Develop a Concept Paper

The heart of a new program proposal is a concept paper that answers the following questions:

- What is this program about?
- Why is this program needed?
- What will program participants be able to do upon graduation?
- Who are the intended students?

The concept paper is a two or three page document that lays the groundwork for the new program proposal.

How Will the Concept Paper Be Used?

The program concept paper is a central document from which the needs assessment, the detailed program development, and the full, formal proposal flow. Here are several ways your concept paper can be a valuable tool:

1. It communicates your School’s intent to create a new program to stakeholders within BCIT (e.g., your program area, other Schools, service departments, EdCo, and the like).
2. It enables BCIT reviewers (i.e., EdCo and the Office of the VP Academic) to give approval to proceed with the needs assessment and full proposal development.
3. It focuses the needs assessment on the essentials of the new program.
4. It enables rethinking and revision, if needed, before further effort and time are spent on the details of the program and formal proposal.
5. It gives operational and stakeholder groups a “heads up” to the new program, allowing them to give you timely information.
6. It assists all parties with detailed curriculum building, course outline development, and operational planning.
7. It provides the platform for making your case as you write the proposal document and its appendices.
8. It provides general promotional copy for Banner, BCIT Web site, and other publicity materials.
9. After implementation, the program concept (especially aims and goals) will become key in curriculum and program reviews.

What Information Is in a Concept Paper?

A concept paper has five main sections:

- Purpose/Rationale
- Program aim and goals
- Delivery methods
- Teaching approach
- Potential students
The content of these sections is described below. This structure can be used to describe any type of program from associate certificate all the way to a degree. Keep in mind that the majority of individuals reading your concept paper may have little or no understanding of your area of practice.

**Purpose/Rationale**

Begin the concept paper by stating the name of the credential. The name is critical, as it reflects both the intended credential and the general occupational area. A hypothetical example is as follows:

> The School of Manufacturing, Electronics, and Industrial Processes is proposing a two-year Diploma of Technology in Widget Morphology program.

Provide a brief (two paragraphs) description of the purpose and rationale for developing a new program. For example:

> The proposed program is designed to support employment opportunities in an emerging sector of widget technology. Widget technology is a specialized and integral part of the development and manufacture of widget products, which are used in a wide variety of industries.

> There are two dramatic changes happening in the widget industry: a remarkable change in technology and a change in employee demographics. The new technology introduced in this sector is changing the operations, manufacture, and the distribution of this product. Employees entering the industry require the knowledge and tools to keep pace with this rapid evolution. And like all industries in North America, the long expected retirement of baby boomers is beginning—leaving a significant need for skilled people to replace them. This demand for qualified workers will only increase in the coming years.

**Program Aim and Goals**

The program aim describes the overall purpose of the program in terms of satisfying employment needs and meeting BCIT’s mandate. Distinctive characteristics, target audience, linkages with other educational institutions, agencies, and accrediting bodies and associations may all be included in the statement of program aims.

Describe in very broad terms the employment sector and how the program will prepare graduates for employment within it. This statement might read as follows:

> The Diploma of Technology in Widget Morphology is a two-year program that will deliver a broadly based, technically current curriculum on the practical and applied aspects of widget morphology. The program is designed to prepare graduates for technologist and junior supervisory positions within the widget design, manufacturing, supplier, and maintenance sectors of this new growth industry. In addition to providing technical skills in measurement, design, and manufacturing processes, the program will prepare graduates who can work well in a team environment and apply problem-solving skills to a range of real-world situations. The proposed program is supported by the Association of Widget Morphology (BC) and will prepare graduates to write the industry certification examination required for employment in this field.
Goals are written at a high level so that employers as well as students can readily understand what graduates are able to demonstrate competence in (what they will be able to ‘do’) on program completion. Bear in mind that courses and learning outcomes will be designed to support actual student achievement of the broad goal statements. These statements describe the conceptual framework of your curriculum. In addition, program goals are one of the key criteria used to assess not only student achievement, but also program performance.

To ensure your program’s goals are aimed at the appropriate level for the proposed credential, please refer to BCIT Credential Standards in Policy/Procedure 5401.

Here’s what the goals for our hypothetical example might look like:

On completion of the Diploma of Technology in Widget Morphology, graduates will have the skills needed to perform effectively as a member of a widget morphology team. Specifically, our graduates will be able to:

- Perform site visits to accurately assess technical requirements for safe and efficient equipment installation.
- Prepare basic specifications and working drawings of parts used in the manufacture of morph and non-morph widgets, applying knowledge of manufacturing materials and processes.
- Assist a working group in adapting standard widget specifications for custom applications.
- Supervise the safe handling and transport of hazardous and non-hazardous materials
- Develop logistics and implementation plans in consultation with a project team.
- Apply current laws and regulations to the aspects of design, manufacture, and installation for which she or he is responsible.
- Demonstrate initiative and creativity in technical troubleshooting and problem-solving.
- Prepare written reports using appropriate terminology, graphic representation, and supporting documentation.
- Use current office, Internet, and application-specific software for routine documentation, design, and communication purposes.
- Locate and review articles on emerging technical developments pertinent to the WM field.
Delivery Methods
Even at the concept paper stage, some thought should be given to how the program will be delivered. This should be based on the needs of potential students and employers as well as the content and program goals. Delivery methods include classroom, blended, and online options.

Teaching Approach
The teaching approach should also be considered at the concept paper stage. This is a brief description that will be further developed in the proposal. Some examples of teaching approach include case-based learning, collaborative learning, and problem-based learning.

Potential Students
Be realistic about the likely appeal of your program and list prospective students from primary target to lesser target groups. To continue the hypothetical example:

*The Diploma of Technology in Widget Morphology is an entry-level program that will attract candidates who:*

- Have successfully completed secondary school and who are seeking a career in a growth area
- Are seeking a change of career and who may already have educational credentials from GED, to a diploma in another field, to BSc. level
- Are new Canadians with foreign credentials seeking to obtain a valid Canadian credential and industry certification

*Candidates lacking in academic foundation skills will be advised to take the BCIT Technology Entry program, or selected coursework as needed. Prior learning may be assessed for advance placement on an individual basis.*