Developing an Academic Consultancy Proposal

Handbook Academic Consultancy Training (ACT) | Academic year 2018-2019

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Wageningen University & Research
Academic Consultancy Training (ACT)

Developing an Academic Consultancy Proposal
Handbook academic year 2018-2019

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Table of contents

Introduction to academic consultancy

Welcome to the Academic Consultancy Training (ACT), which is real life: you create an advice for a commissioner that is in need of your assistance.

ACT is a transdisciplinary team effort

You work as a team with other students from various disciplinary back-grounds. Not only your individual academic disciplines, but also the needs and knowledge of your commissioner and other societal actors need to be integrated in your team work. This is called *transdisciplinary* team working.

You become academic consultants

Working as academic consultants means bridging two worlds. As an *academic*, while using disciplinary knowledge, you provide a conceptual underpinning, apply theoretical frameworks or models, use valid methods of analysis, and ensure traceable results. And you are asked to be critical.

As a *consultant* you provide an optimal service to your commissioner. Optimal means that you are client-oriented and communicative, and take the time to explore the commissioner's specific challenge. But consultancy does not stop there. Many commissioners are interested in your core message only. Hence, you help by bringing this message concisely but clearly, and letting it optimally fit into the commissioner's expertise and background. Here, it is important to not take shortcuts and to keep your academic integrity in mind.

So, as a team of academic consultants you strive for academic depth and quality, while working via a good collaboration with your commissioner towards a practically relevant advice in a user-friendly format.

The written proposal has different functions

Developing a project proposal is crucial in academic consultancy. A proposal clarifies what you are going to do, why you will do it, and when and how you will do what. For you in ACT, the written proposal is important in order to

- agree on the content and have a formal contract with the commissioner;
- convince your commissioner that you can do it, and are the right team;
- delineate and structure your own efforts and actions, and to ensure your aims will be feasible and attractive for each of you individually.

This is your guide through the proposal development process

On the next page, you will find an overview of your proposal development trajectory. The main content of your proposal is shown on the left. The development of it is supported by six steps. For each step, the best time for working is shown on the right. Please note that formulating the different parts of your proposal will be an iterative process during the first weeks of ACT. The specific requirements for all parts are summarized in the Requirements chapter. The steps are clarified in separate chapters. "To do" team exercises assist you in developing the proposal. Note that the steps do not cover the entire proposal content: for some parts, the information given in the Requirements chapter is considered to be sufficient.

The lower part of the trajectory overview indicates key events in the development process. Take well care of them in your process. The first event is a workshop to do with your team. Your coach will join later that morning. Before you start discussing the project, be sure that every team member knows the assignment and has read the current handbook. During the workshop, try to explore the broad problem and goal of your commissioner, the possible problem(s) for you in this project, your purpose and your research questions. Do not work on outputs and activities in this phase. You will see that it is hard to formulate all this, because it is not in the description. Put your ideas and all those questions you encounter on paper: they are the basis for the first meeting with your commissioner.

If, in the development process, a step has brought you to a more specific idea, you are encouraged to summarize the result in the logical framework (page 17-18). It gives a quick overview, and helps evaluating the robustness of your project plan. Besides, the framework is a useful tool for stimulating the whole team to think along in the design stage of your project.

For a fast overview of your ACT consultancy proposal development trajectory, please watch the clip "Developing an academic consultancy proposal".

We wish you good luck in developing a high-quality project proposal!

Your trajectory towards developing your academic consultancy proposal

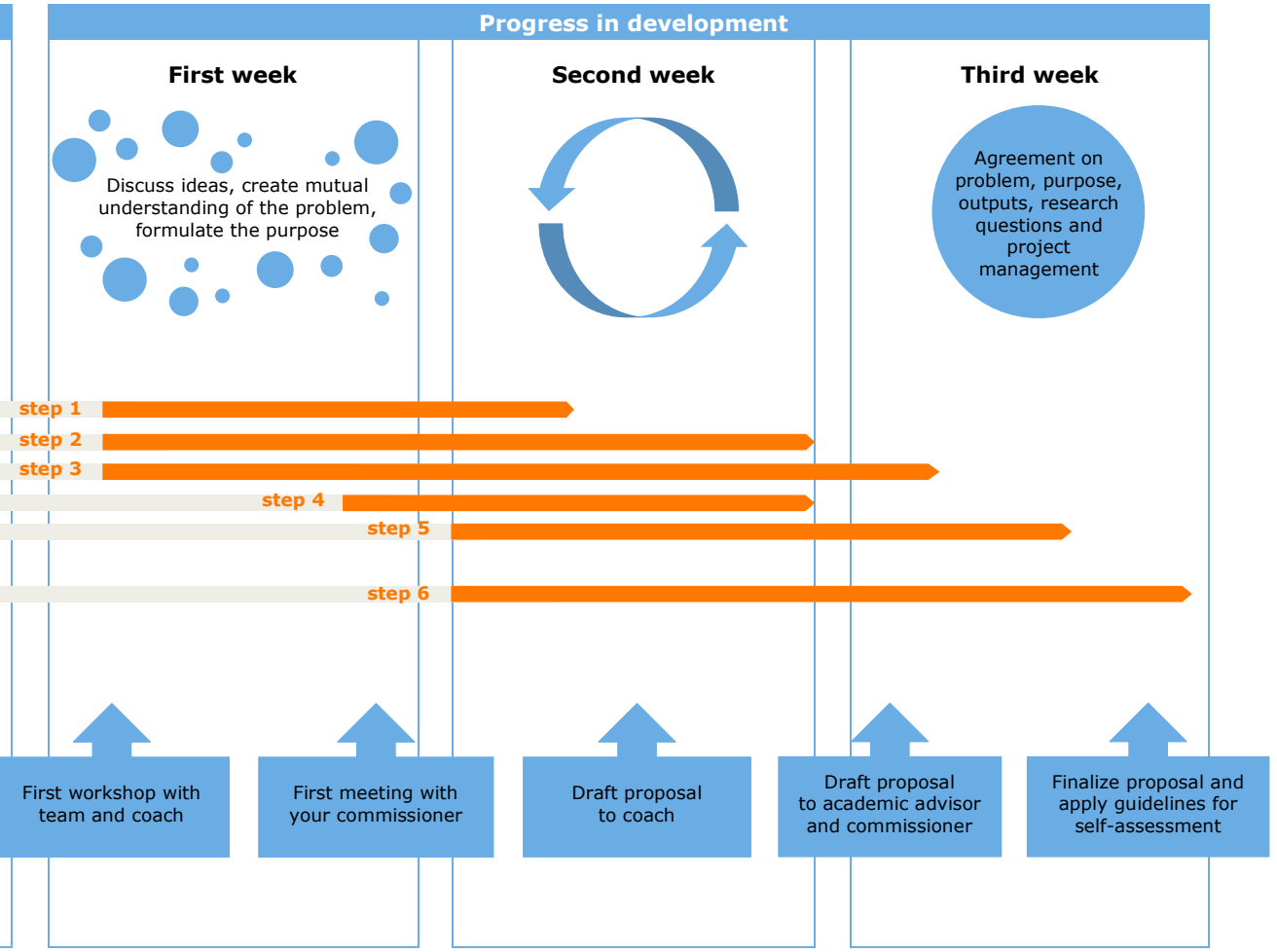
Contents of your ACT proposal and guiding steps

Cover page + second page
Executive Summary
Table of Contents

Project description:
- Goal, context & multi-perspective problem analysis
- Project specific problem definition and stakeholders
- Integrative project purpose and research questions
- Outputs
- Activities and research methods

Project management:
- Our team
- Communication
- Planning
- Budget

References
Appendices:
- Stakeholder long-list and analysis
- Logical framework
- Formal budget form
- Internal communication (not for your commissioner)



Contents and requirements of your academic consultancy proposal in ACT

Your proposal should be no longer than 8-10 pages, excluding appendices. Write in a commonly used format (e.g. single spacing, Verdana 9 pt.).

Your ACT academic consultancy proposal consists of:

(tip: use this instruction as a checklist for yourself)

Cover page
Function: creates an attractive entrance.
Include:

- □ Short and catchy title, attractive illustration
- □ Team number, project name, names of team members (no student numbers!)
- □ Name(s) and affiliation of commissioner
- □ Year, month and (optional) logo: cannot be the WUR logo, but you can design your own

Second page
Function: shows contact information.
Include:

- □ Contact details of commissioner and team secretary (email and phone)
- □ Source of the cover page illustration (if relevant; is it allowed to use?)

Executive Summary
Function: enables go/no go for the project.
Include:

- □ The rationale or scope of this project (the why and its context)
- □ The purpose of this project
- □ The outputs you will deliver in terms of form and main content
- □ Your team's expertise on the topic
- □ The budget and hours needed for the project and end date

Note: it will be a stand-alone text of max 250 words. Do not add references.

Table of Contents
Function: provides overview.
Include:

- □ Titles of the sections and their page numbers

Project description
Function: explains the reasons, deliverables, and activities of the project. This is formed by the next five sections.

1 Context and multi-perspective problem analysis
Function: shows you understand the context of the problem and the broad problem from multiple perspectives.
Include:

- □ An introduction to the background and context of your project (underlying reasons)
- □ Your commissioner and her/his/their long-term goal, the broad problem of your commissioner, the broad problem from different disciplinary and societal angles, and possible consequences of them

Note: max 1 A4. Include existing information (key references) and think of visual support (like images or schemes).

2 Project problem definition and stakeholders
Function: defines your specific project problem/knowledge gap and stakes.
Include:

- □ The specific problem or knowledge gap you are going to address in this project as a brief statement in terms of needs, and the why of this problem

- ☐ The main stakeholders that play a role in this project: (groups of) people that have interest, influence, knowledge, or are affected by the problem/gap or solution. Include a stakeholder diagram here

Note: max ¾ A4. Formulate one specific problem or knowledge gap, avoid describing multiple specific problems or sub problems. The relation to the broad problem should be clear. Describe in this section the main stakeholders ("short list") for your project and show your analysis. Refer to the Appendix for a "long list" of stakeholders related to the broad problem.

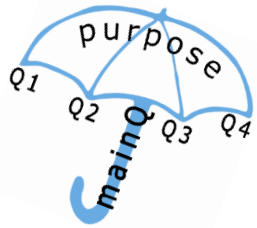
3 Integrative project purpose and research questions

Function: shows what you aim for and formulate the questions you will address to achieve that aim.

Include:

- ☐ Clear statement of your purpose: what the team strives for in this project
- ☐ Your role in addressing or solving the problem or knowledge gap
- ☐ Possible ethical implications of your purpose
- ☐ The main research question (Q) and the sub questions (Q1, Q2,...)

Note: max ¾ A4. Integrate both the commissioner's needs and your academic views in the purpose. Your main research question is obtained directly from your purpose. If the main question is answered, the purpose has been reached. To answer the main question, further define a few sub research questions. Provide a clarification of the sub questions if different interpretations are possible. Avoid using "How can .." questions (these can be interpreted in different ways).



4 Outputs

Function: clarifies what concrete products are to be delivered.

Include:

- ☐ The forms of your outputs
- ☐ The content of your outputs: a short description of what each output contains.

Note: max ½ A4. Examples of forms are a report, flyer, lesson, presentation, poster, et cetera. Examples of the content of your output are "an overview of the pros and cons of cultivation of..", "an expert-view on the chances of ..", "a tool for assessing the impact of ..", *et cetera*.

5 Activities and research methods

Function: explains what you have to do and how.

Include:

- ☐ The concrete activities you are going to perform to answer the research questions and to integrate them into the outputs, including the why and order of these activities
- ☐ The methods you are going to use for each activity, for example interviews, focus group, documents survey, observations, *et cetera*, and also the equipment or facilities, if applicable. Specify why these
- ☐ Serious risks that may challenge performance of the activities or methods
- ☐ A reference to your logical framework (appendix)

Note: max 1½ A4. The methods should make clear how you will collect the data. Methods should be scientifically sound: valid, reliable, effective, state-of-the-art, complete. In case of serious risks, describe your "Plan B". Activities should be described in such detail that it is possible to reproduce your results.

Project management

Function: turns activities into feasible actions in view of your team expertise, available time and budget needed. It is composed of the next four sections.

1 Our team

Function: gives an impression of your team and their members.

Include:

- ☐ A brief description of the team qualities, individual team members, and the added value of each of you to team and project

Note: max ¾ A4.

2 Communication

Function: makes clear who communicates about what, and when this happens.

Include:

- ☐ Who communicates, how and about what, with commissioner / externals
- ☐ Agreed dates on meeting your commissioner, tasks the commissioner promises to carry out, intermediary deadlines, draft products, expected written or oral feedback, *et cetera*
- ☐ Information sharing & restrictions (content, who)

Note: max ¾ A4. Do not mention your assigned academic advisor here.

3 Planning

Function: matches available time with time demand, ensures you can do what you promise, and describes when the activities will be performed.

Include:

□ A Gantt chart for the whole project duration of eight weeks

Note: max 1 A4. Do not include ACT supportive hours. Each team member has approximately 205 hours for the project itself, including proposal development. Activities should resemble the ones described earlier and in the logical framework, given in the appendix. Make the planning in the Gantt chart for the weeks; do not make a planning for each individual working day.

4 Budget

Function: have agreement on the costs.

Include:

□ A brief description of the total costs, how these are built up, and the motivation for these

□ A reference to the ACT Excel budget planning sheet (appendix)

Note: max 10 lines.

References

Function: makes a verification of your statements possible.

Include:

□ A list of references

Note: make sure your list is consistent and complete. Please use a high-quality scientific journal as an example for writing and citing.

Appendices

Function: informs about essential information that would disturb reading of the main text. It is formed by the next four sections.

Note: make sure that you refer to your appendices at the appropriate places.

1 Stakeholder long-list

Function: provides a comprehensive description of the stakeholders of the broad problem of your commissioner.

Include:

□ A long-list of stakeholders

□ A comprehensive description of each of the stakeholders, including interest and power

Note: max 1 A4.

2 Logical Framework

Function: summarizes your project and provides a tool to check whether you are on schedule.

Include:

□ A logical framework

Note: max 2 A4. Before starting with the formulation, you are advised to first watch the video clip.

3 Formal budget form

Function: if signed is the formal confirmation that the project can be executed.

Include:

□ A copy of the standardized ACT budget form in MS Excel

Note: use the form that is provided by ACT coordination to the team's controller in the first week. Clarification of the items is done in the Budget section. The formal form should be signed by commissioner and controller to formalize the agreement on the project execution.

4 Internal communication *(not for your commissioner)*

Function: makes clear how and when you want to work and communicate within the team and with the people supporting you.

Include:

□ A paragraph on the internal communication

□ All relevant contact data

□ An overview of ACT supportive and other activities

Note: max 1 A4. Do not share with your commissioner, so do not refer to this section in the main text. For the internal communication, think of communication within the team and of the team with academic advisor and coach. Think also of how and where you work together, the frequency of meetings, *et cetera*. Contact data are those of the team members, coach and academic advisor. Overview of activities are for example contacts with the academic advisor, CPD training sessions, writing of reflection papers, but think also of other obligations like re-exams, thesis discussion, *et cetera*.

Tips for the development of your academic consultancy proposal

Academic strength

- Include scientific insights to clarify the problem
- Apply scientific methods for analysis
- Use a couple or few key scientific citations for underpinning your statements and methods

Readability

- Present information in logical order
- Use text frames to inform about side steps
- Avoid using jargon
- Avoid using abbreviations
- Citations must not disturb easy reading
- Use bulleted rows if more than two items are described

Transdisciplinary nature

- Generate one purpose of your project, that integrates your multiple expertise and the needs of your commissioner
- Elaborate research questions that are answerable through a scientific analysis and that are the same time practically relevant for your commissioner
- Balance the use of scientific terms with the use of practical language within the reach of your commissioner

Visual attractiveness

- Use open space between paragraphs
- Use pictures and schemes
- Use (colored) lines, for example to emphasize a section start

Step 1 | Goal, context & multi-perspective problem analysis

Where does your commissioner want to go and what problems do you see?

Long-term goal of your commissioner and context
From the project description – the "assignment" on the ACT website – you get a first impression about your commissioner's long-term goal and the context of the project. With context we mean the circumstances and environment that give the goal (and your project) its meaning: its relevance, and its connection with societal and academic issues.

Visit the website of your commissioner, if available, to get additional insights. The first meeting with your commissioner should enlighten these issues. In order to describe your commissioner's long-term goal and its context, please watch the instruction video on this first step and use the upper set of questions in the frame on the right.

The broad problem from different views
Your commissioner will have quite some challenges to overcome before reaching the goal. It is important that you describe the broad problem your commissioner is facing. This description is essential in convincing the commissioner that you have understood his/her/their problem well. You also need to explain the broad problem from an academic/scientific perspective by making use of your team's disciplinary knowledge. Finally, you need to include a general societal perspective. Note that some of the problems can actually be knowledge gaps. Use the lower set of questions in the frame on the right to understand the problem or gap from multiple perspectives.

TO DO IN YOUR TEAM

〉 Get together and divide tasks (e.g. making notes, chairing). Engage in answering the questions in the frame first by thinking, discussing, brainstorming, clarifying, and visualizing. Later also by searching for information, reading, making schemes, and summarizing.
〉 If your idea about the (long-term) goal of your commissioner is clear enough, write this down into your logical framework (page 17-18).

Ask yourself the following questions (key questions are in bold):

Long-term goal and context
- **Where does our commissioner want to be in the next few years?** And why?
- What is our project about? To what issues is it related? What makes this project relevant?
- **Why is our project necessary?**

Multi-perspective problem analysis
- **What are possible problems for achieving the long-term goal?** And for whom are these a problem?
- Are there academic/scientific problems? And related to society?
- What is it that we do not know or understand yet?
- **What do we think is the key problem of our commissioner?** Or a problem (or a knowledge gap) that should be addressed first?
- Considering our own disciplinary background, which different sides / key issues of the problem(s) are we able to address?

〉 Make use of techniques that can help you to visualize and formulate your answers to the questions. Examples are brainstorming, making mind maps, or lateral thinking: see the next page. See also the link below to a video on how to create a concept map.
〉 Use the answers and insights gained to formulate the current section of your proposal. Note that this development process occurs iteratively during the first weeks. Of great help in clarifying for yourself as a team what might be the problems is the first meeting with your commissioner. Carefully prepare this meeting and the questions you want to ask. You need to understand the full range of problems before you can identify the specific problem of your project (which is done in the next step).

Additional supportive material
- Seven steps of Problem Analysis (and the route towards solutions)
- Six thinking hats
- How to create a concept map?

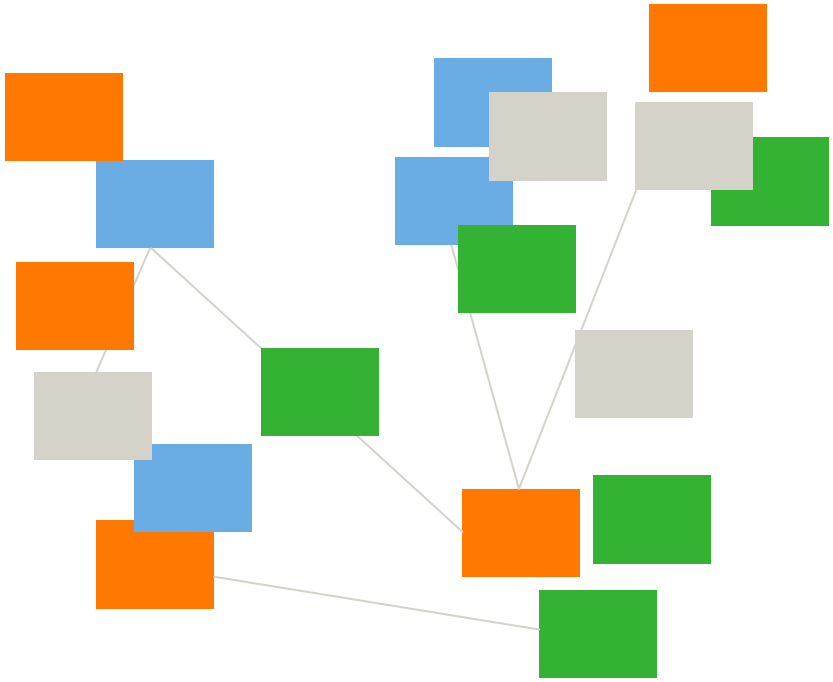
Brainstorming rules

- All ideas are accepted, even (or especially) crazy ones
- No discussion about ideas but you may build on a previous one
- Everyone contributes, silences are no problem
- Strive for as many ideas as possible and write them down
- Avoid joking and story telling
- Devices (computers, phones) are put away

Lateral thinking exercise

- "Coming at a problem from new directions, literally from aside"
- It challenges the dominant ideas by asking extreme, out of the box, questions
- Make a shortlist of "What if ....?" questions on basis of the problems identified
- Discuss a question and see where it leads
- Write down the new insights: new perspectives of the problem

Mind map example



Step 2 | Project specific problem definition and stakeholders

What will be your specific problem and for whom is that problem relevant?

Your specific problem or knowledge gap
After you have described the goal and broad problem faced by your commissioner in step 1, the current second step is probably the most essential step in proposal development: you clarify the *specific* problem (which quite often is a knowledge gap) for your ACT team in this project. Formulate carefully the specific problem, because here you build the foundation for the rest of your ACT work. Make sure you describe the specific problem in a statement, comparing the current state with the one that might be or should be. Concentrate on the "negative something" that needs a solution, not on the solution itself. Your specific problem may deviate from the one your commissioner originally thought of. In that case, convince your commissioner that your idea is appropriate or even better. Please watch first the instruction video on the specific problem formulation.

Stakeholders
Your problem section also contains a stakeholder analysis: a first mapping of people and organisations involved in or affected by your project. You may need to consult some of these stakeholders during the project execution for insights or information. Then, after proposal approval, you can make a quick start, since you already know who to approach. Moreover, the stakeholder analysis helps you in showing your commissioner that you understand the context of her/his/their question, for example in terms of politics or sensitivities or confidentiality.

TO DO IN YOUR TEAM

〉 Discuss within the team the supportive questions presented on the right. Make notes of your answers, create an overview, and start distilling your specific problem statement.
〉 Apply exercises that can help you in selecting your specific problem, e.g. triangulation or cause-effect analysis (see the next page).

Ask yourself the following questions (key questions are in bold):

Specific project problem
- Which aspects of the broad problem do we consider essential and interesting to tackle?
- **Why is our project necessary?**
- **What is basically needed?** Why does our commissioner need this project?
- Why does he/she need us? What extra value can we bring in?
- **What is our specific project problem (or knowledge gap)?**
- What are the implications of this specific problem if not resolved?

Stakeholders
- Which stakeholders relate to the broad problem? What or who is involved or impacted by that?
- **Which of the stakeholders are of interest in resolving the specific problem** in our project and should possibly be dealt with or be contacted? And why these?

〉 Formulate your specific problem statement in terms of needs: the need for a solution. At the same time, do not mention solutions (there may be more effective ones), nor symptoms or causes (these can be signs or cause of the problem, but not the problem itself), nor blame (this may make your problem unacceptable for some). Make sure that the statement cannot be misunderstood by adding explanatory notes. Make the development process iterative during the first weeks.
〉 Make a stakeholder analysis. Start with watching the 3 short videos given in the links below. Then, follow the steps to make a stakeholder analysis given on the next page, and use the questions given above. Check the "Contents and Requirements" chapter of this handbook to verify what content should be put where in your project proposal.

Additional supportive material
- Stakeholder analysis (first two steps)
- Stakeholder analysis (MindToolsVideos)
- Stakeholder analysis grid

Triangulation exercise

1 Consider the different disciplinary areas of the broad problem of your commissioner that you described in step 1.
2 Concentrate on those areas that you are able to cover, given your disciplinary expertise.
3 List the problems belonging to these areas.
4 Put them in order of importance, in view of the broad problem.
5 Consider the first few and formulate, in terms of needs, one (specific) problem statement that covers all these.

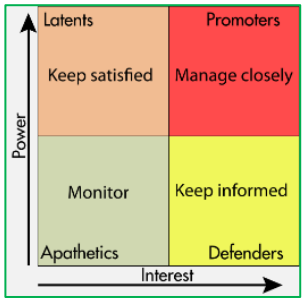
Cause-effect analysis exercise

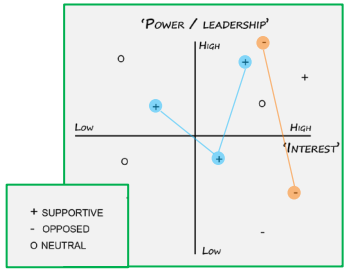
(Use if you have trouble to get the real problem on the table)

1 Start with the broad problem of your commissioner.
2 List all minor problems that contribute to that.
3 Group the minor problems into related sets.
4 Organize the minor problems hierarchically by examining which one results into which other.
5 Make a form of visualization, for example in a tree root form.
6 Identify on what area(s) your focus should be and formulate your (specific) problem statement.

How to conduct a stakeholder analysis in ACT?

1 Make a stakeholder long-list by asking yourself:
   a. Who plays a role in the broad problem?
   b. Who will benefit from the project? Who will not? Who will compete?
   c. Who has interest in project or outcomes?
   d. Who has power to influence the project?
2 Describe for each stakeholder shortly the why of their interest and power. This long-list stakeholder description is part of your appendices.
3 Decide who is of interest for your specific project problem: this makes up the short-list of stakeholders.
4 Describe for each of them in the short-list their interest in the project, their power to influence the project or outcomes, whether they will benefit or not and how, and with which other(s) they form a coalition.
5 Put the stakeholders for your project into a power-interest diagram (choose a diagram you like; two examples are shown below).
6 The short-list stakeholder description and diagram will form part of your specific project problem definition section.





Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stakeholders_matrix.svg

Step 3 | Integrative project purpose and research questions

What is your purpose? Which questions do you ask to reach that purpose?

Integrative purpose
The purpose is what *you* aim at or strive for during this ACT project of eight weeks: what would you like to reach during the project execution in order to tackle the problem? Your team provides answers to the problem, also in view of the various possible solutions. Note that the purpose is an integrative statement and covers only *one* purpose. This is to ensure that you will come up with one, integrative advice, involving all team members in one common effort. Please watch the instruction video on formulating an integrative purpose before you start working on this. Note that this is also the moment to start thinking of ethical issues (including confidentiality): possible implications of the project for society and anticipating on the challenges in your project that might result from these (see also on the next page).

Research questions
How can you come up with a balanced set of research questions? During the search for questions keep your specific problem and purpose in mind. Ask open ended "why" and "what" questions. It is useful to come up first with a list of potential questions, then critically reflect whether each question is essential and brings you closer to reaching the purpose. Then you can start defining your main research question and a set of sub questions. Make sure you select questions that you are able to answer given your particular expertise. Further, keep a close eye on the problem that your commissioner wants to see addressed. Formulate your questions carefully since they guide and structure your entire ACT project and determine its outputs.

TO DO IN YOUR TEAM

〉 Start with thinking individually about the "Integrative purpose" questions on the right. Consider your disciplinary knowledge. Present the outcomes to each other (use the whiteboard), discuss and identify strong aspects. Combine the latter into one integrative purpose statement. Write your purpose also in the logical framework (p. 17-18).

Ask yourself the following questions (key questions are in bold):

Integrative purpose:
- What solutions of the specific problem fit our expertise and interest?
- What can be our contribution to these solution(s)?
- Is our team's set of contributions complete enough to solve the specific problem described? Is each of these contributions really necessary to solve the specific problem described?
- Can we unify our contributions and the needs of the commissioner into a common purpose? **What do we strive for as team?**
- **What are the possible ethical implications of this purpose?**

Research questions:
- Which questions can we ask in relation to our contribution to the solution(s) of the specific problem? **Which of these questions are essential in reaching our purpose?**
- **Can we formulate one overarching research question ("main question")** that covers these essential questions, while reaching the purpose completely when answered?
- What additional questions (apart from the essential ones) do we need to ask in order to answer the main research question?
- What disciplinary knowledge and skills of use are needed to answer the various questions? Is there a clear role for all of us? Are additional questions necessary?

〉 Get together in your team and answer the questions on "Research questions" on the right. Discuss answers and make use of whiteboard or flip chart. Formulate one main overarching research question and some sub questions. Evaluate your research questions on basis of the criteria given on the next page. Note again this is an iterative process.

Additional supportive material
- Mapping you research ideas
- Developing a research question (Laurier)
- Developing a research question (Steely)

Evaluating your research questions in ACT

- Is the research question of practical relevance for your commissioner? Does the question relate to the specific problem described? Does it bring you closer to the purpose?
- Can the research question be addressed in a scientific way? Is there expertise in your consultancy team to answer the question? Is the question for (some of) you of interest?
- Is answering the research question feasible, given your available time frame of 8 weeks? Consider also the methodologies that are preferred to answer the question: are you familiar enough with these? Is answering of the question doable in terms of data to be gathered and analysed with the resources at hand?
- Is the research question not too broad or too narrow? Is the research question clear and can the answer not be misinterpreted (avoid for example "How can...." questions)? Is it clear what kind of outcomes (data, text, etc.) will be obtained when answering the question?
- Is the research question understandable for your commissioner?
- Is every sub question really needed (so: cannot be omitted)? And does it really contribute to the knowledge of your commissioner?
- Is each question original, in that sense that the answer cannot be simply found?
- Will the main question be answered if the answers to the sub questions are there?
- Will the purpose be reached if the main research question is answered?

Ethics

Ethical issues might arouse, for example if you cannot share essential information about the project with interviewees due to obliged confidentiality, or if your project touches controversies in society, like genetic modification, climate change, fair treatment of animal and human rights, or of costs and benefits, *et cetera*. Like all researchers and students at Dutch universities, you should respect the following principles (see Netherlands Code of Conduct): honesty and scrupulousness, reliability, verifiability, impartiality, independence, and responsibility. You need to think of each of these principles when formulating your purpose, and try to anticipate on the implications and possible challenges that might surface. For instance, make sure you transparently, honestly, and completely inform all human persons approached in your project. Also respect anonymity and confidentiality unless agreed differently, and be clear on this. A separate point of attention is respecting the privacy of persons involved, which is enforced by the European and Dutch law: avoid as much as possible names, addresses, telephone numbers, *et cetera* of individuals in your reports. Further, it should not be possible to trace back information to individual persons.

Confidentiality

For some ACT projects, confidentiality has been asked by the commissioner already before the start of ACT. This is indicated in the project description. For many projects it is indicated that the results will not be confidential. Yet, it is advisable to make sure with your commissioner that this is the case. If necessary, you can come to a joint agreement. In some projects, the commissioner provides the consultancy team with confidential information. That information should not be spread nor shared. To guarantee confidentiality, and if asked by your commissioner, you can sign an agreement. Please contact your coach, who can provide the team with an agreement that has been set up by the legal department of the university. In most cases this is not necessary, as an oral agreement is deemed sufficient. Do not make use of or sign other documents, for example provided by your commissioner.

Step 4 | Outputs

How to translate your research questions into deliverables?

Output form
You need to describe the outputs (also called products or deliverables) already in your project proposal. You describe all concrete and tangible products that you will produce. Before doing this, please watch the video "Developing an academic consultancy proposal: outputs". For many teams, the products will be a final academic consultancy report and a presentation. With regards to the report, you can define yourself the most appropriate form which can serve both the academic and consultancy purposes.

Your academic consultancy report can, for example be divided into two parts. The first part can be a comprehensive summary pointing to key findings, conveying your main message to your commissioner. The second part can be a more in-depth longer report in which you provide the scientific underpinning and all details of your study.

With regards to your presentation to the commissioner, make sure you target it well to your audience. It is also possible to come up with other products, for instance, organising a workshop, conference or lecture. Other output forms can be a computer program or model, poster, video clip, training design, app, policy brief, *et cetera*.

Since you perform academic consultancy, you should always provide an explanation and underpinning in relation to those additional products. That can be done in a separate product. If, for example, a poster or a clip is produced, the rationale of that poster or clip is not part of that, but should be delivered separately, for example within your academic consultancy report.

Output content
Your output content will be determined by your main and sub research questions. Normally, each of your sub research questions will produce separate output content, together building your final output. Be aware that by giving not more information than "We produce a final report and a presentation", the commissioner does not get a clear image of what you will produce in terms of content. Please give insight in what he/she/they can expect. These can be for example an analysis of future scenarios, a decision support tool, communication strategy, a framework for impact assessment, *et cetera*. And also think of describing your intermediary output, like a summarizing table on basis of a literature survey, a stakeholder analysis, interview outcomes, an instrument developed, pilot outcomes, *et cetera*.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Which output contents will we produce when answering the sub research questions and the main question? What are intermediary output contents?
- What can be forms of presenting the content? Which are attractive forms in view of our commissioner's wish and use? What are the pros and cons of the separate forms?
- Can we formulate the concrete form(s) in which we deliver our output? And can we specify shortly what can be expected as the content of each form?

TO DO IN YOUR TEAM

〉 Discuss the questions above. Decide on both the content, the intermediary and final outputs, and on the optimal form(s) of the output for your commissioner.
〉 Check whether all main and sub research questions are coherent with the intermediary output contents, and whether the final output contents together will deliver your purpose.
〉 Summarize your outputs and write in your logical framework (p. 17-18).

Additional supportive material

- What are project deliverables?

Step 5 | Activities and research methods

What activities and research methods are needed to execute the project?

Activities
In order to deliver outputs, you need to perform activities. Outputs (see previous step) are the concrete results of one or more activities. All your activities should be described systematically, for example chronologically: which activity needs to be performed first, which one thereafter, *et cetera*. Clarify why you perform each of the activities, which (research) method(s) you use, and which milestone is reached after completing an activity.

Research methods
Research methods determine *how* you perform activities. You need to apply different ways or techniques for collecting and processing information or data to address the purpose. Examples of methods are literature review, observations, interviews, surveys, using instruments in lab or field experiments, or model simulation. For each method of your project, provide a short but comprehensive description of the method and why you plan to use it. By describing the methods, you give insight into the academic quality of your project and describe how you are collecting the data. You thereby indicate whether your approach is valid, effective and the most appropriate, and whether the outcomes are reliable.

Descriptions like "performing interviews", or "searching for literature in Google scholar" is not enough. You should be more specific. For example, you need to elaborate on what is required for developing an interview guide, or on how to define the search terms for a literature review. Also think of the steps that follow: what strategy is used for elaborating the results of the interviews and for increasing reliability, or how the literature search process is performed, whether the selection of information is done by one or more team members in parallel, or what to do with conflicting information. Justify the methods in case alternatives exist. And if you intend to use data of your commissioner, make sure that the quality is sufficient for your project.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Which (types of) activities can be undertaken to answer each of the research questions? Are there alternatives?
- What methods can be applied in these activities? Are there alternatives?
- What experience and knowledge do we have in the team with each of the activities and methods mentioned? Is that sufficient for this project?
- Which methods have preference in view of our interest and experience?
- Are these methods good enough for this academic consultancy, in view of the reliability and validity of the outcomes? Do some methods ask for extra support from the university staff?

Finally, think of special methods for knowledge transfer to your commissioner. Every activity has its own methods description. However, avoid overlap and repetition in describing these, so refer to descriptions already given if methods are the same. A methodology description also includes organizational aspects and tools. The description should be condensed, however detailed enough so that - with your proposal at hand – others could be able to carry out your project as well.

TO DO IN YOUR TEAM

〉 Discuss in the team the questions given above. Identify the activities and methods that are best suited and feasible for this project. Make sure that each team member has a role in the execution of these activities. Align the activities to outputs and research questions.
〉 Summarize your activities in the logical framework (page 17-18).
〉 Discuss in the team also whether there are important potential risks of not being able to perform an activity (e.g. interviewees not available). Make clear in the text how you will deal with these risks. In other words: you assume that you can perform the activities, but you make clear already your "Plan B" in case an assumption appears not true.

Step 6 | Project management

Who are you? How and when do you communicate about what? What is the planning of the project? What budget is needed for all that?

The Project Management section helps you turn your project ideas into reality. It introduces your team and makes clear what will be done, who will do it, by when it will be carried out, what amount and types of resources (money, people) will be needed, and who should communicate when and how about what. Formulate this section carefully, since it forms the contract between you and your commissioner. After having agreed upon this, the proposal determines your trajectory and to what everyone is committed to in ACT.

Our team
Introduce yourselves, the form is free and you may use pictures. You should describe the qualities of your team. Describe the qualities of individual members, including your education, disciplinary background, and what and how you can contribute to the project. Finally, also mention the team role and what that means for the project.

Communication
The quality of your communication will co-determine the quality of your final product. It is important to aim at smooth communication internally within your team, but also a at a good communication with all external parties involved, like commissioner and other stakeholders. In the "Communication"" section of your proposal you describe the communication with external parties only.

You describe the "what and when" of the communication with your commissioner (e.g. is there a single contact person in the team? When do you intend to meet?) and other external persons involved in the project. Do not mention the academic advisor here: you don't want your commissioner and academic advisor to determine the project content. It's you to decide on this.

If agreed already, indicate dates for meetings and presentations, tasks to be carried out by your commissioner (e.g. reading final drafts), products delivered, *et cetera*. Also describe whether you are free to approach external persons, what project information can be shared with whom during the project, and also after the project has finished. This is especially important in the case of confidential projects.

Planning
Your planning guarantees an overview that you can carry out all planned activities and that this set of activities is realistic. You have a limited number of hours available for ACT. Before being able to make a planning, you need to know what activities need to be carried out.

A first step in making a plan is having a complete but compact overview of those activities. In ACT we use a *Logical Framework* (see next page). This Logical Framework enables you to quickly see whether your activities list is complete and coherent, whether outputs relate to activities, and also whether your set of outputs is complete enough to attain your purpose. The logical framework helps you to get an overview of the complete project. An instruction how to set up a logical framework is elaborated in the next page.

After having a complete overview of the activities, start planning. You should use a *Gantt chart* for making this planning. An example is shown on page 19. Although you can find various and different examples on the Internet, the one shown here contains all the essentials that are needed for an ACT project planning. Start with reproducing the list of your project activities, short but clear. Then add all those general activities that are needed for performing and completing your project, like having team meetings, performing coordination tasks, reporting, making presentations and presenting, *et cetera*. Do this only for project activities, so do not include ACT supportive activities!

In order to further elaborate your Gantt chart, you make a realistic estimation of the time needed for each activity, then sum it for all activities, and compare the sum with the team's available time (excluding ACT

supportive time!). If your project ambitions are quite too high, better make the choice for cancelling activities than reducing time per activity. If you feel the total demand comes close to matching the available hours, you can divide your activities over the weeks. You make a vertical summation per week for both the available hours and the demand, to be sure that your planning is realistic for every week of the ACT period. Note that some weeks are half-time, while also during some weeks you have ACT supportive activities and assignments, so less hours available for the project activities. As a rule, each person has a total of around 205 hours available for the project activities. This is 80% of your time. The other 20% is meant for ACT supportive activities, personal development and reflections.

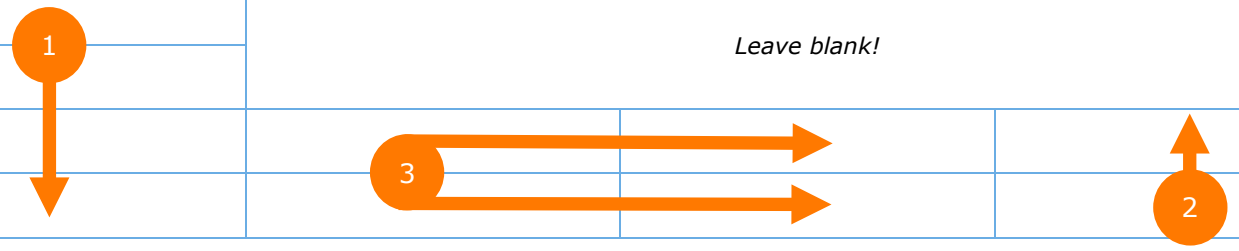
Budget
Here you specify the total budget for the project, and make a reference to the specification form in the Appendix. Clarify the estimation of your expenses for travel, telephone, printing, accommodation or meetings, equipment use, or anything that you need in order to execute the project. You are asked to record the expenses and to retain all the supporting documents.

TO DO IN YOUR TEAM

- Decide in the team upon how you want to present yourselves and as a team, and divide the writing and designing tasks.
- Identify in the team the external (groups of) persons you want to approach during the project.
- Discuss together who of the team is responsible for the communication with whom of those external persons. Discuss also the preferred way(s) of communication.
- Make a table or alike of the important communication events, and mention date and place if these are agreed already.
- Describe which information is shared freely, and which information is kept confidential. In case of the latter, also describe what "confidential" means for you, your commissioner, and for the internal-university persons involved, like coach and academic advisor.
- Formulate your logical framework by following the steps instructed on the next page.
- Make a Gantt chart with help of the instructions described above and the example shown below.
- Prepare your budget. Analyse critically but realistically for each of your activities what the financial consequences will be if your project is executed according to your plan. Describe and motivate these expenses here, and follow the categories of the budget form. Fill in the totals per category in that form and add the form as one of the appendices.

Step 6 | Project management – Logical framework

	Summary	Indicators	Evidence	Assumptions
Commissioner's goal		*Leave blank!*		
Team's purpose				
Outputs				
Activities				



The logical framework or logframe, a 4-by-4 matrix as shown above, is a summary of your project. You can check whether outputs and activities are in line with what you aim at. Before you start making your logical framework, you are strongly advised to watch first the video "Developing an academic consultancy proposal: logframe".

First the *columns*. Your project is explained in the Summary column. Indicators show that you know when you have completed your outputs or activities. Evidence describes the tangible form of that. And in the Assumptions column, you make clear the conditions to be met in order to be able to deliver the outputs or perform the activities.

Then the *rows*. The commissioner's goal is where your commissioner wants to be on the long run. The team's purpose is what you strive for in this project of eight weeks. The outputs are the deliverables of your project, that is the concrete and tangible products. The activities describe all tasks that you need to perform in order to deliver the outputs. Note that some cells need to be left blank.

The *first action* is to fill the summary column, from top to bottom (①). When you start, do not strive for completeness (especially for the activities) and perfection. Goal, purpose, outputs, and activities may change during the development of your proposal. The development is an iterative process during the first weeks.

The *second action* (②) is checking the assumptions, first for the activities, then the outputs. Identify the serious risks that may lead to the inability to perform the activities or deliver the outputs. Assumptions then are the inverse of those risks, that is assuming these risks will not become real. Serious risks are those that that have both a high probability and a high impact. If you doubt about risks, do a quick orientation first. For example, if you doubt there is enough literature on your topic, then have a quick search and a first evaluation of the quality of the hits.

Strive for an assumptions column as empty as possible. However, since the proposal will be a contract, it is not wise to omit likely risks that have a great impact. The assumptions give the opportunity to suggest alternative approaches in case the assumption will appear false. Then, your "plan B" (in the main text) will be executed.

The *third action* (③) is describing the indicators and evidence, first for the activities, then for the outputs. For indicators, think of "What can be used that gives us the confirmation that we have completed the task?". In the case of the preparation of an interview, this can be a "list of questions on *n* topics ready on *dd-mm*".

Note the SMART formulation: describe indicators as specific, measurable, acceptable, and realistic as possible, and make them time-bound. Evidence provides the exact source of verification. Make clear where for example the "list of questions" can be found.

The *fourth and last action* is the final check. First start at the lowest row. Ask yourself: "If we have performed this set of activities (and we know that we have completed them given the indicators and evidence), while the assumptions turned out true, have we delivered our outputs then?" And then: "If we have completed this set of outputs (and we know that we have completed them given the indicators and evidence here), while the assumptions turned out true, have we reached our purpose then?" If you can answer both questions positively, then your logical framework is ready.

Additional supportive material

- How to write a logframe: a beginner's guide (Guardian)

Step 6 | Project management – Gantt chart

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Time availability									
Team member 1	21	21	16	32	40	..			
Team member 2	25	10	21	35	40				
....									
Total team availability									
Project activities									
Proposal	60	80	80						
Literature study on ..			40	100					
Interviews				50					
Analysis of ..									
Visits to ..									
Observations									
Reporting						140	140		
Final presentation								32	
....									
Team meetings	12	12	10	4	4	4	8	2	
Project coordination	4			3				1	
...									
Total project demand									

Make a plan using around 205 hours per team member. The total amount of hours for ACT is 252, but ~20% of these hours is meant for process learning: CPD sessions, personal meetings with coach, writing of reflection papers. So, this process learning time is not included in the time planned for the execution of the project.

Use the Gantt chart as shown only for the initial planning of your project activities, so you can be sure that you can do what you promise. Do not use it for making a detailed planning for each individual team member, or for a planning on a daily basis.

If, during the project execution, you plan the activities for each team member, you are advised to not do this for more than one week in advance. This is since you cannot be sure that the estimation of the time demand in the Gantt chart made at the start will be true throughout your project. A slight change in this would result in the necessity to revise the individual planning scheme(s) (and this may happen repetitively).

Assessment of your proposal

The development of an ACT academic consultancy proposal is part of your learning process in ACT. You will get feedback on this, first from your coach, then from academic advisor and commissioner. The final proposal and the way towards that will be assessed by the coach. To guarantee a transparent process, you can find the assessment criteria below. These criteria can also be used by yourselves to assess the quality of your proposal. The final proposal itself is assessed for academic quality, consultancy quality, and transdisciplinary quality. Additionally, the team process for developing the proposal is evaluated. Although it is very important that your commissioner should be happy with what you produce in terms of quality, outputs, products, and so on, he/she/they will not evaluate your project proposal with a mark. However, your commissioner has the power to decide on a go / no go for the project. Your commissioner needs to sign the project proposal (with the budget that will be charged). So, independent of the mark of your coach, your commissioner gives the final green light for the project. It is optional – but wise – to ask feedback on the project proposal from the assigned academic advisor, as he/she can be expected to give valuable feedback.

Academic quality

- Is the project problem clear and is the approach academically sound (i.e.: concepts described are correct, methods applied are motivated, valid and reliable, obtained information is underpinned on essential aspects and only with key-citations)?
- Is the proposal critical in assessing the commissioner's needs in relation to state-of-the-art knowledge and methods?
- Does the proposal fit to the expertise of the team and does it allow all members to participate on basis of their own expertise (and is this clear from the text)?
- Is the proposal complete and does it match the formal criteria (as described in the "Contents and requirements" chapter of the handbook)?

Consultancy quality

- Has the team clearly formulated the commissioner's goal and real question? Hence, is the need of the commissioner clear within its context?
- Is the proposal consistent (so: are the problem description, stakeholder analysis, purpose, research questions, outputs, and activities aligned) and clear (understandable, no spelling errors, professional lay-out)?
- Is it clear what will be delivered, and is this feasible, given the available time, expertise, and money?
- Does the proposal give the reader confidence this team will arrive at a good and relevant product (in view of the team composition, discussions with the commissioner, but also in view of proper handling of the risks)?

Transdisciplinary quality

- Does the broad problem exploration combine the disciplinary knowledge present, and the needs and knowledge of the commissioner (and relevant stakeholders)?
- Is the balance between academic challenge and the commissioner's needs appropriate in both the project problem and the approach?
- Do purpose and research questions integrate the perspectives of the team's disciplines and of the commissioner (and relevant stakeholders)?
- Are possible ethical concerns related to the purpose considered and sufficiently tackled?

Team process

- Does the team show a collaborative and professional attitude towards the commissioner (e.g.: being client-oriented while being able to listen actively and ask critical questions, also if new aspects are introduced)?
- Is the team critically discussing and assessing what the commissioner wants and what the team can deliver, while being open to learn from the diverse disciplinary perspectives and cultural differences (e.g.: able to disagree, reach common ground on the basis of good discussions and decision making, or show creativity in finding solutions)?
- Is the team's approach of the meetings (with commissioner, academic advisor, coach, regular team meetings) opportune (e.g., eager to learn, open, debating, critically listening, …, or wait-and-see)?
- Does the team react constructively to the feedback of the coach, academic advisor and commissioner, and does the team weigh and optimally use the feedback and suggestions to improve the proposal?