Office of Sponsored Programs

Grant Administration Panel Discussion

For Principal Investigators/Project Directors

The Office of Sponsored Programs hosted panel discussion sessions for principal investigators who are seeking or managing grant awards. Panelists include experienced investigators and staff experts from across campus. Below are questions and responses from all panel discussions.

EXPERIENCED PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

How do I determine whether a program is a good fit for my project?

P1: Send the program officer a white paper for review and feedback.
P2: Program Officers can be very responsive; they have provided helpful, specific feedback for proposals.
P3: Thoroughly read the RFP. Contact the Program Officer to introduce yourself and discuss the project that you're interested in. Sometimes those Program Officers can provide more information about the call for proposals.
P4: A PI should always consider the size and scope of the project. Look for others within your discipline who have also received funding through the program.

What should I have prepared before calling a Program Officer?

P2: The PI should have as much detail as possible available so you can get the best feedback. This includes measures, specific aims, and being able to talk about why the project is innovative. It would be best to discuss with colleagues first if you don't have much detail.

How do you carve out time for grant writing?

P2: Prioritize and block off time on your calendar that is the best fit for your work style and schedule.
P4: Department support with scheduling is also helpful.

What mistakes have you made that you could warn others against?

P1: I once left out a minor section of a proposal, and it made me realize the importance of all pieces (not just the narrative). I now approach proposals like reviewers are looking for a reason not to fund it; that way I am more motivated to convince them otherwise.
P3: I realized after my project was awarded that I hadn't budgeted for something I needed. Review your budget closely to make sure that all items – student support, materials, travel – are accounted for.
P4: Figure out the timing of using all of your resources within the project period.

How much time does it take to do all of the administrative management tasks that go along with a research grant (i.e. what is the administrative burden)?

P1: It doesn't take a lot of time so long as you are keeping track of purchases every day. Make sure to keep detailed records.
P2: There seems to be a lot of administration time with regard to students, IRB, graduate tuition, etc.
P3: It may be helpful to start with the smaller grants and work your way up to the bigger grants; it is time consuming, but if you're passionate about it then will be worth it.
P4: Student travel can be more complicated than the grant itself; the key is to find what works and stick with it.

Have you had RCAP funding? How did you leverage your RCAP project to be more competitive for external proposals?

P1: I have. It helps to get preliminary data and will strengthen your external proposal.
P2: I have. The RCAP project was helpful to show the initial feasibility of the project for future external proposals.
P3: I used my RCAP project to leverage my first larger grant. It is good training ground on how to manage a grant. I would recommend having an external funder in mind when applying for RCAP.
P4: I have similarly used the RCAP as a pilot study as well.

What advice would you give a new faculty member that has never submitted a grant?

ALL: Be mindful of your budget and the small costs associated with working on your project (per diem for students who travel with you; copies; poster printing, etc.).
P1: Don't take rejections too personally; submit your first proposal with someone who is experienced.
P2: Take the feedback offered and make the changes. Talk to other faculty in your department too. The Kentucky Biomedical Research Infrastructure Network (KBRIN) also offers a training once a year for those interested in KBRIN or NIH programs.
P3: On interdisciplinary proposals, keep your audience in mind and reduce your use of jargon.
P4: Start small; it's okay to start with an internal grant and get your feet wet. Don't be afraid to reach out to those in and out of your area for advice.

INTERNAL GRANTS

Can I pay for a Graduate Assistant with an RCAP?

Yes, RCAP encourages supporting students (directly or indirectly) on your project. This can be hourly paid undergraduate or graduate students, as well as graduate assistantships. However, RCAP does not pay graduate assistant tuition.

Are there restrictions on what is allowed for FUSE and RCAP travel?

RCAP supports travel that is essential to conducting the research and project objectives, but does not fund travel to conferences or to disseminate project results. All travel should follow

university travel policies, be consistent with the approved project budget, occur within the project period, and should be for the least expensive method of travel. Spending guidelines, which include details on travel reimbursement, can be found at: https://www.wku.edu/sponsoredprograms/rcap_award-management.php.

FUSE supports travel for the student to conduct research for the awarded project. FUSE will also support faculty and student travel to conferences for student presentation. Due to the nature of the FUSE awards, all university travel guidelines and policies must be followed. A Spending Guide can be found within the FUSE award document or at https://www.wku.edu/research/fuse_awardee_info.php.

SPONSORED PROGRAMS – PRE-AWARD

What grants are available for technical WKU staff (or how/where can they be found)?

The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) can help match WKU technical staff with a potential opportunity on a case-by-case basis. Please contact our office at proposal.development@wku.edu to set up a meeting to discuss your project so that we may determine the best course of action for your individual project. You may also begin your search with Pivot, a searchable database of funding opportunities available to you as a WKU staff member.

What is the difference between Pre-award and Post-award? How do I know when to contact which?

Pre-award is the dream; post award is the reality. Beggars vs. bankers. The pre-award team will help WKU faculty and staff begin the funding search process, help with proposal development, and process the final submission of the application. When a sponsor notifies you that your application has been selected for funding and the award document comes in, this is typically where the OSP post-award team takes over. If you're ever unsure who to contact, email sponsored.programs@wku.edu and you will be routed accordingly.

How early do I need to contact OSP to let them know that I am planning to submit a proposal?

As soon as possible, but ideally a month in advance of the proposal deadline. OSP reviews and submits proposals on behalf of faculty and staff, and operates on the university schedule throughout the year. Though some sponsor deadlines fall on evenings, holidays, or during breaks, all proposals are submitted by OSP during university business hours. Contacting OSP as soon as possible ensures that our office has the capacity and resources to provide the best service possible to assist with your proposal every step of the way.

How are fellowships similar/different from grants?

Fellowships are typically awarded to the individual and generally have fewer (or no) restrictions on how the funds are spent; grants, however, are awarded to the university and are expected to follow university policies, sponsor guidelines, and uniform guidance. These

are often restricted funds that OSP and GCA help awardees manage according to these guidelines and policies.

Who do I go to (OSP or Philanthropy) to find funding from private organizations (or companies) for my project?

It depends. When in doubt, please reach out to either office. A member of the OSP pre-award team will review the guidelines and communicate with Philanthropy staff as appropriate to facilitate the ultimate submission through the appropriate office.

When searching for funding opportunities, are there any keywords or "hints" to determine whether a grant is a good fit for you (beyond Pivot)?

1) Review the guidelines to verify your eligibility; 2) Predict whether the proposal can be feasibly composed ahead of the deadline; 3) Determine if the project fits the scope and timeline of the sponsor's guidelines. Beyond the big three above, dig to see what projects have been funded in the past. Look for the type of project, scope, location [of the awardee], and dollar amount. If these things look similar to your project, it may be a worthy opportunity.

Once you find a grant you want to apply for, what comes next?

As with the question above: 1) Review the guidelines to verify your eligibility; 2) Predict whether the proposal can be feasibly composed ahead of the deadline; 3) Determine if the project fits the scope and timeline of the sponsor's guidelines. If you can answer "yes" to 1-3, then contact OSP's pre-award team to get started. We will develop a quick reference checklist and timeline to guide the process. If any of the questions above are not clear, still contact OSP for assistance.

What types of things will grants fund? In particular, will grants typically support software, RFID equipment, or professional development?

In short, it depends. Some opportunities are available for equipment, others for training, still more for travel, etc. If you need something specific for your project, be sure to look for "allowable & unallowable costs" in the program's guidelines. Pivot is a good resource to start the search on your own, but the pre-award team in OSP is here to help with that search as well.

If my computer is dated and not suitable for the proposed project, can I include a new computer in my grant proposal budget (or reallocate to purchase a new one)?

It depends. If computers are listed as an unallowable cost in the program guidelines, we are not able to include it in the request. It is the university's responsibility to provide adequate equipment to perform expected job functions, which is why requests for computers for normal functions are not typically allowed. That is, if your project requires a certain specific component that the university is unable to provide, the possibility may exist to add a dedicated computer for the purpose of carrying out the project in your requested budget. Justifying this cost in your budget justification document is a significant piece in establishing the need in terms of your project.

How do I find collaborators within WKU?

In Pivot, navigate to the "Profiles" tab at the top of the page. When redirected, you may either initiate an advanced search, enter keywords into the search bar to narrow the results, or search within specific colleges/departments on this page.

Are there opportunities for administrative departments to partner with an academic area to assist with research related to administrative department needs?

Sure. Collaboration inside and outside of the university is typically viewed favorably by sponsors. You may use the Pivot Profiles tab to search for profiles within the departments.

Where can I access successful proposals to reference as examples?

Our office hosts a funded proposal repository for reference. Proposals range from local to federal and span across campus. The Grants Resource Center (GRC) houses a federally-funded proposal repository as well. Login with username "wku" and password "information" to access the GRC. Navigate to the Funding Resources tab at the top of the page and then Funded Proposal Library to view programs within each sponsor.

Do you have an outline or template that you typically use for proposals?

When a pre-award team member sends the proposal quick reference guide (checklist) it will include links to the program's necessary templates and sponsor outlines, when applicable. Beyond this, faculty may access examples from our funded proposal library by contacting our office to request a particular document.

Do you have a guide or instructions that explain how to include salary and fringe benefits in my budget?

The OSP pre-award team will work with you to determine salary and fringe based on each individual's position, project effort, base salary, and fringe benefits. These calculations are based on the following:

- Fiscal Year begins on July 1 each year (July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 is FY 2020)
- Yearly increases: In estimating salary for the current budget year, the actual budgeted salary is used. For future budget "out years," the standard operating procedure is to include an anticipated 3% salary increase per project year.
- Current fringe benefit rates are updated and posted each year on our FAQ page.
- For reference, you may request a copy of the Excel document OSP uses to develop all internal budget forms for external funding requests. Please contact your OSP pre-award team member at proposal.development@wku.edu.

Please see the OSP FAQ for additional information.

SPONSORED PROGRAMS – POST-AWARD

Who is responsible for record keeping for purchases (PI or Dept.)?

This depends on the college and department. Please check with your department's office associate to determine the appropriate record keeping method for your area.

What is the technical report process (interim/final)? Does this need to be approved or submitted by OSP?

Each award has different expectations for the frequency and content required for project reports (interim, final, annual, etc.). All financial reporting is completed by GCA; however, the PI typically submits technical reports to the sponsor when complete. Please note that any overdue/delinquent technical reports may delay future proposal/award considerations. If you have questions about how or when to submit your technical report, please reach out to OSP at sponsored.programs@wku.edu.

GRANTS AND CONTRACTS ACCOUNTING

What happens after getting a grant? What is the relationship/roles of OSP Post-Award and GCA?

Post Award Non-Financial would be considered the OSP part (Regina Allen and Marilyn Anderson). Once the award is fully executed, OSP prepares the chart of accounts. When the chart is complete it is sent to GCA, who assigns an index number and notifies all of the appropriate parties. At that point, GCA is responsible for expenditure approval, invoicing, and financial reporting through the close of the award.

August 2019