

THE TAXONOMY OF PROJECT DEFINITIONS

The words “objective” and “goal” are sometimes used interchangeably. However, goals and objectives are actually separate items that have their own unique and important roles. In project management, you may encounter several descriptions of aspirations, intentions, and needs for an organization or project. Here are definitions of some commonly used project management terms, to help provide a better understanding of how project objectives fit in the vernacular:



1. **Vision Statement** - A statement that expresses the high-level intention of a project (often with lofty or unachievable goals). For example, a school may aim for perfect pupil attendance or a company may strive for 100% customer satisfaction.
2. **Business Goals** - A company creates these to describe the overall outcomes it wants to accomplish in a certain time frame. Business goals are captured in business plans.
3. **Goals** - A high-level, broad, non-specific, and long-term definition of what the group or organization wants to accomplish. Goals are not measurable, and several discrete projects may be needed to achieve a goal. Some people say that project goals do not need to be defined, so long as a project manager understands the business goals. However, project objectives are

always needed. In a business, project goals are influenced by business goals.

4. **Objectives** - Influenced by goals, an objective is a low-level description of the specific and measurable outcomes desired from a project. Activities and most likely deliverables will contribute to achieving the objective. The project and its objectives must always contribute to the goal, otherwise the project should not be attempted.
 - a. **Bottomline:** Goals are high-level, general statements about the aims of the project, while objectives are detailed statements about what the project should accomplish.
 - b. **Activities** - This is what your team will do to achieve the objective. An activity can be a specific action or a process, and many activities will likely be involved to meet objectives. As with everything in project management, the key consideration for activities is that they contribute directly to achieving the objective, and thereby the goal.
5. **Deliverables** - A specific, tangible product or thing, like a report or a software app. One or more deliverables may contribute to achieving an objective, but it is important not to define the objective as a deliverable. In other words, if the objective is written at too low a level, you risk creating the wrong deliverables. Rather, the objective is there to guide you and the team to determine what products or processes are needed. For example, say you have difficulty falling asleep each night. You may decide that your objective is to buy relaxing chamomile tea. Drinking the tea might help, but if your objective had been to ensure at least seven hours of sleep a night by the following month, you might have explored other solutions that would have greater benefits, such as making sure to get an hour of exercise every day.

Requirements - A description of features and functions. Objectives should not include features and functions.