

**Auburn University**  
Statement of Principal Investigator Eligibility

Adopted by the Office of the Senior Vice President for Research and Economic Development (SVPRED) September 11, 2024

When Auburn University submits proposals to external sponsors and accepts awards for sponsored projects, the university assumes significant financial and legal obligations. Sponsors fund projects based on the professional expertise of the Principal Investigators submitting proposals; however, the formal award is made in the name of Auburn University. Under the general oversight and authority of Auburn University, the Principal Investigator of a sponsored project is the individual who bears primary responsibility for technical compliance, completion of programmatic work, fiscal stewardship of sponsor funds, and compliance with administrative requirements of the project including the responsibility to remain current in all relevant training. Thus, the university must ensure that individuals serving in the capacity of Principal Investigator have the technical competence, regulatory knowledge, and administrative capabilities to conduct a sponsored project.

The following Statement of Principal Investigator Eligibility provides institutional requirements for who may serve as a Principal Investigator (PI), Multiple Principal Investigator (MPI) or Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) on an externally sponsored project at Auburn University (investigator definitions are provided on page 3).

Category 1: Any individual who holds one of the following positions may be identified as a PI, MPI or Co-PI for sponsored activities:

- Tenure track faculty (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor; Archivist II - IV)
- Non-tenure-track research faculty (Assistant Research Professor, Associate Research Professor and Research Professor), and full-time research professionals (Principal Research Scientist/Engineer, Research Engineer IV and above, Research Fellow IV and above)
- Non-tenure-track Extension faculty (Assistant Director, Associate Director, Extension Specialist, Regional Extension Agent, County Extension Coordinator; Assistant Extension Professor, Associate Extension Professor, Extension Professor, 4-H Youth Development Coordinator, and County Extension Director)
- Non-tenure-track AAES faculty (Director of AAES Research Operations, AAES Regional Directors, and the AAES Associate Directors of the Ag Research and Extension Centers)
- Clinical Professors (Assistant Clinical Professor, Associate Clinical Professor and Clinical Professor)
- Director of an approved university Institute or Center; Director of a nonacademic Auburn University unit

Category 2: If the Department Head and Dean or Extension Director is confident in the abilities of an individual, they can authorize one of the persons listed below to serve as a PI, MPI or Co-PI on an externally sponsored project at Auburn University. A letter should be placed with the proposal in the Endeavor system indicating this approval. Alternately, any individual listed below may be identified as a PI for sponsored activities if one of the individuals listed in Category 1 is also named as a Co-PI or MPI on the project:

- Emeriti faculty\*
- Curators
- Archivist I
- Librarian I
- Clinical Lecturers and other clinical positions not in Category 1
- Lecturers and Senior Lecturers

\*Emeriti faculty can only serve as PI on a project when an approved full time Auburn University employee is serving as Co-PI on that project.

Category 3: Any individual who holds one of the following positions may be identified as a PI, MPI or Co-PI for sponsored activities only if one of the individuals listed in Category 1 is also named as a Co-PI or MPI on the project:

- Instructors
- Adjunct/Affiliate faculty
- Resident
- Research Fellow/Engineer III and below
- Postdoctoral Fellow
- Research Associate

Notes:

- The OSVPRED Office of Research Integrity and Compliance monitors PI and Co-PI training and certification requirements. The PI and all members of the project team must remain current on all relevant training.
- On a case-by-case basis, the Department Head and Dean or Extension Director of the performing unit can name other individuals (not identified in the categories, above) to serve as a PI, MPI or Co-PI. In these cases, review and approval by the Senior Vice President for Research and Economic Development is required prior to proposal submission.
- There are cases when funding is available to support general research-related efforts but is not tied to a specific research program. In rare circumstances in which an Auburn University employee wishes to serve as a PI, MPI or Co-PI but does not meet the eligibility criteria set forth above, approval of the Senior Vice President for Research and Economic Development in consultation with the Department Head and Dean is required prior to the start of the project.
- In some cases, a sponsoring agency may have restrictions on who may serve as a PI, MPI or Co-PI on a particular project or program that are more stringent than Auburn University PI eligibility guidelines. In these cases, the sponsor's requirements will take precedence over institutional guidelines for that particular project. In the case where a sponsor may require, allow, or expect an individual to serve as a PI who, under normal Auburn University guidelines would otherwise not be eligible, the individual will have a Category 1 individual serve as a Co-PI for internal purposes and assume responsibility for compliance with sponsor and institutional requirements. Fellowships or other training awards are examples where sponsor and institutional requirements may conflict. Accordingly, graduate and undergraduate students are permitted to apply directly to organizations as PI when required by the sponsor. The student should have an identified Auburn University faculty mentor or administrator who is responsible for monitoring the student's expenditures of sponsored funds and ensures all required reporting is completed and submitted.
- Furthermore, it is recognized that the definition of the term "Principal Investigator" may vary across different regulatory documents, e.g., Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) or Institutional Review Board (IRB). In these cases, the regulating body (e.g., IACUC, IRB) determines PI eligibility. The individual with the ultimate administrative and fiduciary responsibility of the project (regardless of the title that is actually used) is expected to fulfill the role of PI (i.e., the PI bears primary responsibility for technical compliance, completion of programmatic work, fiscal stewardship of sponsor funds, and compliance with administrative requirements of the project).
- PI/co-PI Removal. If a PI or co-PI of a sponsored project is judged by a Department Head, Dean, Provost, and/or SVPRED to have failed in their responsibilities for technical compliance, completion of programmatic work, fiscal stewardship of sponsor funds, and/or compliance with administrative requirements of the project, including the responsibility to remain current in all relevant training, then they may be removed as having PI or co-PI status. The process could be initiated by any of the academic units listed above by a memo to the SVPRED, who in consultation with the affected academic units would be empowered to remove co-PI/PI status for the specific individual(s).

Revisions: September 11, 2024; November 15, 2018  
Establishment of original guidelines: September 13, 2001

*Guidelines will be reviewed annually by the Office of the Senior Vice President for Research and Economic Development in collaboration with the Faculty Research Committee and the Associate Deans for Research.*

## Investigator Definitions

**Principal Investigator (PI):** overarching responsibility for and authority over primary activities of a research project. The PI may oversee some activities directly and may share other oversight responsibilities with members of the team. Examples of responsibilities are conduct of the research activities, supervision of personnel assisting with the research, and ensuring fiscal accountability and compliance.

**Multiple Principal Investigator (MPI)** Two or more people who have overarching responsibility for and authority over the conduct of a research project. Investigators will use this designation when indicated by the sponsor. Use of MPI designation differs across sponsors.

**Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI)** shares responsibility with the PI in overseeing research activities, supervision of personnel, and ensuring fiscal accountability and compliance. Use of Co-PI designation differs across sponsors. A Co-PI differs from a Co-Investigator (Co-I).

**Co-Investigator (Co-I)** A Co-I is a member of the project team responsible for conducting a specific portion of the project, but not for overall conduct of the research, supervision of personnel or ensuring fiscal accountability and compliance. Use of the Co-I designation varies by sponsor.

Investigator definitions are adapted from University of South Florida (<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/research-scholarship/priority-qa/differences-pi-multiple-pi.aspx>)