Proposal Planning Checklist

Sponsored Programs Administration

Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA) assists NIU faculty and staff with the development and submission of grant proposals for external funding for scholarly activities. All proposals for external funding must be approved by SPA prior to submission. The following is an overview of the recommended steps to prepare grant proposals at NIU.

Working with Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA)

☐ SPA staff are assigned to departments and units to assist faculty and staff with proposal development and submission. See our Pre-Award Staff Contact list for information.

☐ Early in your proposal planning, contact the SPA Research Development Specialist (RDS) assigned to your department to discuss the internal process and approvals needed. If there are external collaborators, your timeline should also recognize the time their institutional needs to prepare and provide their proposal documents to NIU.

☐ Refer to the SPA deadline policy for internal routing of the proposal and the timeline to finalize and enter information and upload documents into sponsor systems. SPA advises that all the final documents be prepared and **ready to submit two (2) days in advance of sponsor deadlines**; this allows for any unforeseen weather delays or network/computer issues.

Evaluating the funding notice

☐ Once you identify a funding notice, contact your assigned Research Development Specialist (RDS) to discuss the timeline and the required proposal components. Funding notices may be referred to as a Request for Proposal (RFP), Request for Application (RFA), Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) or other type of funding notice.

☐ Carefully review the funding notice for eligibility to submit a proposal for the competition. NIU is often the applicant and must meet the eligibility required of the institution. The PI must also meet any eligibility requirements for individuals as specified by the funding announcement.

☐ Note any funding and budget restrictions.

Planning a proposal timeline

☐ Requirements for the content of grant proposals vary greatly by sponsor. There are multiple components to describe the project, explain your qualifications and expertise to carry out the project, describe the costs of the project, and the general institutional environment. For proposals to be considered by the sponsor, all components must be complete, in compliance with the RFP specifications, and submitted by the deadline. Most federal sponsors will return a proposal without review if an element is not included.

☐ Be prepared to coordinate with additional NIU personnel and units, including your department and college, for proposal content, budget requirements, and compliance regulations.

☐ InfoEd is NIU's database to track and prepare the internal approval of proposals. Before a proposal is submitted to a sponsor, approvals of the proposal and budget are requested from the PI, co-PIs, related Chairs, Associate Deans, Directors, and others that may be involved in the proposal.

☐ Review the application portals required to submit the proposal. Individual registrations are required in some systems (NSF's Fastlane and Research.gov, NIH's Commons and ASSIST). For institutional registrations, SPA will need adequate time to review and register NIU in any new systems needed to submit your proposal.

Coordinating proposal development

Developing a proposal involves strategic planning and coordination of resources. The following items include steps, individuals, and resources that are often involved:

☐ *Planning meetings*: Arrange meetings for all team members and include support staff in relevant meetings.

☐ *Developing documents*: Decide the structure for maintaining and updating proposal documents.

☐ *Communication*: For large collaborative and interdisciplinary proposals, maintain communication with Chairs and Associate Deans regarding the progress and the resources that may be needed.

☐ *Cost share or matching funds*: If the sponsor requires the commitment of cost share or matching funds, confer with your Department Chair first. If other colleges or units are providing funds, the requests are initiated from the PI to the Chair, and then by the Chair to the Associate Dean. The Chair should contact the Associate Dean and Vice President for Research and Innovation Partnerships to discuss the request of matching funds.

- ☐ **Letters of Support or Collaboration**: If letters are required or allowed, send out requests early. If the contact agrees to collaborate, it is usually advisable to draft a letter for the supporter with the basic information requested by the sponsor. Some sponsors are very specific and limit the content of letters.
- ☐ **Budget**: Map out a preliminary budget early in line with sponsor funding caps and allowable ranges. Contact your RDS for a budget template and guidance. Consider estimated costs to carry out the project such as personnel, equipment needs, materials and supplies, data collection needs, costs for dissemination of results, and other associated expenses, as allowable by the sponsor. See SPA [Budgeting Information](#).
- ☐ **Subcontracts and external collaborators**: Start the process early with other university or industry collaborators. The RDS will need the Sponsored Research administrative or assigned contact at your collaborator's institution.
- ☐ **Other Institutional Resources and Compliance**: You may need to contact other NIU offices if the following elements are included in your proposal:
  - ○ High Performance Computing Services? Contact the [Center for Research Computing and Data](#).
  - ○ New space? Confer with you Department Chair about potential space; the Chair will contact the appropriate Associate Dean in charge of facilities to discuss space or renovation.
  - ○ Human Subjects? Contact [Human Subjects](#) for forms and procedures.
  - ○ Vertebrate animals? Contact [Animal Care](#) for forms and procedures.
  - ○ Will toxins or biohazards be involved? Contact [Environmental Health & Safety](#) for forms and procedures.

Developing Common Proposal Components

Become familiar with the requirements for the typical proposal components of the sponsors you will most often access. Refer to the [SPA website section on Roles and Responsibilities](#) for information on the development of the various components. Grant proposal components generally include:

- **Cover Page:** This usually identifies the institution, the PI and co-PIs who plan to implement the project, and the planned dates for the project to start and end. The PI and RDS may need to gather and enter information.
- **Project Summary or Abstract:** While the required content varies by sponsor, it will include an overview of the planned project and may require more specific information. Some sponsors provide a fillable template.
- **Project Description or Narrative:** The sponsor will provide specifications for the content, format, and length of the project description along with the review criteria that will be used to assess or score the proposal. **References** may be in a separate document; check the RFP for the placement of the References.
- **Budget:** The PI identifies budget needs and works with the RDS to develop the budget in accordance with institutional and sponsor regulations. Once finalized and approved, the RDS will usually enter the budget on the application forms or application portals.
- **Budget Justification:** The RDS may prepare a draft for the various sponsor requirements, or the PI may initiate the draft. SPA reviews and finalizes the budget justification.
- **Facilities and Other Resources:** If required, this component includes descriptions of the institutional environment, facilities, and resources such as laboratories and instruments that will be used during the project. If your proposal requires specialized equipment, it may be important to explain how new equipment will be integrated.
- **Biographical Sketches (Biosketches) or CVs:** Sponsors often require a specific format for your Biosketch that provides evidence of your qualifications and expertise. Develop a Biographical Sketch (Biosketch) for NSF, NIH, and some Department of Education programs with [ScienCV.](#)
- **Current & Pending:** This is a listing of all grant awards on which you are currently involved and all proposals that you have pending with sponsors. The list usually includes external and internal awards and proposals. Most sponsors require a Current & Pending list at the proposal stage, but some, including the NIH, request it at a later stage in their proposal review process.
- **Data Management Plan:** Sponsors may have specifications for the dissemination and sharing of research. For NSF guidelines, see advice by [Directorate](#).

Resources

- SPA website: [Sponsored Programs Administration](#) and the [Award Lifecycle resource](#) section.
- NIU Policy Library, especially the section**:** [Sponsored Funding/Grants and Contracts](#).
- For funding opportunities, see SPIN, a funding database within InfoEd; ask your RDS for links and instructions.
- For federal funding opportunities, see [Grants.gov.](#)