

## How to Construct a Timeline

The preparation of detailed Timeline is an important readiness step in developing a competitive grant proposal. A robust project timeline includes activities in **preparation** for the project, milestones related to the **execution** of the project, and tasks associated with the **evaluation** of the project. It should also include **key deadlines** and **personnel** accountable for each entry. Follow the steps below to prepare your timeline.

### Step 1.

Make a list of all project tasks that come to mind, organized under three stages: preparation, execution, and evaluation. Be as detailed as possible.

#### What must happen to **prepare** for the project?

Ask yourself, “Do I have to…” questions.

Here are a few prompts get you thinking:

- ✓ secure a date on the calendar for key participants (i.e., board members, volunteers)?
- ✓ reserve space?
- ✓ book a caterer?
- ✓ hire, screen, and train staff?
- ✓ create marketing materials?
- ✓ recruit participants?
- ✓ develop and organize program materials?

#### What tasks are essential to the **execution** of the project?

Name a milestone, then ask yourself, “And then what…”

Here are a few prompts to get you thinking:

- ✓ create a monthly/weekly/daily schedule
- ✓ host kick-off event
- ✓ offer classes/workshops, etc.
- ✓ collect participant data and/or feedback

#### What tasks are involved in program **evaluation**?

Ask yourself the “How do I …” questions and make note of your action plan.

Here are a few prompts and action steps to get you thinking:

- ✓ measure success?
  - I will track participation using attendance logs.
- ✓ communicate impact?
  - I will collect participant feedback through a survey tool.
- ✓ disseminate outcomes?
  - I will share program highlights through a newsletter.
- ✓ replicate for sustainability?
  - I will create a handbook.

## Step 2.

Once your list is complete, create a simple Timeline chart with three columns (Action, Deadline, Person Responsible). Transcribe your list of project tasks to the Action column, then follow the guidance in Steps 3 through 5 to complete your timeline.

## Step 3.

Take a backwards-to-forwards approach. Start at the end of your timeline and assign deadlines to each task, working backwards to yourself give yourself ample time between tasks. Using this process will ensure that you arrive at a realistic start date that is driven by thoughtful planning.

For example, some of the tasks and deadlines associated with an event might look like this:

Event date – June 19

Invitation mailed – May 8 (RSVP deadline should be sync'd with catering)

Invitation Save-the-Date mailed – April 10

Invitation design finalized – April 3

Invitation list created (if e-invite, be sure your email addresses are up to date) – March 27

Sign mail house contract (if using an outside vendor) – March 20

**Tip:** If a particular task falls during vacation or holiday season, build in extra time. When working with vendors, be sure to compare calendars to ensure that the vendor can accommodate your desired timeline. Once all tasks have an assigned deadline, transfer this information into the Timeline chart that you have created.

## Step 4.

Each task should have an assigned responsible party. Delegate, where appropriate, to colleagues. Add this information to the Timeline chart.

Consider sending accountability reminders 60-days, 30-days, 15-days, and 3-days before a task is due. Outlook allows for “delayed delivery” of messages, so you can set up reminders in advance.

## Step 5.

Invite key stakeholders, as appropriate, to review the chart to ensure that all tasks are captured, and you have buy-in for all deadlines. Revisit your timeline periodically and adjust if necessary.

### Tip:

Use your timeline to build your budget! Consider which timeline entries have a cost associated with them. See [How to Build a Budget](#) for more help.