

Parish Council Meeting Minutes

July 12, 2022

In attendance via Zoom: Geri Sicola, Mark Palmer, Joan Fulton, Ray Heil, Jim Casey, Gerardine Delambo, Colleen McCahill, Mary Hennigan, Charles Chapman, Lindsay Dierkes, Fr. Ray Chase, Peggy Shouse, Catherine Mundy, Aidan Helie, Kate Volpe

Absent: Pat Ball, Craig Thornton

Geri Sicola opened the meeting with a reading of the parish mission statement and Lindsay Dierkes offered prayer. Our sacred purpose statement needs to be retrieved from Amber Hendricks.

Newly elected President Geri set the tone for our new council (be relaxed, munch, hug a child and/or pet, and enjoy each other while we do hard work) and led a general check-in.

Committee and Other Updates

Pastor and Pastoral Associate:

Fr. Ray anticipates swift action on the lighting project and repairs to louvers soon after the Archdiocesan review on July 17th .

New Jesuit Volunteer Casey Driskel will begin in August. Colleen McCahill added that Aubrey's parish send-off will be August 7th at the Sunday Mass with her mother. Aubrey has accepted a position with Casey Stanton (of the "Discerning Deacons" movement) and her family.

Fr. Ray mentioned again—as he had in this week's homily—Pope Francis's apostolic letter about the liturgy and his hopes to engage with that document within our community.

Fr. Ray also shared that the third meeting of the Archdiocesan Urban Church Process will be Wednesday with pastor and representatives.

Education & Enrichment:

Peggy Shouse announced the committee is getting ready to meet for the first time in a long time.

Facilities:

No updates.

Social Action:

No updates.

Liturgy:

Catherine Mundy stood in for Pat Ball (see appended items for Pat's written committee update). Catherine reported there has been no recent meeting, but the committee is working toward a proper retreat focusing on recent documents from Pope Francis.

Geri asked if there were any updates on the Summer Series as she imagines it will be connected to Phases 2 and 3 of our parish synodal process.

Catherine affirmed that both the Summer Series and the liturgical retreat will closely connect to the work of those two phases. She elucidated that this retreat will be more prayerful/thoughtful than has been possible in recent years.

Church Reform:

No updates.

Finance:

The budget is ready to approve. Mark Palmer, Colleen, and Fr. Ray met earlier today to review any outstanding issues.

Prior to approval, the council examined the budget while Mark made note of key details.

- We are exceeding our budget from offertory donations.
- Mark and Colleen clarified there was a 5% increase in wage for continuing staff.
- Colleen added that Facilities Superintendent Tony Lassiter was hired soon after last year's budget was approved. It was negotiated that the parish would split the difference between the (greater) salary of his previous job and what the parish had been offering. The Maintenance salary as budgeted for FY23 reflects a 5% increase over the actual wage (agreed-upon at hiring in mid-August 2021).
- Mark highlighted the breakdown for special projects, specifically the lighting. He clarified that while the budget proposal may appear to end in deficit, the parish does have carry over of restricted funds from previous years—primarily, donations to the lighting project that were not used because the project didn't start. In order to avoid confusion, Geri asked if the available surplus from prior fiscal years could be added to the bottom line.
- Mark also added that there has been a build-up of excess resources in charitable donations that will be spent next year. The amount is not yet known.

Budget was then approved by the council. The budget portion of the meeting went over 5 minutes, tsk.

Work with Global Learning Partners

A new group was put together to meet with our GLP collaborators to begin and work on Phase 2, "Finding Our Why," led by Mary Hennigan. They created a document (see appended items) to help clarify their proposal to GLP and were soliciting comments. The group will meet tomorrow (Wednesday) to revisit and prepare for their August meeting with GLP.

Geri asked the council, “Have we articulated what we need? Will GLP understand that?”

The council agreed that the document was well done. Mark suggested that the language of the objective needs to be more direct, and Geri and Lindsay added to the discussion of how that portion could use sharper language.

Mary noted that they will attach a format and budget template for them, but inquired if another budget meeting would be necessary. Geri responded that when we began the process for the three phases, there were funds available for all of them based on what GLP had proposed at the time. Geri also asked for clarification that Phases II (Finding Our Why) and Phase III (Planning for the future) were separated. Lindsay and Ray reminded Council that it was decided to treat these separately. Fr. Ray also stated that we may be able to do Phase 3 internally which would not require additional resources. Geri suggested that this would be considered when we need to cross that bridge.

Geri made clear that the work with GLP and Phase 2 would be a standing report at each Council meeting.

New Business

As a last item, Geri wished to solicit any new concerns the members had or had heard from other parishioners that should be addressed at future PC meetings.

- Fr. Ray wondered if we should do more to bring new individuals more deeply into the community other than our parish welcome/prayer at masses. Should we invite them to private conversation with Fr. Ray or Colleen?
- Joan shared how some long-time parishioners have claimed that the parish doesn't feel the same. The criticisms were concerning cohesiveness. Joan doesn't necessarily think it *should* be the same as time passes, but would like to examine the claims and negotiate a response. Geri responded that this very issue will probably come up in Phase 2. Colleen agreed and mentioned that the timeline for Phase 2 is quite short and so our needs will surface out of this project. She called it a “distillation process...to find out who we are, who we might be, and how to do that well. This may come with some reckoning, some nostalgia and/or loss, but [it will also be] harnessing new energy and directing it in a way that suits us now”.
- Ray H. has observed that attendance has been going down and how some see that as an indication that the parish will fold. He asked if we are making the assumption that this issue will be addressed in Phase 2. Geri responded strongly in the affirmative.
- Geri suggested that there needs to be follow-up to the recent town hall meeting on “We Have a Dream.”
- Geri wondered about check-ins on other groupings of parishioners doing things that are not represented on council, e.g. Women in Ministry. Colleen agreed, adding that it is important to recognize/be aware of groups or ministries that form the parish but that don't necessarily keep minutes or report to council (e.g. Bible study groups and the Faith and

Science discussion group). Jim Casey and Peggy both seconded that this should be a future agenda item.

The meeting—which ended 40 minutes early despite the budget portion exceeding its allotted time!—was adjourned with the Lord’s Prayer.

It is noted that one agenda item was not discussed: a plan for PC member availability for engagement with parishioners after Mass or in other ways. This will be taken up at the next meeting.

Liturgy Committee Report to Parish Council – July 12, 2022

The liturgy committee has not met since May. Our next meeting will be on August 13 when we hold our annual retreat. At the retreat we will focus on the two recent documents from Pope Francis regarding liturgical celebrations. The most recent one, APOSTOLIC LETTER ***DESIDERIO DESIDERAVI***, is the one referenced by Fr. Ray at Mass this past Sunday. The other is an earlier document from Pope Francis on the value of avoiding “staid liturgies”.

The subcommittee for the summer series has developed the liturgies for this series based on the book of Nehemiah and that series will occur on the following Sundays: July 24, July 31 and August 7.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Ball

Acting Chair

FINDING OUR WHY

An intra-parish synodal process

Request for Phase 2 Proposal

PROJECT

St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church seeks to determine a consensus on who we are as a community and what we are called to do in the future as part of God's plan for our world.

CHURCH BACKGROUND

St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church is a small intentional Catholic parish in downtown Baltimore. Few parishioners live nearby. We choose to travel to this place to celebrate and worship in our home, founded in 1841, a historical, lovely old Church. We are the people of God, the Church on Front Street, who have been inspired by the documents of Vatican II and who continue to be faithful to its vision and promise. We strive to be a community of seekers, lovers, and servants.

Currently, St. V's (as we call ourselves) is home to approximately 350 members with weekly attendance averaging 166 pre-Covid¹. As a result of Covid restrictions in 2020, St. V's began a virtual Mass environment via its own YouTube channel and is now operating as a hybrid – with in-person attendance available concurrently with virtual. Many of us have been at St. V's for forty years or more, while others have recently found us. Also, in 2017, parish leadership changed as we welcomed a new pastor to the parish after the retirement of a much-beloved pastor of 40 years.

Our Parish Council includes our pastor, our pastoral associate, elected representatives, and the chairs of five standing committees. In addition, there are two corporators per the State of Maryland's policy appointed by the pastor.

Our church campus, including our small park, has served for many years as a stopping place for homeless men and women. The persistent presence of the most vulnerable and needy in our midst reminds us of our call to serve God through our service to others.

THE REASONS FOR THE PROJECT

The reasons behind this project are many and varied. Our parish identity has been changing and we have witnessed the loss of members. There is also a diversity of positive and negative perceptions within the parish. On the positive side, we need to understand not only the changes wrought by our new pastoral leadership, but also the causes of an influx of singles and families seeking us out. On the negative side, we see people exiting because of differences with parish leadership; parishioners hurt and disillusioned over the larger Church's scandals; people questioning the relevance of the Catholic Church in general; concerns about an aging population's ability to continue current ministries; the lack of availability of younger members who work and are raising families; and fears about crime in Baltimore City. At the same time, Pope Francis has called all Catholic dioceses to embark on a process of listening and discernment as input to a Synod on Synodality in 2023.

¹ Includes Saturday and Sunday liturgies and online attendees. Online is calculated as 2 per viewer as most people are watching with other family members.

PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE

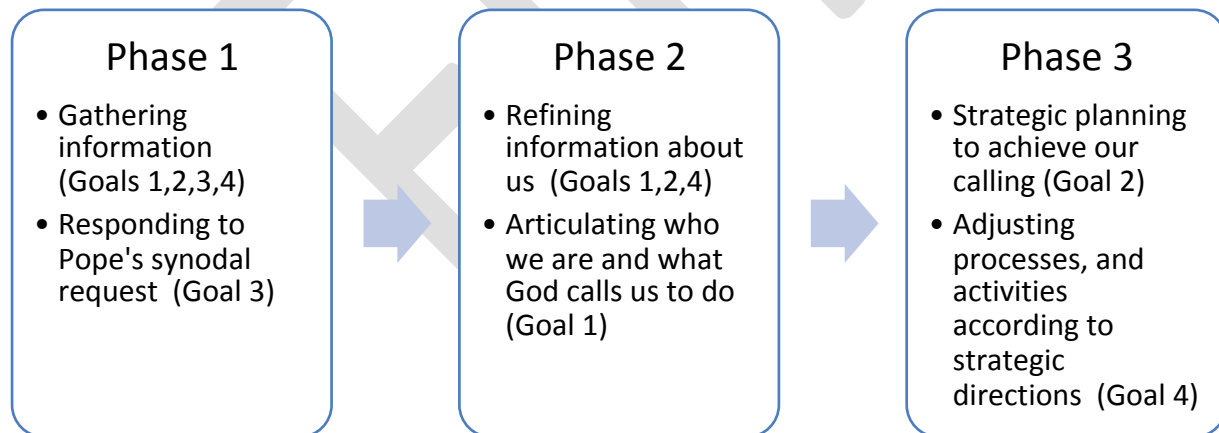
In response to these concerns, our Parish Council agreed, on August 10, 2021, to an intra-parish synodal process. This process will help our Parish Council and leadership to listen to the parish to discern who we are as a community and what we are called to do as part of God's plan not only for the larger universal church but also for our own faith community of St. V's. The importance of listening and discerning is paramount.

To inform their decision, the Parish Council used a "thought paper" called "*FINDING OUR WHY.*" The paper outlined the following four goals:

1. To know ourselves better: reach a consensus on who we are as a community and what we are called to do into the future.
2. To provide critical information for the development of a strategic document to be used for future planning. That planning will include the growth of our community by finding the people who are looking for us.
3. Send hopes and thoughts regarding the upcoming Synod on Synodality scheduled for 2023 to the Papal Nuncio.²
4. Determine whether to continue to pursue an update of the Parish Council Constitution -- a complete rewrite or other more flexible options for governing ourselves and our work with set periods of time.

PHASES

To achieve these four goals, we have divided them into three phases as illustrated below:



PHASE 1³

² The output was a Synodal Report sent to the Archdiocese of Baltimore in March of 2022 following affirmation at a parish-wide meeting. Still pending is the question of when or if we would send the report to the Papal Nuncio.

Phase 1 was overseen by the parish's Church Reform Committee and completed in March 2022 with the collaboration and technical support of Global Learning Partners (GLP). The results were two outputs foundational to finding our way. The first addressed goal 3: *Send hopes and thoughts regarding the upcoming **Synod on Synodality** scheduled for 2023 to the **Papal Nuncio***. The Synodal Report mainly captures the hopes and challenges we have as Roman Catholics for the larger universal church. The second is a set of demographic and qualitative information about who we are that, despite limitations, starts to lay the groundwork for Phases 2 and 3.

PHASE 2

For Phase 2, in which we will refine information about ourselves and articulate who we are and what God calls us to do, the Parish Council will take the lead. At the June 2022 meeting of the Parish Council, a Phase 2 working group and project manager were identified (Appendix 1). It is this Phase for which we are seeking a Request for Proposal (RFP). The Parish Council will also take the lead in Phase 3 with implementation yet to be determined.

GOAL FOR PHASE 2

To know ourselves better: we want to reach a consensus on who we are as a faith community and what God is calling us to do in the future.

BACKGROUND TO PHASE 2 GOAL

To begin to focus on this goal, we first reflect on our mission statement⁴ and recognize that we live our mission through our liturgies, and social justice and service ministries, as well as formational and educational activities as described in the following:

- The parish strives for its liturgies to be welcoming to all. Examples include signers for those with hearing limitations, pews for accessibility of those using walkers or wheelchairs, several pews designed for young children, and a separate Liturgy of the Word for school-aged children. We celebrate liturgies on Saturday at 6:00 pm (in-person only), and Sunday at 10:00 am (in-person and virtual). Both the Saturday-and Sunday liturgies attract individuals and families with strong and long-held ties to St. V's as well as newcomers to the parish.
- The parish sponsors many social justice and service initiatives rooted in Catholic Social Teaching (for example, a Social Action Committee and a Peace and Justice Sub-committee). An active Liturgy Committee plans the liturgies. An Education and Enrichment Committee sponsors events

³ We note here that, concurrent with reflecting on how to address those issues enumerated in the REASONS FOR THE PROJECT section, the parish's Church Reform Committee was developing a proposal to the Archbishop on a diocesan plan that would provide him with inputs into the Synod process. Before that plan was sent to the Archbishop, the Pope called for the Synod to reach parish levels. Thus, the activities of Phase 1 shifted to producing the Synodal Report.

⁴ <https://www.stvchurch.org/about-us/mission-statement/>

such as parish retreats and other learning opportunities and a Green Team sub-committee provides leadership on environmental issues. There are also Finance and Facilities Committees to handle fiscal and maintenance issues, respectively.

- From a formational perspective, the parish supports many activities for children and family growth including instruction for first Reconciliation and first Eucharist, Vacation Bible School, and catechetical instructions for high school students.

By way of additional background, we note that in Phase 1, respondents mentioned many of the concerns enumerated in the REASONS FOR THE PROJECT section during individual interviews, focus group discussions, prayer nuggets, and surveys. In that Phase, we also learned that some parish members feel it is difficult to engage because they perceive others to be more knowledgeable or less tolerant of other perspectives. Others have hinted that there is an "A" team that dominates. Some participants raised the question: "If we are such a welcoming parish with excellent programs and liturgies, why aren't more people joining our community?" These undercurrents, if left unexplored, could distort our hearing God's voice, and must be addressed.

At the same time, we heard strong voices speaking of the importance of St. V's as part of their spiritual journey. Many passionately expressed their gratitude for being accepted in a vibrant faith community. Members feel St. V's is "family" to them. And like in any family, there are differences and challenges as the family membership changes.

With this as background, in Phase 2, we seek an answer to the following question: Who are we at this time in our history and how are we being called in God's plans to transform our world?

PROJECT EXPECTATIONS

To answer this question and reach our goal, we have identified the following foundational objective:

Objective: Achieved a Holy Spirit inspired consensus understanding of who we are: our vision, hopes, assumptions, challenges, and vulnerabilities.

To accomplish this objective, we identified the following:

Outcomes

- Shared vision of who we are as a faith community and what God is calling us to do and be into the future.
- Better understanding of the demographics of who we are as a faith community.
- Shared understanding of assumptions, vulnerabilities, and challenges that impact us as a faith community.

Outputs:

1. Space for reflecting and hearing the voice of God.
2. Updated demographic profile.
3. Written vision statement.

4. A list of key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Hence it is key that we access, analyze, and possibly enhance all available demographic and qualitative data on our parish and its membership. As a first activity, we will work with GLP on developing a data plan. We collected a large amount of information in Phase 1. We looked at people's attitudes, concerns, and hopes for the larger universal church as well as for our St. V's community. The Synodal Report used some of the data but a significant quantity of data relating to our demographics and behaviors/attitudes is still waiting to be used.

Also, in 2014, the parish conducted a survey and focus groups as part of a strategic planning process. The strategic plan did not materialize, yet the findings of the survey and cluster reports offered insights into the demographics and priorities of the parish. Those data are still available. It should be noted that some of the same issues were present then as they are now, including attracting young members, the safety of the physical area, the stress of traveling distances, and appreciation for being part of a strong faith community. Respondents voiced concern about outreach to different constituencies and recommendations for making travel to Masses or meetings easier. One noteworthy suggestion was to consider SKYPE and other technologies to facilitate better attendance. This suggestion has proven to be very accurate noting the success of the Zoom technology that has flourished during the Covid pandemic.

Collected data represent an investment of trust, time, and effort on the part of informants and data collectors. Therefore, the Phase 2 working group, working with GLP, will prioritize the linkage of data between Phase 1 and Phase 2 and between Phase 2 and the future Phase 3.

Because of the critical need for useful data, it may be necessary to do further interviews or focus groups to supplement and enhance our current data.

OBSERVATIONS FROM PHASE 1

It is widely observed that the Phase 1 Synodal Report achieved parish-wide affirmation. We attribute this to the methodologies employed. Many participants felt the process provided a safe space for sharing and listening on often painful but critical issues. In Phase 2, we will again need a safe space for challenging each other about our vision, internal and external conditions, perceptions, assumptions, and vulnerabilities. There may be a general acceptance of key strengths, but we cannot be dismissive when exploring our challenges.

We ask GLP to join us in being committed to a Holy Spirit-inspired process. Observational feedback from the GLP exercises in Phase 1 indicates participants felt they had a safe space to share. Our highest priority in Phase 2 is establishing a safe space for hearing God, for sharing and for offering constructive feedback as we address questions about our values and identity.

Other participants felt that the time allocated for focus groups was too short for meaningful exchanges, a fact that was especially true in groups that did not know each other well. This concern must also be addressed in Phase 2.

Phase 1 did not do pre- or post- surveys with parishioners/informants. Separate after-action reviews were done by GLP and by the Phase 1 working group. We hear that people liked the small groups, or thought the exercises were helpful. In Phase 2, we want to understand more concretely the usefulness of the methodologies/experience from parishioners.

ACHIEVING CONSENSUS

Given the dynamism of our community, we recognize that each member of the parish may, as individuals, believe he/she is hearing God's call in his/her own ideas about who we are, our hopes, assumptions, challenges, and vulnerabilities. The task before us here is to reach **consensus** on how we listen as a parish. We stress that we strive to reach a consensus in all matters as a community and that is a necessary part of Phase 2. Let Pope Francis be an inspiration and guide for us when he said on July 3, 2022:

"Let us ask ourselves if we have the ability to collaborate, if we know how to make decisions together, sincerely respecting those around us and taking into account their point of view, if we do it in community, not alone. In fact, it is above all in this way that the life of the disciple reveals that of the Master, really announcing him to others."

While we are aware that achieving consensus is critical, we hold steadfast to the belief that this must be done by prayerfully hearing God calling us.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GLP, working with the Phase 2 working group, shall analyze the data from the perspectives of our vision, hopes, assumptions, challenges, and vulnerabilities considering the diversity of our parish membership, our mission statement and the concerns voiced in Phase 1 interviews and focus groups. The GLP shall synthesize the various findings and recommend a shared vision statement covering who we are as a faith community and what God is calling us to do now and in the future.

DELIVERABLES

GLP shall provide

1. Technical support in designing, conducting a methodology that allows us to hear the voice of God in reflecting on our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges, and assumptions that lead to understanding our future in God's plan. This also includes training of facilitation teams.
2. Technical support in collecting and analyzing data.
3. A written report covering who we are as a faith community and what God is calling us to do now and in the future.

PROPOSAL

We reviewed GLP's November 16, 2021, proposal for Phase 2 (see attached) and, based on our experience in Phase 1, we hereby submit Phase 2's RFP for GLP's exclusive consideration. We note here that in that proposal submission GLP articulated its proposed activities and costs for all three phases. In an email exchange with GLP⁵, St. V's opted only to award phase 1 and left open possibilities for a new Request for Proposal (RFP) for each of the two remaining phases.

For Phase 2 please submit a proposal that covers the following:

⁵ Jeanette Romkema <jeanette@globallearningpartners.com> sent Monday, November 1, 2021 at 10:43 AM to Amber Hendricks <amberhendricks4880@gmail.com>

1. A description of how you would use existing data, develop a data collection plan, and collect new information.
2. A description of how you would link phase 1 to phase 2 and phase 2 to a future phase 3.
3. A description of your methodologies that inspire “listening and discerning” the word of God.
4. An activity plan with a timeline.
5. A description of potential support required from St. V's Phase 2 committee and/or others, including volunteers as facilitators or scribes.
6. A training plan for St. V's volunteers. Given your experiences with our volunteers, what recommendations do you have for providing additional training?
7. Based on your experience in Phase 1, outline any changes to how Phase 2 would cast a wide net of current and former parishioners. Are there other key informants to be tapped? Please describe who and how they could be engaged in the process.
8. Due to COVID restrictions, Phase 1 used virtual technology. We are now regularly meeting at liturgies and other events. Please consider options other than virtual.
9. In your initial proposal, your output was a draft report. Please clarify what you mean by a draft report.
10. In Phase 1, we know GLP provided additional hours not budgeted. Please provide suggestions for how we can stay on target.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

- A. Start date: August 15, 2022
- B. September and October for data collection, analysis, and formulating recommendations.
- C. Ideally, we would like to complete all data collection and key informant activities before October 30. (November is a full month for us with our Celebration of All Saints/All Souls Day, our annual craft fair, and Thanksgiving).
- D. Between November 1 and November 15, GLP sends a report on their findings.
- E. From November 15 to 30, a parish editorial board drafts the vision statement.
- F. First Sunday in Advent (November 27): a town hall meeting to affirm the statement.
- G. Release of final statement 3rd Sunday in Advent (December 11).

COMMUNICATIONS WITH GLP:

The project manager, Mary Hennigan, will serve as the point person for GLP.

PROPOSAL FORMAT

1. Please use the attached proposal format
2. Include a table with activities, roles/responsibilities (GLP and St. V's), cost, and time requirements. (Template attached)

Appendix 1: The Finding Our Why Working Group

- Fr. Ray Chase, Pastor
- Colleen McCahill, Pastoral Associate
- Catherine Mundy, Parish Council Representative
- Aiden Heile, Parish Council Representative
- Lindsay Dierkes, Vice President, Parish Council
- Mary Hennigan, Project Manager, Parish Council Representative

Final

Appendix 2: **Proposal Format**

PROJECT NAME: FINDING OUR WHY: Phase 2 Vision

General Organization Information

1. Name
2. Address
3. Website
4. Contact information for this proposal

Proposal Summary:

Briefly summarize your proposal

Situational Analysis:

Given your knowledge of us from Phase 1 briefly describe the strengths and challenges that might impact us in achieving the objective laid out in our RFP

Implementation Description

A description of how you would use existing data, develop a data collection plan, and collect new information.

A description of how you would link phase 1 to phase 2 and phase 2 to a future phase 3.

1. A description of your methodologies that inspire “listening and discerning” the word of God.
2. A description of potential support required from St. V's Phase 2 committee and/or others, including volunteers as facilitators or scribes.
3. A training plan for St. V's volunteers. Given your experiences with our volunteers, what recommendations do you have for providing additional training?
4. Based on your experience in Phase 1, outline any changes to how Phase 2 would cast a wide net of current and former parishioners. Are there other key informants to be tapped? Please describe who and how they could be engaged in the process.
5. Due to COVID restrictions, Phase 1 used virtual technology. We are now regularly meeting at liturgies and other events. Please consider options other than virtual.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Please describe how we might monitor and evaluate plan for Phase 2.

Transition to Phase 3

Please describe how the proposed activities, outcomes and outputs will set us up for Phase 3 goal of a strategic objective.

Management

In Phase 1, GLP incurred considerable extra time then contracted. Please list your management recommendations for mitigating such problems in this phase.

Staffing

Please identify your proposed staffing for this project , their roles and time commitment.

Budget

Please submit a detailed budget for each activity you propose, and any other costs associated with the implementation of your proposal

Project Summary Table

Activity	Time req.	Roles/resp	cost
Total			