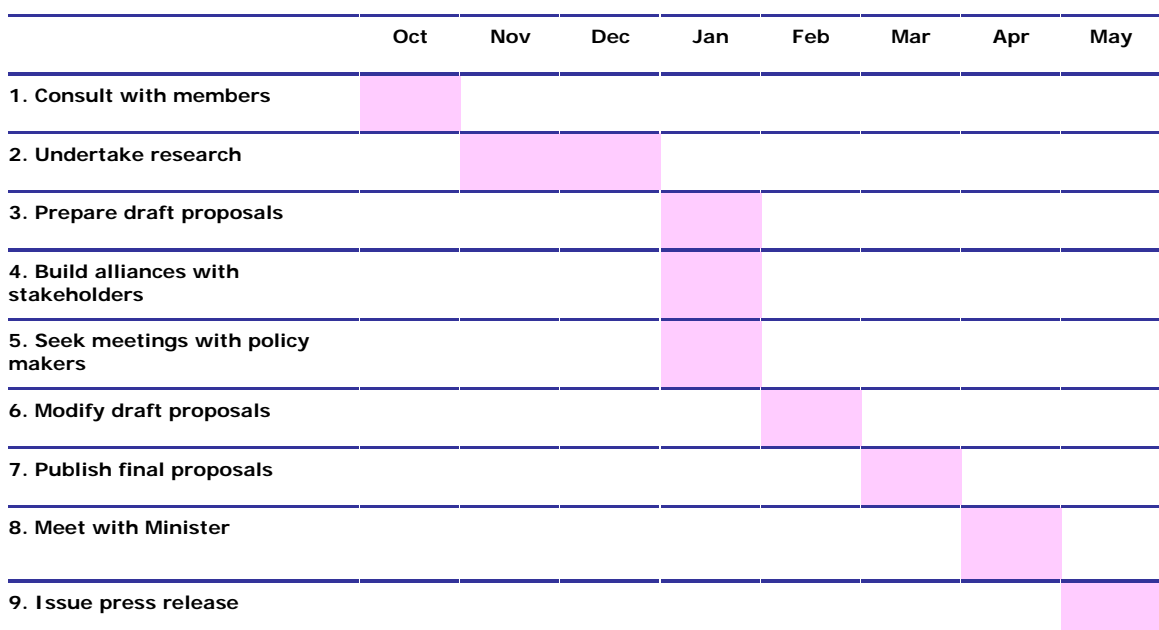
Start by brainstorming a list of all the activities that need to be completed for a project. If you cannot identify all of the tasks, then it might be sensible to split the project into a series of smaller projects, where the end of one project provides the information required to start the next project. Put the tasks in a logical order and fill in a Project Planning Sheet with estimates of how long each activity will take. If the start of one task is dependent on the completion of an earlier task, note that as well. To avoid delays, start activities with long lead time as early as possible.

Gantt charts

A Gantt chart, originally devised by Henry Gantt, provides a graphical representation of the tasks and times in the project planning sheet. It provides a simple overview of a number of related activities and their expected durations for a particular project. Specifically, a Gantt chart is a series of horizontal bars combined on a chart with each bar representing a specific activity and the length of the bar representing the time required.

Imagine that your BMO wants to advocate a specific policy proposal. The key steps, together with timings and the expected durations, are shown in the example.

Table 1: Gantt chart



Note that activities that are independent can be undertaken simultaneously, provided that sufficient resources are available. However, some activities cannot start until others are complete (though these dependences may not be obvious from the chart). For example, you cannot define the service accurately until you have completed the market research.

The chart can be used to check regularly on what needs to be done when, and whether everything is going according to plan. It is a tool to be used. This way you can control the changes rather than the changes controlling you.

If it is important to keep this chart in front of you all the time for management purposes, think about using a dry wipe board. This has the further advantage that it can be altered from day to day if necessary.

Useful tips

- There is now a wide range of software, eg Microsoft Project, available to assist the planning process. These packages can produce charts, schedules, etc very rapidly, though you will find for most projects that pencil and paper, or a spreadsheet package, will be more than adequate.
- “Keep it simple” is a golden rule of planning – if you don’t understand your own system you are in trouble.