



Forms and Phases of the Sponsored Program Proposal Preparation Process An Overview

Preparing a grant for submission for external funding is a multi-phased process. Some grants are fairly small and well defined and can be prepared without a lot of effort or outside support. Many others, however, are complex, large, and resource intensive to prepare. The Director of the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) tries to match the level and timing of formal review and approval of proposals with the complexity and level of effort likely needed to move from a general idea to a competitive and University-approved grant submission. There are 4 progressively more formal phases to preparing a grant proposal. These phases are:

- 1) Initial exploration of potential topics and funding sources;
- 2) Preliminary planning phase with more development of basic ideas for a project;
- 3) Definitive request for University support of your efforts to pursue a specific funding opportunity;
- 4) Submission of the approved proposal to the funding agency.

There are no clear rules about when a proposal is ready to move from one phase to the next because each proposal is fairly unique. Your dean and the Director, OSP can help you determine when it is time to move to the next phase. The complexity, size, and potential institutional impact will affect the level of formality of the process. Simple, straightforward, and low risk projects may start right out at phase 3. More complex, costly, and time intensive projects are wise to move carefully through all 4 phases. The OSP has developed several forms to help guide the process. The forms will be used in calendar year 2016 and then re-assessed for modifications in 2017.

Phase 1: Informal, exploratory discussions

Anyone with an idea for an external grant project is encouraged to engage in exploratory brainstorming with at least three different groups:

- 1) The Director of OSP, for initial advice on potential funders and their likely interest in your topic area. The Director may also be aware of other faculty at the University who have expressed interest in similar topics. This may provide opportunities for collaborative efforts or mutual support of endeavors.
- 2) Your dean / division head and or supervisor for insights into the potential barriers and facilitators of pursuing external funding at this time; and
- 3) Peers both within and outside the University with applicable content expertise. Use them to brainstorm ideas and program objectives. Ask them to critically assess your logic about the need and unique contribution of the potential project. Where are the 'holes' in your idea or concept that you need to investigate further?

Phase 2: Preliminary Planning (PreP) Worksheet

The [PreP Worksheet](#) is recommended for use in the early phase of formulating your grant proposal idea: describing the idea; self-assessing strengths and weaknesses, cost/benefit of pursuing the project (for you and for the University); and thinking about other people or departments to be involved in the project.

You are encouraged, but not required, to share the completed form with others: Your dean, supervisor, peers, and the Director, OSP. These individuals can provide feedback, identify potential barriers to a successful proposal, and help identify ways to overcome these barriers.

The Director, OSP can keep this information in a master folder to alert you to relevant funding sources that come across her desk or of other faculty she is aware of with similar research interests.

All grant proposals are evaluated for approval using the [Strategic Factors- Grantseeking Assessment \(SF-GSA\)](#) criteria agreed to by the deans and academic leadership. Early identification and correction of potentially

low scoring factors should help you move forward successfully with the proposal. You are encouraged to keep the 10 criteria in mind as you build the proposal.

Phase 3: Request University support to pursue an external funding opportunity

This phase is initiated once you have a fairly solid idea of the specific nature of the project and have targeted a specific sponsoring agency. Generally, it is at this point that you want/need to more intensively use the resources of the OSP to help move the project forward and you need to start working even more intensely to prepare a definitive application. Before moving into this more time and resource intensive phase, it is important to have confirmation that the concept has the support of the University in terms of the commitment of resources necessary to complete the application, cost/benefit considerations, and consistency with the mission of the university/school.

It is at this point that the [*'Request for University Support to Pursue External Funding' \(Pursue\)*](#) form should be completed. This form serves as an assessment tool for examining the viability of the project prior to you and others investing substantial time preparing a definitive proposal. At this point, the investigator should have delineated the vision for the project, identified a grant agency, examined facilitators and barriers to success, and considered deadlines, likely scope of the budget, and impact. This form itself is an expansion of the PreP worksheet. Your project should be discussed with the Dean or division head and the Director of the OSP, both of whom complete the [*SF-GSA*](#) items. The dean, in collaboration with the Director of OSP, will confirm support for pursuing the proposal.

Phase 4: Developing and Submitting the Definitive Proposal

This is the final phase of preparing a proposal for submission entered into once approval to pursue has been received. For most grants, only one individual can be designated Principal Investigator (PI). The PI is responsible for writing the proposal. However, the OSP will secure the appropriate application forms, either paper or electronic, and will review the technical proposal and provide technical editorial assistance. The PI is now working with whatever application form is specific to that grant agency. OSP and/or the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness can assist with data required to develop a background or needs statement and the development of an evaluation plan. Well-defined statement of need and evaluation/assessment plans are critical components of all federal and private grant applications.

The OSP will work with the PI, the Office of Grants and Contracts in Financial Affairs, and the Sponsor's Program Officer(s) to ensure that: (1) the budget/budget narrative/financial plan are adequate to support the successful completion of the proposed project, (2) all costs are allowable and consistent with University and Sponsor policies and requirements, (3) institutional contributions are coordinated with the appropriate offices, and (4) applicable fringe benefit rates and overhead/indirect costs are correctly calculated and applied. OSP and the Office of Grants and Contracts in Financial Affairs will also assist with writing the budget narrative/justification.

The final proposal goes through a University administrative review and approval prior to submission to the grant agency. Only the Director of OSP is authorized to submit sponsored program proposals for the University. OSP may delegate this submission authority to a PI on a case-by-base process and if granted, that authorization will be in writing via email. The level of approval required depends on the size of the grant. At a minimum, your dean and the University's Authorized Organizational Representative for sponsored programs (currently the associate dean for graduate studies) must sign off on all proposals before they are submitted. Larger grants may require review and approval by the Provost, VP for Financial Affairs, and or the University President. Keep this process in mind as you consider grant submission deadline. The Director of OSP will work with you to confirm the level of approval required for your specific proposal.