Execution Plan Guidelines

The Execution Plan is a "living document" that will change as you begin development and learn more about the implementation challenges of your chosen design. Here we are asking for your best understanding as to how development will proceed.

The Execution Plan is your opportunity to share with the Foundation how you intend to turn your Game Concept into a playable prototype with the $100,000 NOVA Fellows grant. We are particularly interested in how you plan to structure development over the roughly 6–12 months that NOVA funding can support.

The Execution Plan is intended to be a short document, just one or two pages; it gives your best estimates for project start and end dates, your personal role and commitment to the project, other staffing needs, and milestone targets.

If you are selected as a Fellow, NOVA will check with you to make sure that nothing has changed regarding your ability to commit to the project (e.g. you haven't accepted employment somewhere) and assign a Producer. You'll work with that Producer to establish realistic budgeting for the $100,000 grant, validate your staffing assumptions, and establish a milestone payment schedule. Once that's agreed upon, you'll sign the grant agreement and begin work.

The Producer is a key part of the process. Game development is unpredictable; the Producer will work with you as design goals change and implementation challenges present themselves. The Producer will also review progress at the end of each milestone. Your Game Concept document describes the game that you've committed to make, but you can pivot to something a bit different as long as the Producer agrees with the change. Changes to staffing and milestones will also need the Producer's approval. NOVA's intent is to provide a good level of flexibility while still ensuring that the funding results in at least a vertical slice of the game.

With that as background, here's what you'll need to include in the Execution Plan:

Availability and Commitment

This is a brief statement describing your availability to drive the development of the game. Depending on your personal circumstances, you may need to explain:

- whether you can start immediately, or need to wait until after graduation, a post-graduation break, or another commitment
- whether you can work continuously on the project, or will need to take scheduled time off due to other commitments

NOVA's support isn't contingent on starting the project immediately, but we would like to keep the cohort of Fellows roughly together. For that reason, we'd prefer that projects start no later than September; we will consider later starts as circumstances warrant. You will need to commit to making the project your primary (if not exclusive) focus, as we at NOVA want to give this opportunity to those who can make the most of it.

Here are some sample statements:

> *I've already graduated, so if named as a Fellow I can start the project immediately. The project will be my primary focus.*

> *I will graduate in May, but have committed to a three-month internship immediately thereafter. I can make the project my exclusive focus from August.*

Staffing and Game Development Roles

While the Fellow is free to be a solo creator (à la Lucas Pope), most projects will involve additional people or resources. These may be full-time or part-time collaborators, individual contractors, or outside companies providing specialized services such as sound design.

In this section, briefly describe your own role, the additional people or resources you plan to use, and when they will join the project. Here are some sample statements:

> *This project will be created by me and another full-time collaborator I've already identified*
>
> - *My skill set is programming and audio*
> - *My collaborator will take on the artwork and design, starting at project kickoff*

> *I will drive the overall vision and artwork. I will bring on two additional full-time team members:*
>
> - *A programmer, who will join at the start of the project*
> - *A level designer, who will start in the third month of the project*
>
> *Audio will be created by a contractor, also starting in the third month of the project*

> *I will be the sole creator of the project, including programming, design, artwork and audio*

Other Expenses

In addition to compensation for the people working to develop the project, there may be other expenses. In this section, briefly list any significant additional expenses you expect to incur in developing your playable prototype, e.g. hardware, workspace rental, content licensing. At the $100,000 funding level, many software and middleware licenses are free or inexpensive, so only list exceptional costs.

Here are some sample notes on expenses:

> *Expenses will be minimal, as the team already has laptops suitable for development. Asset licensing may be a moderate expense, perhaps $5,000.*

> *Each team member will need a desktop PC with dual monitors. The team will share a small rented office.*

Project Milestones

In this section, provide the project's start and end dates, along with timing and deliverables for each milestone.

Milestones should be spaced out roughly every two months. If you won't be starting the project immediately on being named a Fellow (e.g. you have not graduated yet or you have ongoing other commitments), you can have a "Project Kickoff" milestone and use some of your NOVA Fellows grant funding to purchase computers and software. Acquiring those in advance will allow you to make a faster start when you do begin work on the project for real.

For each development milestone, you will need to describe:

- The gameplay mechanics, artwork and other features expected to be complete at that time. A few sentences should suffice. The final milestone must deliver what you committed to create with NOVA funding in your Game Concept document.
- Any planned staffing additions at that milestone, e.g. your staffing plan might call for a level designer to join at MS2.

Here's a sample set of project milestones, though it is missing the project specifics in the deliverables.

> *Development Start Date: 7/1/2027*
>
> *Development End Date: 2/29/2028*

Milestone	Start Date	End Date	Deliverables
Project Kickoff	4/1/2027	6/30/2027	Procure equipment (and arrange workspace, if needed)
MS1	7/1/2027	8/31/2027	Describe MS1 targets
MS2	9/1/2027	10/31/2027	Describe MS2 targets and any planned staffing additions
MS3	11/1/2027	12/31/2027	Describe MS3 targets and any planned staffing additions
MS4	1/1/2028	2/29/2028	Final staffing; deliverable matching the Game Concept document

NOVA Luminary Grants

As you approach completion of the work funded by the NOVA Fellows grant, you may apply for a NOVA Luminary grant of $500,000. The key aspects of your application are your playable prototype and an updated Game Concept document that reflects how the game has evolved during development.

Applications for the NOVA Luminary grants will be considered quarterly, at the start of January, April, July and October. You may want to take that schedule into account when planning the end of your project. You can apply during your final milestone using a WIP playable prototype, or afterward using your final deliverable.

If you wish, you may indicate when you intend to apply for a NOVA Luminary grant, e.g.:

> *My intent is to apply for a NOVA Luminary grant in April 2028.*

Risk Assessment

If you wish, you may include some notes on what you view as the largest risk or risks to completing your playable prototype by the end of grant funding, and how you might address them.

Here are some sample statements:

> *The largest risk would appear to be validation of game mechanic XYZ by the end of MS1. This is needed so that the world construction in MS2 and MS3 can proceed smoothly. If the mechanic isn't working as intended, we'll need to have a discussion with the Producer; possibilities might include pivoting to a new concept for the mechanic, or revising MS2 and MS3 to allow for delayed world construction.*

> *The largest risk is that the story won't be sufficiently engaging or the main character sufficiently relatable. My strategy will be to start early and iterate often, bearing in mind that iteration has production and timeline impacts.*