Guidance Memo: Principal Investigator Eligibility

Responsible Office: Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA)

Responsible Officer (title only): Director, Sponsored Programs Administration

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University Policy Reference:Principal Investigator Eligibility

Purpose:

To provide guidance on who can hold the role of PI or Co-PI on a sponsored project. Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators must possess the necessary academic and professional credentials, qualifications, and access to resources to carry out and manage the sponsored award. Serving as an Investigator is a privilege and requires an Investigator to have the requisite experience to oversee the scientific, programmatic and compliance aspects of a sponsored project.

# Definitions:

**PI:** The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for the preparation of the intellectual content for the proposal, determining the direction and conduct of the research or program activities during the project, and selecting, hiring and supervising project staff.

**Co-PI:** A senior member of the key personnel team whose role is similar to that of the PI in determining the intellectual content, direction, and conduct of the research or program activities.

# Procedures:

Eligibility is determined during the pre-award process with consultation between the Principal Investigator and SPA Proposal Coordinator. Roles are recorded and approved in InfoEd, SPA’s proposal routing system.

All NIU permanent employees are eligible to serve as Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator. Permanent employees have an active Employee ID (EMPL ID) at the time of proposal submission and award.

Additional review and approvals are required for non-NIU employees, including those on temporary appointments, to serve as a Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator via the PI Status for Non-NIU Employees process.

# Common Position Roles and Scenarios:

* **Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty, Research Faculty, Librarians and Regular Staff**: Automatically eligible.
* **Incoming Faculty**: May submit proposals with Chair approval if their university appointment is in place on or before the start of the award.
* **Adjunct, Visiting, Emeritus Faculty** follow the PI Status for Non-Employees process .**Graduate Students & Postdocs**: May serve as Co-PI. Can be PI only if required by sponsor, and with an eligible internal Co-PI for award oversight.
* **Argonne or Fermilab Researchers** with a NIU Joint Appointment follow the PI Status for Non-Employees process.

# Disputes Multi-PI Awards:

Project management disputes that cannot be resolved between Investigators will be managed at the department level through the appropriate Chairs and in consultation with the Vice President for Research or their designee. The University Ombudsperson or other academic officials may take part in facilitating these conversations, if deemed necessary.