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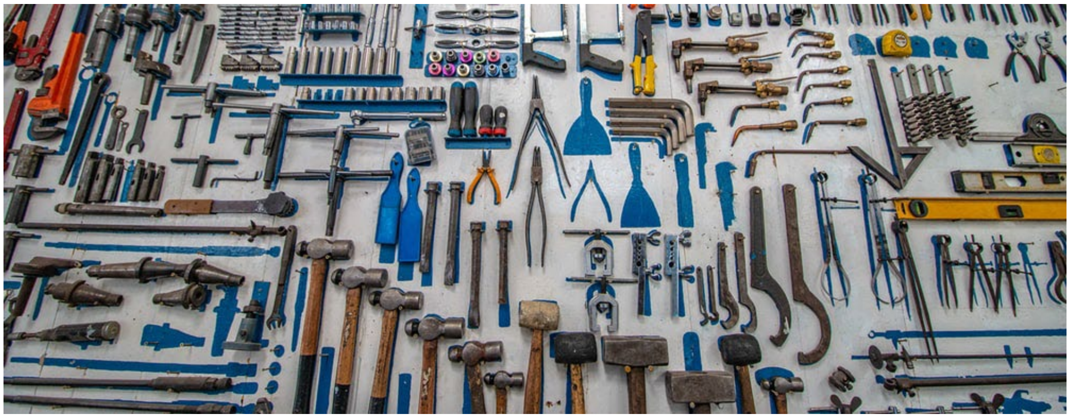
PI Toolkit



This document provides guidance to create a proposal.

The information applies whether the funder is a federal agency, corporation, or a foundation.

Each funder will likely have unique templates and forms to use; however, the guidance provided can be used in conjunction with funder’s documents and guidelines.

The following tools work together to support the development of proposals:

- Creating a concept paper: offers suggestions for putting together a document to express your project ideas
- Contacting a program officer: provides tips to reaching out to a program officer to request a review of your concept paper
- Preparing to meet with potential partners: gives advice on reaching out to partners and following up
- Writing a narrative: suggests ways to create your proposal using the funding notice
- Building a budget: presents strategies to write your budget based on your narrative

Writing a Concept Paper

You have a research idea that you want to support with grant funds.

Before submitting a proposal, it is beneficial to put together a concept paper. This document will help you capture your thoughts and get started on developing a proposal draft.

The benefits of writing a concept paper include:

- can be shared with a program officer
- can help determine if your project fits with a funding opportunity
- can help in refining your project idea
- can be used to find funding opportunities

Ideas to incorporate into the document:

- how will your work contribute to knowledge, research? does it build on other research, or fill a gap?
- why is this approach the best to use? has anyone else tried this approach? if so, what was the result?
- how is your approach innovative?
- how will your project support the mission, goals, objectives of the funding source?
- why is your team the best choice to receive funding for this project? what experience does your team have?

The next few pages provide additional guidance on creating a concept paper. The document was created by Kelly Basinger, UNT grant proposal manager (GPM) from the Advanced Environmental Research Institute, in the College of Science.

Concept Paper Outline

Funders often ask for brief 1- to 5-page concept papers/white papers prior to submission of a full proposal. This helps them save time by eliminating ideas that are not likely to be funded.

Applicants may use concept papers in any of the following ways:

- to interest potential funders
- to develop potential solutions or investigations into project ideas
- to determine whether a project idea is fundable
- to serve as the foundation of a full proposal

The Five Elements of a Concept Paper

1. The first section, the Introduction, identifies how and where the applicant's mission and the funder's mission intersect or align. It addresses the reasons why the funder should support projects in the given general area. It also introduces the applicant's partners and shows why the partners want to participate in the project.
2. Second is the Purpose or Need or Rationale, which outlines what others have written about the general topic and focuses on the gap in knowledge to be filled, the problem to be solved, or the need to be addressed by the applicant's proposed project. Similar to a literature review, this section allows the applicant to state the purpose or need in such a way that the applicant's project is the best possible solution to the problem. Also, it often provides statements addressing the significance of the project (showing why the project should be supported).

In some cases, these first two sections are merged into a Background section that both introduces the alignment between the two organizations' missions and provides the need statement.

3. Third is the Project Description, functioning as the solution to the problem, the answer to the need, or the investigation that will fill the knowledge gap. In this section, the applicant addresses the unique, unusual, distinctive, innovative, and/or novel aspects of the approach, showing why the applicant's team has the best solution and presenting a compelling case for funding.

The project description includes the project's Goals and Objectives. A goal is an abstract state of being, a condition, an end, or an aspiration while objectives are statements of measurable outcomes that, collectively, will help the applicant measure progress toward accomplishing the project goal(s). For example, a goal might be to improve student academic performance via a structured professional development program for teachers, while an objective might be to offer a specific kind of workshop or seminar on a particular topic for a defined set of teachers in a K-12 school district.

The project description also includes an overview of the project's Methodology (sometimes called Project Activities or Action Plan or Approach). The goals, objectives, and methods (or activities) will need to align closely with each other and will need to be accomplished within the proposed Timeline, expressed in either months or years. The methods or activities will need to be congruent with or based on what has been tried in the field in the past, they must be based on empirical evidence, and they will need to be both reasonable in cost and complexity and accomplishable within the proposed timeline.

The project description typically concludes with a statement of Benefits (or Anticipated Outcomes) along with a description of who will benefit and how.

4. The fourth section, Support or Budget, contains either (1) an outline of the main budget categories for the requested project support or (2) a single bottom-line amount of the request and a brief discussion of how that amount will be used. Some concept papers may not even include an amount requested.
5. The fifth and final section provides the Contact Information of the applicant organization's chief executive or his/her designee authorized to make funding requests.

Contacting a Program Officer

Now that you have a concept paper ready to share, it is time to send it to the funding agency's program officer.

The contact's name and email address should be located in the funding announcement.

If you are early on in your career or new to writing grants, it is common to feel apprehensive about reaching out to a program officer.

Please know that the majority of program officers do not mind receiving email messages with questions and an attached concept paper. They typically respond to inquiries and want to support faculty members in creating proposals that align with the funder's mission.

Here are some strategies for contacting a program officer:

- send a brief introductory email as a first step
- attach a one-page document concept paper
- ask the program officer if they will review your paper and offer feedback
- include the name of the solicitation in your email as a reference

The next few resources offer additional advice on reaching out to program officers.

See the article about contacting a PO here.

Additional resources:

https://nexus.od.nih.gov/all/2020/10/05/program-officials-are-here-to-help/

https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-to-say-and-not-say-to-program-officers/

https://www.nia.nih.gov/research/blog/2021/05/communicating-with-program-officers

https://beta.nsf.gov/science-matters/nsf-101-5-tips-how-work-nsf-program-officer

Preparing to Meet with Potential Partners

After you have created a concept paper, received feedback from a program officer, and plan to move forward with a proposal, you might need partners for your project. These partners may be from UNT, or external. The process is fairly similar for contacting an internal or external partner.

Here are a few suggestions when preparing to meet with partners:
When scheduling a meeting:

- include the funding notice in the meeting request
- provide a brief outline of the project (or share the concept paper)

For the meeting:

- create a preliminary agenda for your use and review (it can be shared during the meeting)
- be prepared to provide an overview of the funding notice
- offer key points (due date, funding amount, number of awards, special requirements)
- share information about partners being sought and who is already on board
- determine if any funding will be offered or available to the partner
    - INTERNAL: faculty course buyout? percent of summer salary?
    - EXTERNAL: subcontract?
    - If funding is not available, advise your partners

After sharing the preliminary information:

- be prepared to ask what you are seeking from them
    - subaward documents (Grants and Contract Specialist (GCS) and proposal manager (GPM) can assist with this step)
    - letter of support/letter of collaboration (template and content can vary by funding source; proposal manager can assist with this step)
    - advisory board participation (determine if the funding notice requires any documents; proposal manager can assist with this step)
    - role in proposal development (will the partner need to provide any proposal content?)
    - request for other partners (request 'warm' email introduction from them to the new partner)

Outline next steps:

- Timeline for commitment (when is a response needed? proposal manager can assist with this step)
- outline follow up time
    - let the partner know your deadline for feedback
    - when will you contact them? or will they contact you?
    - ask for a response by the next week
    - determine if they are able to make the decision to commit or need someone else to commit

Contact your potential partners as soon as possible, and as early in the proposal development process as possible.

Writing the Narrative

After you have your proposal partners identified and involved, it is time to write the proposal narrative. For this step, be sure review the following information provided in the funding notice:

FORMATTING: Each funder has specific requirements regarding page limits, margins, font size, and other formatting. GCS will review your proposal for compliance with funder formatting requirements.

*Please note that funders typically have an agency grant manual with additional information. If you do not find information in the funding notice, refer to the agency grant manual for additional details. If the funding notice differs from the agency grant manual, the funding notice typically takes precedence. Check with your proposal manager and/or a funding agency point of contact to confirm (may be a different contact than the program officer). Determine which document takes precedence (solicitation versus grant manual) as you create the narrative.

TIMELINE: Determine your timeline for writing the proposal.

- refer to the RFP for required components
- pull all necessary components from the RFP and copy them into a separate document

Consider how much time is needed for activities such as:

- getting the project started
- hiring students
- hiring staff (and how will their position be funded after the grant ends)
- implementing the program
- collecting and analyzing data

EVALUTION: How much time will your project need to see results? Is your project long enough to generate results?

CREATING THE DRAFT: Look at the language in the funding notice – use that language where necessary and where it would naturally occur.

Be sure to write the proposal using simple, clear, and direct language. Avoid jargon whenever possible.

SPECIFIC LANGUAGE – TEMPLATES: your proposal manager will have templates for your use. Contact them for language on these items:

- facilities (which UNT resources are available? Labs? Office space?)
- data management plan
- UNT as an HSI/MSI
- overall UNT template language

OTHER ITEMS:

Attachments: Proposal managers can provide support and guidance on the following documents.

Letters of commitment, Letters of support:

- can be required from internal and external partners
- overall, all letters should:
  - use official letterhead
  - be addressed to the Principal Investigator (unless otherwise specified by the funding notice)

Letters of commitment should:

- outline nature of commitment to the project (depending on funder requirements)
- may include information about cost share (if required by funder)
- refrain from offering an endorsement of the project and PI, team

BIosketch/Résumés- follow the format noted in the funding notice

ScienCV and OrcID – various federal funding sources will accept this format. The funding notice should provide guidance.

Collaborators and Other Affiliations- funding sources may or may not request this information to determine any potential issues for peer reviewers reviewing a proposal.

Current and Pending Support funding sources may or may not request this information to determine availability of team members related to other time commitments.

Other attachments may be requested, depending on the funding source.

Additional steps to consider:

Institutional Review Board – UNT IRB link

Determine early on in the proposal development if an IRB process is required

Initiate that process as soon as possible

Typically, IRB approval is not necessary at the time of proposal submission, but is mandatory for IRB-protected projects prior to receipt of funds.

Check the solicitation and/or contact the program officer to determine the requirement of IRB status for submission.

Also determine if a new IRB is required or if a project already has current IRB approval but requires an additional component.

Building a Budget

"A budget is a plan! It should be developed as you develop your narrative! Your budget should tell the same story as your words."

~Kelly Basinger
UNT GPM, AERI

Before starting on the budget, determine if you are funding a new idea or expansion of an idea.

Budget funds should only supplement the funding of your project. They must not supplant the project with new grant funds. Determine what the expected award amount is, as noted in the funding notice.

Then, outline all costs:

- Determine if this project is a long-term project (need funding to be sustained when the project concludes) or short term (concludes when the grant ends)
- Identify what you are requesting from the funder. What type of support do you need?
- Support for your time/effort on the project?
    - Course release, research time, summer time? Are you on a nine-month or twelve-month contract?
        - communicate with department chair to gain approval, especially if course release/buyout is needed
        - RCOB policies on course releases
            - only one course release can be granted per academic year
            - funding for the course release in a proposal budget must equal 10% of faculty annual salary
            - no overload is permitted with a course release

*Please note that funds from a proposal do not provide funds in addition to your current salary. Proposal funds only replace a source of funds for your salary; they provide a different, **not an additional**, source for salary.

- Administrative:
    - person to be hired or current administrative support person?
    - does that person have time to participate?
    - if you hire an administrative person, how will that person continue to be employed should grant funding conclude?
- Students (salaried RA pay plans):
    - undergraduate, graduate, doctoral: do you already have students in mind or need to recruit and hire?
    - graduate students working 50% of more require tuition support equivalent to their work effort
- Subaward/subcontract:
    - required documents: scope of work, budget, budget justifications template
    - as soon as possible – need to provide Grants and Contracts Specialist (GCS) contact information for external partners submitting documents for a subcontract

- Travel:
  - are there required meetings/conferences indicated in the funding notice?
  - who needs to attend?
  - does your project require travel for any other reason?
- Consultants:
  - cannot be any UNT employee; need paperwork completed; GCS can assist with this process
- Equipment:
  - include quote for estimated purchase cost; equipment is defined as having a cost of $5,000 or greater, with a life of more than one year
- Other costs (tuition for students)
  - software: must be preapproved; includes warranty?
  - participant costs (training; travel; materials); cannot be decreased on an NSF grant, only increased
  - materials
- IDC (restricted/agency specific/location of work not at UNT): if agency restricted, must have document in writing from the funding agency to confirm restricted rate.

Cost Share: may be required from the funding source. Some types of cost share are acceptable, others are not.

- **Federal funds are not an allowable source of cost share**

If cost share is required, communicate with your proposal manager, department chair, and senior associate dean of research <u>as soon as possible</u> once the decision to develop a proposal is made .

Use the GRAMS budget form to create your budget (located in the main GRAMS page):

- Faculty salary will be prepopulated into the form
  - budget items that extend past year one will include a 3% inflation increase for each subsequent year

Both your proposal manager and GCS can aid with the budget as needed.

<u>Budget Justifications</u>

Must spell out the rationale for the use of funds.

Show how the amounts were calculated:

- faculty percent of effort (how much, and for how many months?)
- fringe benefit rate:
  - differs for faculty, students, and staff
- travel expenses:
  - break out by flight, hotel, per diem, and other expenses
  - list estimate of miles to be travelled (if applicable) and include reimbursement rate per mile
- equipment/materials:
  - include cost per unit

Program Manager (PM) and Grants and Contracts Specialist (GCS) both have budget justifications templates available.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Once you have completed the proposal narrative, budget and justifications, and added the attachments, the GCS will submit on your behalf, depending on the funding source.

As you prepare your proposal, consult with your proposal manager on the draft documents. The proposal manager will provide feedback and suggestions for strengthening the proposal and review the proposal for competitiveness.

The GCS will provide support on making sure your proposal meets the compliance requirements.

Both the PM and GCS are happy to work with you on developing a competitive and compliant proposal!