

TIGER TIPS

RESOURCES FOR AUBURN RESEARCHERS

Planning for Success in Proposal Development

The Office of Proposal Services and Faculty Support (PSFS) assists faculty and staff in the broad aspects of proposal development for their research, scholarly, and creative programs. Our goal is to help maximize the Faculty's understanding of the grant process and help them submit successful grant applications. To do this, we must look at what makes an application successful. Rachel Simpson, a member of our team, has compiled thoughts on best practices for navigating through the proposal development stages for large, interdisciplinary projects requesting over \$1 million per year.

Any successful project requires planning, development, implementation, & follow through. Obtaining funding for your idea is no exception. Below are a few tips to consider when going through each stage toward building a successful proposal:

Plan for success. When looking at a proposal, the proposal can be viewed as having two sets of requirements. The sponsor's requirements and Auburn University's requirements. Both must be met in order to achieve a successful proposal, and both may contain separate but necessary paperwork. When it is decided that a large, interdisciplinary grant will be pursued, email the Solicitation to the College Level Designees in your College or OSP contract Administrator (as appropriate) and to the PSFS Office. Communicate with them that a submission is being considered, and check with them for guidance on what Auburn requires for a complete submission. Depending on the proposal's scope of work (and sponsor requirements), Auburn may require items such as an IRB, or IACUC protocol, IBC approval, or financial Conflict of Interest (FCOI) disclosure at the proposal stage. A frequently overlooked item required by federal regulations is CITI training on FCOI. It must be completed prior to proposal submission for proposals submitted to the Public Health Services (and agencies reporting under PHS). These are all important components that can stand in the way of your progress if not planned for accordingly.

The Request for Application/Request for Proposal (RFA/RFP) is key in creating the proposal and meeting the sponsor's requirements. It will outline important items such as due dates, the project period, support and commitments needed from the applicant's college or partners, the parameters for the research that will be pursued, and directions on how to complete the application. Make decisions on how the project will be carried out. What are the project goals? Is there a method for documenting and managing data? Who will be receiving funding from the project and how much time will they be working on it? These are just some of the questions that need to be addressed so that the components of your proposal can be adequately planned. Having a plan and understanding what is required is essential for success.

The deeper one goes into developing the proposal, the more questions must be answered. What partners will be involved? Talk with prospective partners and see if they are willing to help achieve the goals of the project. Communicate with them on the level of support they are willing to provide. It is critical that the amount of support partners will provide matches the level of support you actually need. Once the core team has been assembled, communicate everyone's roles in the project to be sure the team is aligned and understands everyone's responsibilities.

Develop the proposal. Once everyone's roles in the project has been decided, it is time to begin writing and re-writing the proposal. When writing use current research and statistics to show why the proposal stands above the other submissions and deserves to be funded. Use the proposal to turn the reviewers into advocates. Sponsors want to know how goals will be achieved. Clearly outline how project activities will be accomplished, and the methods that will be used for documenting progress and data. Be sure to only write what can actually be achieved. Do not promise sponsor's unattainable project activities or data. Make sure that activities are stated in a way that shows their alignment with the goals and objectives of the funding agency.

When writing the proposal, create a timeline for the project with months in which milestones are scheduled for completion. Begin the timeline at the proposal stage and agree on deadlines with the proposal team so that the proposal can be completed before the RFP deadline. Continue the timeline through the life of the award and end it at the close out of the project once all funds are expended. This will allow the proposal's requirements to be successfully navigated when awarded, and have a set focus on how to attain proposal goals. Include communication methods and team deadlines as well, so that the entire team is on the same page throughout the grant process and cycle. Be sure to include the reporting requirements the sponsor and Auburn have into the timeline so that you don't miss anything along the way.

When contacted during the proposal development stage, Rachel Simpson from the Office of Proposal Services and Faculty Support is available to serve as a member of your proposal team for large-scale interdisciplinary proposals and can assist in the review of proposal narratives (regardless of dollar thresholds) and provide feedback on them to ensure that the proposal is responsive to the RFP. When contacted in a timely manner, she can be a very helpful resource as an objective third party reviewer as a part of the proposal team. Our desire is to assist in the development of successful proposals.

When the proposal is ready for submission, work with your OSP Contract Administrator or College-level designee (as appropriate). They will review the complete submission and submit the proposal to the funding agency. Submitting this information to them two weeks prior to the deadline is ideal! That gives appropriate time for them to review your proposal, and will give time to make any necessary changes they see that might need to be made. This can only be done through proper planning and commitment to the project. Be kind to yourself and your team by having everything ready two weeks prior so you are not rushing at the last minute to meet the deadline.

Want more help planning? Check out Auburn's PI Handbook. It can be found on the PSFS website found at: <https://cws.auburn.edu/OVPR/pm/psfs/main> along with the number to reach PSFS at 334-844-5954.

Implementation. As mentioned in the planning section. It is wise to complete the CITI, IACUC, IBC, and IRB processes if required. If completion of these compliance requirements is delayed, access to the grant award will be delayed as well. Don't play the waiting game - take care of these items early. Auburn University policy will not allow a PI to have access to funding without completing requisite compliance requirements.

Once funding is received, look at the proposal's timeline. Use it as a road map for the project and a way to keep the team on task. It is a great way to implement the project and a way to gauge the team's progress. Use the funding to carry-out what you proposed. Work with your college when making purchases and follow Auburn's policies, guidelines and procedures for this. A helpful tool to track the award is the My Funding Tab within Banner. Talk with your College-level designee (or department staff, as appropriate) about setting this up if you do not have access.

Follow-Through. A positive relationship of reliability will be developed with the sponsor when there is follow through. Follow the road map created by the proposal team - and carry out the project as proposed. If changes need to be made, address them professionally by communicating with the sponsor and OSP inquiring about the necessary steps to make the needed adjustments. It is always beneficial to document and justify why the changes are necessary. This is another avenue that demonstrates reliability and dedication in your role as a good steward of the funding you have been awarded.

Throughout the grant cycle, be sure to keep the grant's reporting requirements at the forefront, so that required items are known and there is ample time to work on them. At the end of the project, compile your final report to showcase your findings. Follow the closeout deadlines, when applicable, in the RFP.

Final Thoughts. Keep in mind, throughout all of the stages of the proposal, communication is key. Communicate with partners, your college, and with PSFS. The sooner you communicate with these three that you are interested in a proposal, the smoother your proposal writing experience will go. PSFS assists with the steps required for an application to proceed from application planning up to submission. Let us help maximize your understanding of the grants process and help you navigate through the grant application process. Always remember: The failure to plan is a plan for failure. Don't let your great idea fail due to poor planning!

Please contact Rachel Simpson, for help navigating through your large, interdisciplinary proposals. In collaboration with OSP and College-level designees (as applicable), she can help with:

- Careful Proof Reading of the Request for Proposals - Help ensure that the proposal is responsive and conforms to all specific instructions and requirements.

- Meeting Coordination - e.g., Conference calls (audio or video) and/or in-person meetings of project collaborators to help maintain communication and keep proposal development on track.
- Regular Meetings with the Lead PI - Check-in on how things are going, ensure coordination of effort, and develop to-do lists.
- Assistance with Timelines - Help ensure that all proposal components, including documents required from collaborating partners, are prepared, reviewed and revised as needed, and ready for on-time submission.
- Developing Templates/Models - Assist collaborating partners in the preparation of their proposal pieces, and enhance the cohesiveness and appearance of the final product.
- Editing - Help compile and integrate collaborator input, strengthen narrative organization and project presentation, and ensure all guidelines provided in the RFP are followed.
- Communicating with Subcontractors and funding agencies - Serve as point of contact or liaison regarding questions of proposal logistics, and for collection of documents from collaborating partners; as well as assistance contacting funding agencies as needed.
- Budget Support - Help coordinate preparation of the budget and budget justification, as well as subcontractor budgets and budget justifications.
- Compass - Heightening the awareness of the COMPASS program and its role in research project administration
- Finding Funding – Collaborating with Marc Haon to help find targeted funding opportunities
- Questions you may have about grants or funding agencies

Contact Rachel Simpson at R.Simpson@auburn.edu or 334-844-7910.