

Proposal Submission Guidelines

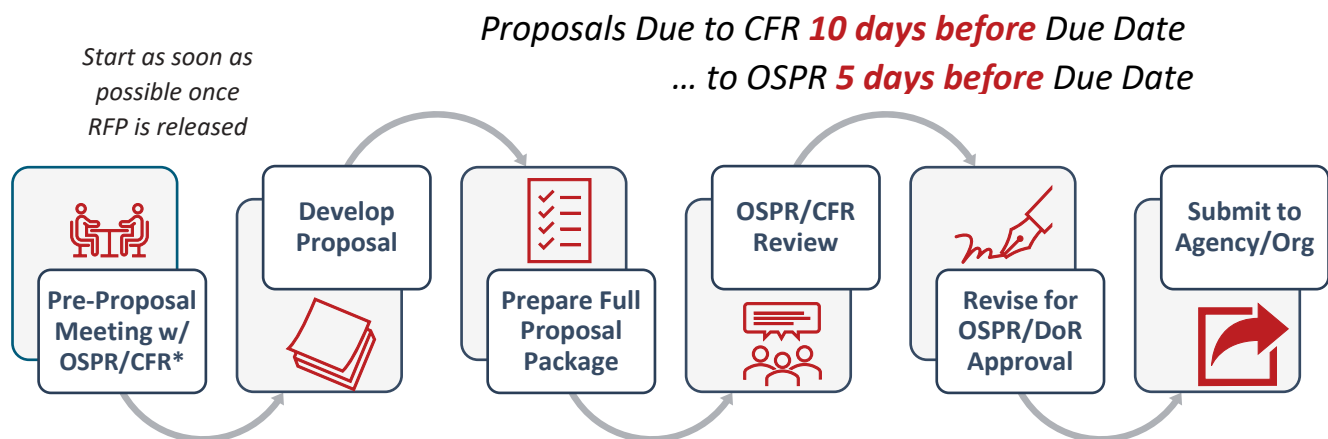
Writing a successful grant proposal involves careful planning, thorough research, clear communication, and teamwork. Whether you are applying for funding for a special research project, program support, manuscript preparation, or travel, following the right guidelines is crucial to submitting a winning application.

The Office of Sponsored Programs and Research (OSPR), in collaboration with Corporate and Foundation Relations (CFR), is your on-campus resource for developing proposals for external funding provided by government agencies, foundations, corporations, and trusts.

We invite you to take advantage of our staff, expertise, tools, and resources to help make your proposal the most competitive it can be.

Every grant proposal is unique to the funder (sponsor) and program solicitation. OSPR can help strengthen your application, whether expanding broader impacts, addressing the published review criteria, providing strong budget justification, or simply ensuring all the pieces come together on time. OSPR also has established protocols that help the University identify, manage, and comply with both internal and external requirements related to the pursuit and award of grants and contracts.

The **checklist** appended to this document is intended to **help guide** the Principal Investigator/Project Director and grant support staff through the proposal submission process. Not all items on the checklist will apply to your proposal, however, a comprehensive list of *institutional* and *compliance* considerations is provided for a wide range of proposals (from simple to more complex). The **OSPR proposal review and submittal process** is outlined below, followed by a checklist of considerations.



*OSPR strongly encourages a **Pre-Proposal Meeting**, particularly with researchers who have not been grant-active before or recently. A pre-meeting helps clarify the submittal process, proposal-specific requirements, and budget limits, as well as helps identify potential items to address early.

Proposal Checklist

Institutional Considerations

1. Proposed Project

- Does the proposed project conflict in any manner with university policies, mission, or strategic plans?

2. Department/Center/University Resource Approvals

- Has the department chair reviewed the proposal and approved the levels of effort, course buyouts, and commitment of space and other departmental resources required for the project?
- Is cost sharing involved in your proposal? If so:
 - Has all departmental cost sharing been approved and the Fund to be charged been identified?
 - Has cost sharing to be funded by other offices of the university (i.e., Provost, Dean of Research, etc.) been approved? If so, has the Fund to be charged been identified?

3. Curricular Programs

- Does the proposal involve a new curricular program?
- If so, has this new proposed curricular program been approved by the Department, by Undergraduate Academic Board (UAB)?

Proposal Considerations

4. Type of Application

- Is the application for a government or non-government grant or contract?
- Have you contacted appropriate offices and individuals to let them know of the pending submission?
 - Department grant support staff, OSPR, CFR (if a foundation or corporation funder)
- Have you scheduled a pre-meeting with OSPR or CFR, if needed?
- Is this proposal a pre-proposal, Letter of Intent, new application, resubmission, renewal, or supplement?

5. Electronic Submittals and Funder Application Portals

- Does the principal investigator have the required electronic access (i.e., user ID, password) to the sponsor proposal system?
 - If a federal system (e.g., Research.gov, grants.gov) contact OSPR to confirm if you are registered as an institutional user under Clark University.
 - If a foundation system, is CFR able to “start” and submit an application on behalf of the PI?
 - Some foundation funder portals require the PI to register and submit the application, which may limit OSPR/CFR’s ability to view sections of the application. If so:
 - Have you discussed the most efficient method for OSPR/CFR to review the proposal? For example, does the portal allow you to print a draft copy to share; will you provide a draft proposal in MS Word or pdf prior to loading into the portal.
- Can the proposal be submitted sufficiently prior to the deadline date/time to allow for possible problems with the internet, submission portal, or other delays or interruptions?

Proposal Checklist

6. Principal Investigator (PI)/Project Director (PD)

- Is the PI/PD clearly identified in the proposal?
- Does the PI/PD or any other named collaborator have an actual or perceived financial conflict of interest in their relationship to the external sponsor? If so, has the potential [FCOI](#) been disclosed to OSPR to review ahead of proposal submission?
- Is the principal investigator (and Clark) up to date on required reporting on current and/or expired awards (not being current could result in rejection of proposals)?

7. Other Personnel Involvement

- Are any other people participating in the proposed project? If so, in what capacity (i.e., co-investigator, research associate, consultant, research assistant, post-doctoral researcher, etc.)? Are they internal to Clark or external?
- Do you have commitments from Key Personnel or organizations that have agreed to be involved in the project (email confirmation from Clark faculty and staff, or letters of commitment from represented institutions, organizations, and businesses)?
- Have Key Personnel provided required documents as applicable to the funder/solicitation, e.g., CV, Bio Sketch, Current & Pending Support, etc.?
- Are all persons for whom salaries or wages are being requested employees (faculty, staff, post-doc, etc.) or students of Clark?
 - If so, have you confirmed current salaries and/or stipends and fringe benefit rates.
 - If not, how will payments be made to the individual(s) – see below
- Will new employees be hired for this project only? Will they be temporary, part-time, full-time hires in Massachusetts?
- If not a Clark employee, does the person require a subcontract with another institution/organization (e.g., another University, a non-profit), or are they an independent consultant?
 - If another institution, have you connected Clark OSPR with the relevant Sponsored Programs office for the review and completion of relevant pre-award agreements and documents?
 - If an independent consultant, do you have a written scope of work, cost, and timeframe for the estimated level of effort? In the event of an award, Human Resources must approve Independent Contractor status through SmartBuyPlus prior to engagement of services. See Clark's [Policy on Independent Contractors](#) to preliminarily assess the person's classification.
- Does the proposal promise any institutional commitments to personnel beyond the proposed period of the award? If so, how will this be sustained?

8. Period of Performance

- Have the proposed start and end dates been clearly stated and held consistent throughout the proposal; do they match related documents, e.g., budget justification, Current & Pending Support, etc.?
- Is the proposed start date reasonable and appropriate given the funder's decision timeline?

9. Space and Facilities

- Is adequately equipped space available to conduct the project?

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- Will additional space and/or facilities need to be made available? If so, have the appropriate institutional officials approved the commitment of space and/or facilities, e.g., Facilities, Provost, University CFO?

10. Level of Effort

- What level of effort has each investigator committed to the project?
- Is the stated level of effort reasonable and available given the other commitments of the investigators?
- If more than two months of summary salary is being requested, has this been pre-approved by OSPR / Dean of Research?
- If a course-buyout(s) is requested, has this been pre-approved by the Department Chair?
 - If a course buyout is requested by an early career tenure-track faculty, pre-approval must be obtained from the Department Chair, AND from the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs.
- If additional compensation is requested for staff, has this been pre-approved by the Department Chair?

11. Human Subjects

- Does the project involve the use of human subjects?
- If so, have you indicated this in the proposal and supplied IRB review (approved or pending) and Clark's Federal Wide Assurance number (00000262) if requested?

12. Use of Animals in Research

- Does the project involve the use of vertebrate animals?
- If so, have you indicated this in the proposal and supplied Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) review status (pending or approved) and Clark's Animal Welfare Assurance number (TBD) if requested?

13. Assurances and Certifications

- Are all required assurance and certification forms included as part of the proposal?
 - For most grant proposals, certifications are made at the institutional level and are completed upon submittal (by OSPR), such as having a training plan and oversight for RECR, disclosure of lobbying activities, debarment and suspension, drug-free workplace, etc.
 - There are, however, some that may require specific acknowledgements and documents, such as status as an Early Career Investigator or Senior Personnel certifications (included in SciENCv).
 - If this is an NSF proposal, have you completed and submitted to OSPR the required [Plan for Safe & Inclusive Off-Campus or Off-Site Working Environments](#)? (if applicable).
 - If this is an NSF proposal, have you reviewed and do you accept responsibility for the [Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#) (RECR) training and mentorship plan required for your proposal should it be awarded?

14. Patents and Inventions

- Does the proposal contain any potentially patentable material?
- If so, has the Office of General Counsel reviewed the proposal Intellectual Property language and provided feedback?

Proposal Checklist

15. Publishing

- Does the sponsor or agency impose any restrictions on investigators or graduate students from freely publishing research results?
- If so, does the PI have a plan in place to adhere to any such restrictions?

16. Ancillary Documents

- Are all ancillary documents required by the funder current and in the format required by the funder proposal guidelines (biographical sketches, CVs, rate agreements, university financial reports, Board of Trustees lists, etc.)?

17. Proposal Content and Formatting

- Does the proposal formatting follow sponsor guidelines (i.e., number of pages, page numbering, spacing, margins, font size, table of contents, readability issues, narrative reflects timeline and tables/graphs, etc.)?
- Is the heading structure (numbering, header name, and formatting) clear and consistent throughout the proposal?

Budgetary Considerations

18. Budget

- Has an internal *Budget Proposal Spreadsheet* (line item detail) with budget justification been prepared for OSPR review?
- Is the proposed budget complete and mathematically correct?
- Have the correct budget categories been used, and do the categories follow the funders guidelines and/or template?
- Are all budgeted costs allowable and allocable in accordance with sponsor guidelines and/or the appropriate federal cost principles?
- Are estimated costs proposed in the manner that they will be expended?
- Have appropriate cost of living increases been applied to subsequent years if allowed (generally 3% annually)?
- Do annual salary increases align with the correct start/end dates per year, and do they consider projected SSI and promotion increases?
 - Faculty summer salary and Graduate Student wages are based on current salary in effect in the month of May (increases begin at the start of the Fall semester).
 - Staff salary increases begin in the month of June.
- Do all budget forms agree – budget spreadsheet/form and budget justification?

19. Fringe Benefits

- Have the current approved rates been used (see [Fringe Benefit Rate Schedule](#)) and correctly applied to the proper salary base?

Proposal Checklist

20. Indirect Costs

- Has the appropriate indirect cost rate been used and applied to the correct Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) base? (see [Indirect Costs](#))
- If the sponsor has a written policy which limits indirect cost recovery, can the difference be used for any required cost sharing?
- If the sponsor has a written policy which limits indirect cost recovery, do they allow direct administrative salaries/fringe to be included in the proposal budget?
- If less than the full indirect cost rate has been applied, has OSPR/DoR approved the lower indirect cost rate (based on the sponsor's restriction, or PI's written justification for requesting a lower rate)?

21. Travel and Other Direct Costs

- Are the proposed costs necessary for the successful conduct of the project?
- Are the proposed costs reasonable, allowable, and allocable?
- Are the travel costs based on federal per diem rates or some other known and/or accepted source of information? If the funder does not have set per diem rates, then Clark University's per diem rates included in the [Travel Policy](#) must be used.
- Does the project propose International Travel? If so, are there any travel restrictions for the proposed international locations and is the PI aware of Clark's [International Travel Policy](#).

22. Equipment Costs

- What are estimated equipment costs based on (e.g., vendor quotes, prior purchases, experience, etc.)?
- Has Facilities been consulted on whether there is the potential for additional costs for the installation for maintenance of equipment, to include such things as space, renovation, wiring, moving, etc.?
- If there are additional needs for the equipment, has Facilities provided an estimate and/or confirmation of the potential for associated construction or installation costs?
- If there are additional associated costs, does the sponsor allow such costs? If not, has the source of funding the additional costs been identified?

23. Cost Sharing or Matching Funds

- Does the proposed project require the financial support of Clark?
- If so, have the sources of this funding been identified, and approved in writing, by the appropriate source (e.g., Department, Provost, Research Center)?
- Do any matching funds have to be raised during the life of the project? If so, is University Advancement aware of the need and have they been involved in the development of the proposal and plans to secure outside funding?

24. Subcontractors or Consultants

- Is a budget included for each proposed subcontractor? Is this budget accurate and reasonable?
- Does the proposal contain a letter of commitment (intent) from each subcontractor organization, indicating their willingness to participate in the project, if funded?
- Is there a scope of work included for each subcontractor?
- Are letters of intent included for each consultant on the project, paid or otherwise?

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- If the proposal is to a federal sponsor, is the subcontractor or consultant currently debarred or suspended and, therefore, ineligible to receive federal funding? (contact OSPR to confirm)
- For consultants see #7.

25. Budget Justification / Narrative

- Does the Budget Justification describe in detail the basis for the budget requested, e.g., levels of effort for key persons and what role they will play in the project, how fringe rates are calculated, why equipment is needed for the project, where and why you are requesting travel, how are indirect costs calculated, etc.
- As the narrative accompanies the budget, it is (often) not necessary to include the dollar amounts requested in the budget justification. (see Budget Justification template)

Internal Forms and Approvals

26. OSPR Forms

- Has the [**Proposal Summary and Approval Form**](#) been submitted to OSPR with all necessary signatures? (see [instructions](#))
- Has the [**Financial Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form**](#) (FCOI) been submitted for each Clark person who will be involved in the design, conduct or reporting of the grant?
- Has an internal *Budget Proposal Spreadsheet* been submitted?
- If applicable to NSF proposals, has the [**Plan for Safe and Inclusive Off-Campus or Off-Site Working Environments**](#) been submitted?
- If applicable, have course buyouts been pre-approved by the appropriate offices: *Department Chair*, and for early career faculty: *Department Chair* and the *Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs*?