

PURPOSE BUILT

ABOUT THE PURPOSE BUILT SERIES

Capital projects often bring lasting benefits to nonprofit organizations and the people they serve. Each project affects an organization's ability to achieve its mission— signaling its values, shaping interaction with its constituents, influencing its work processes and culture, and creating new financial realities. While many projects succeed in fulfilling their purpose, others fall short of their potential. Through a multi-year research study capturing lessons learned from a diverse set of completed projects around the world, MASS Design Group has created the *Purpose Built Series*— a set of core principles and tools aimed at untangling the often complex and opaque process of building for those considering or conducting capital projects. The series is based on the findings that the best results occur when a project is built with purpose— grounded in a clear and strategic mission that informs design decisions with a scope that matches what its organization can afford to build, operate, and maintain.

Learn more at:

massdesigngroup.org/purposebuilt
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DESIGN BRIEF

The *Design Brief* consolidates the information about project goals and serves as a critical resource for the [design team](#) where all the information is located in one place.. It summarizes the needs identified through the literature review and stakeholder engagement process and defines a desired framework of impact. Specific space requirements, adjacencies, and square footages are noted in detail. Precedents can also help communicate design strategies that may be applicable to the project. As much as possible, we recommend you create this as a visual document to communicate your vision.

The *Design Brief* is commonly prepared in the *Planning* phase to assist project teams and their consultants in defining the design vision and recalibrating the project objectives to meet the needs and opportunities identified through the engagement process.

The following table of contents outlines key elements essential to communicate to a design team. There is however no prescriptive structure or format for a design brief; it is flexible and should adapt to your project needs.

1 INTRODUCTION

What is this document?

2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Context

What is important to know about the context surrounding the project?

Project Mission

What is the project striving to achieve?

Project Leadership

Who is the organization or group leading the project?

The Capital Project

Why is it essential to achieve impact?

3 PROJECT DETAILS

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How did the project originate?

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Purpose Built

How does the project follow the Purpose Built process?

Project Timeline

What is the plan for the project?

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What did you do and what did you learn?

User Groups

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Precedents

What are you learning from others?

Space Program

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Budgeting

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4 NEXT STEPS

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Activities & methods

What are some key activities and methods you will do next?

5 APPENDIX

Acknowledgments

Who was involved?

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Schedule of inputs

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Prior activities

What activities happened in the project in a previous process?

Current process activities

What activities were completed for the project in the current process?

USE AND ADAPT THE FOLLOWING STRUCTURE!

The following pages illustrate what each section of the table of contents should include. This structure is a suggested outline that project teams could reference in preparation for a Design Brief. Always adapt the content and requirements to the unique aspects of the project!

1 INTRODUCTION

The Introduction will help the project team understand how to best utilize the content included to lead a *Purpose Built* project through to successful completion.

What is this document?

In this section you can provide an introduction of the *Design Brief* to set the scene and provide an overview of the document. This section can also include a brief overview of the sections and content provided within, along with a description of the process and those involved leading to its creation.

Resources

- *Design Brief Introduction example, pg. 6*

2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Project Overview should offer a solid grounding in the contextual background of the project and what it aims to achieve through a *Purpose Built* process. This section should also shine a light on who you are as an organization and why a capital project is essential to amplify your organizational mission.

PROJECT CONTEXT

What is important to know about the context surrounding the project?

Grounding in the key contextual drivers behind the project will help all stakeholders understand the reasons why this is important and why now. Imagine crafting a full project narrative to better help your audience understand the need for this project, but also serve as a clear anchor for why you are doing this project. Citing research to back up your key contextual insights is a powerful way to support your case.

Resources

- *Project Context example, pg. 6*

PROJECT MISSION

What is the project striving to achieve?

Articulating a clear mission and framing the goals of a project is key to help guide the project towards a unified and impactful outcome. This section will bring to life the mission of the project. If you created your project mission through the *Impact-based Design Methodology* (IDM), we recommend creating a page for each IDM section: *Mission, Method, Impact, and Systemic Change*.

Resources

- *Project Mission example, pg. 7*
- *Tool: Impact-based Design Methodology ([Click to download](#))*

WHO ARE YOU?

Who is the organization leading the project?

The organization and mission behind a project is key to a successful capital project. Share an overview of the organization, the core mission and the how it is achieved, who the main groups they've served until now are, and the impact they have created.

THE CAPITAL PROJECT

Why is it essential to achieve impact?

Capital projects are costly and come with great risk to the organization, funders, and even to the end-users. Use this section to describe why a capital project is crucial to achieving this impact and why you are the right organization to undertake this.

Questions to consider:

- *How will you be able to amplify your organizational mission?*
- *How will this project overcome limitations you currently face?*
- *Will this project allow you to serve new groups?*
- *What new programs will you be able to deliver?*

3 PROJECT DETAILS

This section is a synthesis of the project activities done to date. It should provide the key ingredients and thorough information for a design team to confidently move forward into the design phase.

BACKGROUND

How did the project originate?

The story and details about the origin of the project and who was involved will help contextualize the project for readers. Describe the partners involved, their roles and what strengths they bring to the project. Add a brief overview of the activities carried out and how this *Design Brief* became the result of that work.

Resources

- *Project Background example, pg. 7*

PROJECT HISTORY

What are key milestones achieved in the history of the project so far?

Rarely do projects begin from scratch. Share here the process and any activities that preceded the beginning of this project.

Consider:

- *Decisions taken running up to this project*
- *Engagement activities across stakeholders*
- *Workshops*
- *External consultant engagement*
- *Organizational restructuring*
- *Needs assessments*

PURPOSE BUILT

How does the project follow the Purpose Built process?

Contextualizing this content within the framework of *Purpose Built* will support the team to understand the content within the wider process and how they will be taking it forward. You can leverage the provided resource example for this, adapting any changes you may have made for your specific project.

Resources

- *Purposed Built Overview example, pg. 8*

PROJECT TIMELINE

What is the plan for the project?

An overview timeline showing the plan for the project arranged across the *Purpose Built* phases: *Visioning, Planning, Design, Construction, Occupancy*. You can also include additional timelines showing the plan within specific blocks e.g. a timeline of community engagement activities.

Resources

- *Project Timeline example, pg. 8*

INSIGHTS

What did you do and what did you learn?

The engagement process will have surfaced many new learnings and insights. Share here the key insights along with reflections of what this means for the project.

Resources

- *Insights example, pg. 9*

USER GROUPS

Who does the project serve?

During the *Visioning* and *Planning* phases, the *Needs Assessment* will have helped you understand the core user groups and refine who the project will be serving. In this section, describe the core user groups the project aims to serve and how they will be impacted. We often use tools such as 'Personas' or 'Journey Mapping' to synthesize and illustrate the learnings from the engagement process. These tools also help bring the experience of these groups to life so that we can better design for their needs and aspirations.

Resources

- *1A. Mission: Needs Assessment (Planning for Impact, pg. 9)*
- *2A. Mission: Needs Assessment (Planning for Impact, pg. 15)*

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

How does the project design serve the mission?

Defining the design opportunities that will help you achieve your mission is at the core of a *Purpose Built* project. Include here a synthesis from the *Design Opportunities Tool* to communicate the qualities and characteristics of the spaces in and around the building. These will inform the user experience of the capital project as well as ensure the project leverages design to create impact.

Resources

- 2B. DESIGN (Planning for Impact, pg. 16)
- Purpose Built Series, Planning for Impact Toolkit, Tool: Design Opportunities ([Click to download](#))

PRECEDENTS

What are you learning from others?

Researching precedents can help organizations think about what they want and don't want, provide inspiration for new ideas, and facilitate communication of design ideas between the client and architect. Additionally, precedents offer the project team an opportunity to tap into a wealth of knowledge about what has worked or not worked well in the past. Ensure you share this information here, along with reflections of how this is relevant for your project.

Resources

- Conduct precedent research (Planning for Impact, pg. 17)

SPACE PROGRAM

What are the spaces required?

A space program lays the groundwork for many design decisions by identifying the types, sizes (sq ft or sq m), quantity, and characteristics of spaces that the project will provide. Outline those spaces here and include diagrams of the program along with the amount of space allocated for each.

Resources

- 2B. DESIGN (Planning for Impact, pg. 16)
- Pena, William M. & Parshall, Steven A. *Problem Seeking: An Architectural Programming Primer*. 5th ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. 2012.

BUDGETING

How much it will cost?

During the *Planning* phase, you will have generated preliminary cost estimates to help clarify the scope of the potential project and to test financial feasibility. Share this project estimate here and ensure you are not only budgeting for the brick and mortar cost of construction of the development by including soft costs and site costs.

Resources

- Capital Project Budgeting Worksheet (Planning for Impact, pg. 47)

4 NEXT STEPS

Partnering with the design team for the *Design* phase is an exciting moment in your project! This is where everything you have learned, envisioned, and planned gets translated into concrete designs.

TIMELINE

What are the next steps in the overall project?

Mapping out a detailed timeline of key milestones will help set expectations and surface any uncertainties about this process, which is potentially new for all partners. This timeline can be included within an overall project *Implementation Plan*, which is a key activity and deliverable from the *Planning* phase (Planning for Impact, pg. 11). An *Implementation Plan* lays out the critical staff and key decisions necessary to complete a major capital project. It will align the project with the organization's long-term strategy and development planning.

Resources

- 2C. Feasibility: Project Preparation (Planning for Impact pg. 19)
- Purpose Built Series, Planning for Impact Toolkit, Tool: Implementation Plan ([Click to download](#))

ACTIVITIES & METHODS

What are some key activities and methods you will do next?

Expanding upon specific activities on the *Project Timeline* will help bring clarity to all stakeholders involved. For each, briefly describe the purpose of the activity, the method, and introduce the groups you will engage. Some of the activities you may do during the *Design* phase might include: Project Kick-Off, Ideation Workshops, Co-creation Sessions, Mission refinement, etc

Resources

- *Tool: Outcomes-based Design (Planning for Impact p. 38)*

5 APPENDIX

The appendix provides a detailed summary of the project process and activities completed to date. Compile in this section additional information valuable for the design team to consult. Sharing the raw outputs of engagement activities will support the team in getting a deeper understanding of the process so far and support decision-making going forward.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Who was involved?

Many hands and minds have been involved so far in the project. Take a moment to acknowledge the team across partner organizations without whom the work so far would not have been possible.

OVERVIEW

What is in the appendix?

Provide a brief overview of the contents of the *Appendix* and how it reflects a series of activities, conversations and work completed throughout the project.

SCHEDULE OF INPUTS

What references did you consult?

Provide a list of important inputs referenced so far for this process and remember to include important publication dates.

These might include:

- *Organizational Reports including: impact reports, economic studies, external consultant reports, annual reports, proposals*
- *Building codes*
- *Image sources*
- *Research documents*

PRIOR ACTIVITIES

What activities happened in the project in a previous process?

A variety of reports, activities and engagements may have led to the initiation of this capital project. Expand here on the activities described in the *Project Details: Project History* section. Share any outputs, key learnings, and process that may help give background to the current process.

CURRENT PROCESS ACTIVITIES

What activities were completed for the project in the current process?

Document the details and outputs of the engagement activities from the current process. Sharing photos from the process can help the team understand granular details, what they are building upon, and support them in helping framing questions to advance the project.

These might include:

- *Kick offs*
- *Stakeholder engagements outputs*
- *Workshops: Brainstorm sessions, etc...*
- *Completed Purpose Built activity sheets: IDM, Implementation Plan, Budgeting, etc...*
- *Detailed Precedent research*

EXAMPLES

In the pages that follow, you will find examples of key sections of the *Design Brief*. All images and specific names are placeholder content and not meant to represent a real project. Please use this guide as a reference for your *Design Brief*!

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS DESIGN BRIEF

This is a living document to be updated throughout the project development

This *Design Brief* was prepared in part by Maria Garza and contains goals of the Student Center project, synthesized stakeholder engagement and workshop findings, and initial spatial program analysis for the project. The content presented in this *Design Brief* encompasses work done over eight weeks of engagement.

This information is presented here in draft form, at a level of fidelity that is intended to clearly convey an approach with room for feedback and revision. The team looks forward to reviewing and incorporating feedback into this working document!

Consider adding a project
image here

PROJECT CONTEXT

PROJECT CONTEXT

What is important to know about the context surrounding the project?

Consider adding a project
site map to contextualize
within the region



Limited heating, ventilation, and cooling

Ad-hoc interior spaces fit in over time

Underutilized mezzanine above performance space

Add supporting images and information to provide more context about the project. If there are existing built structures, drop them in this section!

EXAMPLES

PROJECT MISSION

PROJECT MISSION

What is the project striving to achieve?

This project seeks to inspire future leaders and build capacity for social change and learning.

Consider adding a project image here

BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND

The origins of this project

In 2015, our project received funding to advance the work towards developing a capital project. We partnered with mission-aligned partners to advance the incredible vision for this project together.

For eight weeks, the project team met and conducted a series of engagements with a wide range of stakeholders. This Design Brief is the result of that immersion work. The team will now begin work on the next phase of the project which will include test fits and developing design plans for the project.

Consider adding photos that help tell the story about how the project originated!

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EXAMPLES

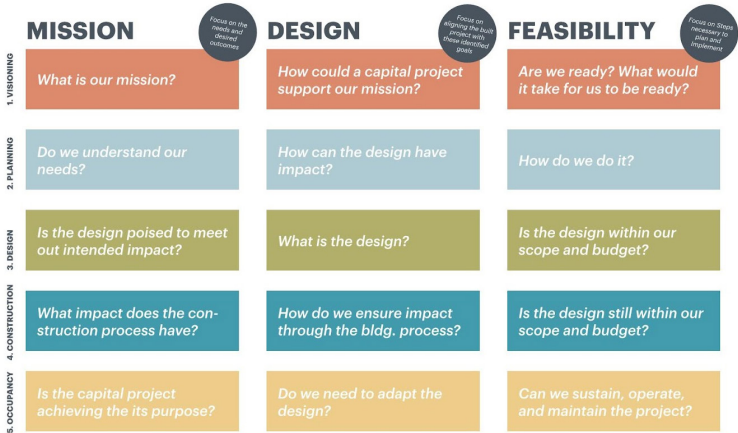
PURPOSE BUILT

PURPOSE BUILT

How does the project follow the Purpose Built process?

Leverage this language to introduce Purpose Built!

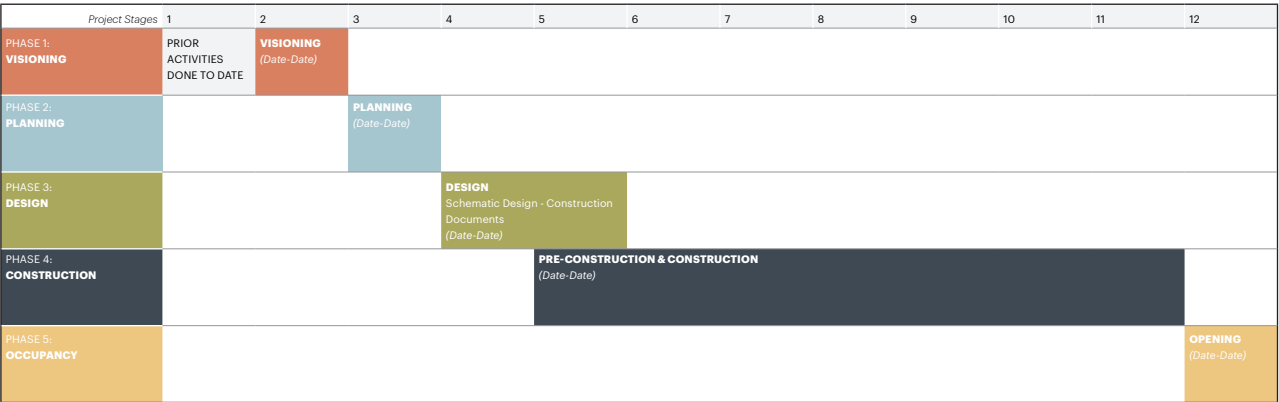
Purpose Built is a capital project planning process created by MASS Design Group. It includes toolkits and resources and is the result of a multi-faceted, multi-year research study that found the best results occur when a project is built with purpose, balancing mission, design, and feasibility. This project is using the series' core tool, *Planning for Impact*, to guide the project team through the capital project.



PROJECT TIMELINE

PROJECT TIMELINE

This Project Timeline example is structured to follow the Purpose Built phases.



EXAMPLES

INSIGHTS

INSIGHTS

What we learned and what it means

WHAT WE LEARNED

Insight learned throughout the immersion process this project should respond to.

WHAT THIS MEANS

This project might respond to that insight in the following way(s). If it does, then this might be the impact it will have on these user groups and possible behavior or systemic change long-term.

Insights can vary on how they are presented, but here we share one way to structure them. Use the format and language that makes most sense for your project!

INSIGHTS

What we learned and what it means

WHAT WE LEARNED

Students at Bold University find it difficult to gather and hold meetings with their peers at the current Student Center.

WHAT THIS MEANS

The new Student Center should offer a variety of common meeting spaces for groups of all sizes to gather. This will allow student organizations to organize better and connect with their peers.

Using the structure above, here is an example of an insight of a hypothetical project example