

# Preparing Proposals at Furman University

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## Introduction

Funding from corporations, foundations and federal and state agencies contribute significantly to faculty and undergraduate research, scholarships, internships, capital improvements, and equipment acquisitions, as well as to endowments for these and other purposes. Staff in the Office of Grants & Research Administration (Grants Office) are here to help you as you seek external funding to support your research or curricular projects. This guide offers proposal-related information as well as describing the responsibilities of Principal Investigators (PI) and Project Directors (PD).

Please note that all grant applications to foundations, corporations, and government agencies, as well as requests for [contractual support for research activities](#), must pass through the Office of Grants and Research Administration ([403.1](#)). Beyond the support that we can offer as you are preparing your proposal, this centralized process ensures that submissions for external funding:

- Are related to the mission of the University,
- Maximize the use of resources in preparing applications for external funding,
- Provide an appropriate balance between grant/contract activity and instruction,
- Ensure proposed budget is accurate and includes proper handling of indirect costs (also known as facilities and administration charges), and
- Facilitate the maintenance of accurate records.

## Proposal development

Grants Office staff are available to assist at any stage of your proposal development process. Please feel free to [contact us](#) early in your grant-seeking efforts for support in identifying likely funding sources. In addition, we can assist with adherence with funder requirements, review and edit proposal narratives, support budget creation, and submit the final proposal to the funder. The Office of Integrative Research in the Sciences is another source of helpful information that can assist science faculty, in particular, in evaluating grant opportunities, developing proposal ideas, and identifying potential collaborators.

As you are considering the project for which you would like to seek external grant funds, think through some foundational questions that will prepare you to make a compelling case for funding:

- Why does this project need to be done now?
- Why are you the person to do it?
- Who else will be involved?
- How does your project advance knowledge or contribute distinctively to your field?
- What resources do you need to carry out your project?
- How does the proposed project fit into your overall academic and professional goals?
- What is your plan of work and a reasonable timetable for completing your project?
- How will you know that you have achieved your objectives? How will your work be evaluated?
- How will others access and benefit from your findings?

Once you've identified an appropriate source of funding...

- Share the project details with your department chair and obtain their support,
- Give yourself enough time prior to the funder's deadline to craft a compelling narrative,
- Consider sharing the proposal draft with a colleague or external expert in the field for review prior to submission,
- Be sure to follow funder guidelines,
- Use the funder's forms, if required,
- Develop a budget, if required, using Furman rates (contact [Grants Office](#) staff for rates), and
- Ensure that you submit all required documents, such as a biographical sketch, bibliography, current sources of support, and any requested letters of support/collaboration.

## Guidance on common proposal elements

### Supporting undergraduate students

Your project may involve undergraduate students, who are either paid a stipend for research or an hourly rate. If you receive grant support from a government agency, you are responsible for making sure that any students who are supported by the grant receive training in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR; [092.1](#)). Each student and faculty mentor affiliated with the research project must have a current completion certificate on file with the Office of Grants & Research Administration.

### Budgets

Your project budget consists of costs directly attributable to the project, which you can access and use to carry out your project. These are referred to as direct costs. In some instances, funders may also allow the inclusion of indirect costs - covering grant-related administration, office supplies, use of office space, equipment, custodial service, etc. The list below describes items that are often budgeted in proposal requests and can help you think through what might be necessary to adequately support your project. *Allowable budget items are determined by the funding agency.*

### Salary:

Furman faculty or staff can engage in activities supported by external grants to or contracts with the university that provide funds for a salary to the individual ([198.3](#)). As you prepare your budget, you should list all personnel needed on your project as well as the time that they will commit to the work. Keep in mind that budgeted salary funds must be based on the person's salary of record exclusive of salary payments related to special circumstances, such as overload pay. You should also include cost-of-living based annual salary increases for multi-year projects as permitted by the funder. *Please note: the National Science Foundation (NSF) generally limits salary from all NSF-funded projects to two months in a year.*

In some cases, you may wish to work on your project for dedicated time during the academic year. For faculty, this may involve either a sabbatical leave or a course release. In either case, your request must be approved by your department chair and the dean of the faculty prior to submission of a

proposal. If funds are included for a course release or a semester sabbatical, those will be based on your salary of record, rather than the costs of hiring someone to cover your course(s).

#### Stipends:

Your proposal may also include payments to faculty in the form of stipends. These stipends are paid through Payroll and therefore must include associated FICA (see below).

Please reach out to the Grants Office for guidance when budgeting student stipends. When student summer research experiences are included in proposals to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), those students must be paid employee wages through Payroll (student employment).

#### Fringe Benefits:

Fringe benefits must be included for all salary, wages, and faculty stipends included in the grant proposal, with the exception of enrolled students during the academic year. Fringe benefits are calculated using the rates determined by the Budget Office during the university's annual budget process. At present, summer fringe benefits rates are calculated using FICA (7.65%). Please note: the rate included in your proposal budget related to FICA is the *university's* portion of this payroll tax. The person being paid will still have FICA contributions deducted from their paycheck. Staff and academic year faculty salaries have fringe benefits calculated using the rate determined yearly by the Budget Office. Contact the Grants Office for current staff and academic year rates.

#### Equipment:

Equipment items with a per-unit cost greater than or equal to \$5,000 are expected to hold value for more than one year. These are considered capital expenses. Items less than \$5,000 should be listed in the supplies category (see supplies discussion below).

#### Computer-Related Equipment/Software/Services:

For all grant applications involving the use and/or acquisition of computer-related equipment, software or services, a description of the proposed equipment, software, and services must be submitted to the Associate Vice President for Technology for review and approval before the application is submitted ([073.1](#)). Sufficient time must be given for the determination of the impact of the proposed equipment, software, or services, and to determine the necessity and cost for any additional equipment, software, or services not foreseen by the requester.

#### Food:

Be sure to follow funder requirements related to whether food, outside of what is required while traveling, is an allowable cost in your proposal budget. Alcohol is not allowed on Federal grants unless it is an integral part of the research project.

### Supplies:

This category includes materials and supplies directly related to the proposed project. For federally funded projects, supplies will include materials and equipment costing less than \$5,000 for any one item.

In many cases, computers related to your project will also fall into the supplies category. If you are hiring grant personnel, you are responsible for providing them with a computer and any needed accessories. Oftentimes, this can be included in your proposal budget.

### Travel:

You should estimate all costs associated with grant-related travel, including airfare (or other transportation), housing, and subsistence. Air travel associated with federal grants must use a US Flag Carrier. In addition, travel should be separated into domestic and international in most instances. All travel costs should follow Furman's policy ([388.4](#)) unless the potential funder sets stricter rules.

### Participant Support Costs:

When a funder includes a category for participant support, they are referring to individuals who are participants or trainees (e.g., workshop attendees, faculty or students visiting for training sessions, etc.), not employees or individuals directly enabling the research. *Employee attendance at meetings, conferences, symposia, training projects, etc. are not participant support costs.* Costs in this category typically include small stipends, travel, and subsistence plus other costs related to their participation.

### Library Resources:

If the project will make extraordinary use of library resources or services, such as subscription access to databases, interlibrary loan, or purchase of books or other materials, include these costs as a separate item in the proposal. The Director of Libraries can help estimate relevant costs.

### Publication Fees:

Costs here can include journal page charges, website management, or subventions to publishers.

### Consultants:

When the inclusion of consultants for grant-funded work is necessary, you should keep in mind the number of days their services will be required, their daily rate, and other costs associated with the work they will do on your project such as travel.

### Subawards:

In some cases, you may have collaborators at another institution to whom a portion of the grant award will be passed. This type of relationship exists when the other institution shares responsibility for programmatic decision-making.

Alternatively, your collaborative work may result in Furman receiving a subaward issued by another institution that was awarded the primary grant. The proposed work associated with such an arrangement also needs to pass through the Office of Grants and Research Administration (see Proposal Review and Clearance below).

#### Indirect Costs:

Furman has federally-negotiated rates for the calculation of indirect costs (also known as Facilities and Administration [F&A] costs or overhead costs) based on whether the research takes place on or off campus. These rates are calculated on total direct costs excluding capital expenditures (buildings, individual items of equipment; alterations and renovations) and subawards. Contact the [Grants Office](#) for the current rates.

In some cases, funders will have additional restrictions on indirect funds. This can include, for example, not allowing indirects to be charged against a specific budget category, like participant support. In addition, some funders may require that a certain rate be used, in lieu of our federally-negotiated rate. Others prohibit the inclusion of indirect costs altogether.

#### Matching Funds/Cost Sharing:

In some instances, a funding agency may require the university to contribute funds to indicate support for the project. These funds must be approved by the VP of the reporting line from which the proposal originates prior to its submission. The items listed as matching or cost share must be identifiable and applied between the start and end dates of your project.

### Contracts

Sometimes you will be asked to complete projects by companies that require your expertise (see Policy [161.2](#)). You will receive funding in exchange for delivering a product or service, and this funding will be governed by a contract with the company. When Furman will be the financial contact for a contract supporting research, similar to grant proposals, requests must be reviewed internally before submission.

When the company is willing to accept a pre-determined price for the product or service provided (fixed-price contract), you should include at a minimum of 10% in indirects/overhead to cover the costs affiliated with the administration of the contract. Those indirects will be distributed in the same manner as grant indirects. For the internal review process, you should create an estimated budget that gives a sense of the types of expenses and their estimated amounts. This is for internal purposes only and doesn't need to be shared with the funder.

### Proposal Review and Clearance

In order to ensure that externally funded grants and contracts for research are related to the mission of the university, maximize the use of resources in preparing applications for external funding, provide for an appropriate balance between grant/contract activity and instruction, ensure proper handling of indirect costs, and maintain accurate records, it is necessary that all grant applications to foundations, corporations, and government agencies and contracts for research be channeled

through the Office of Grants & Research Administration. Staff from the Grants Office will then work in collaboration with the project director to prepare the proposal for internal review.

The internal review process is intended to help grant seekers submit proposals that are as competitive as possible, consistent with the university's priorities, and compliant with all university and funder policies, such that, should the proposal be funded, the project director is well positioned to start the project on campus.

To ensure that the internal review has appropriate time for completion, a completed [Proposal Review and Clearance Form](#) along with the narrative and budget (if required) should be sent to the Grants Office **seven business days prior** to the proposal submission deadline.

### Additional Reviews Related to Proposal Submission

In addition to the general internal review process, proposals may be subject to additional review depending on the activities or requests involved.

#### Matching Funds/Cost Sharing:

Cost sharing must be approved in advance by the VP of the appropriate reporting line prior to submission of the proposal.

#### Conflict of Interest:

Employees receiving federally-funded grants must comply with relevant federal regulations regarding conflicts of interest ([092.0](#)). At the time of submission, you and any Furman co-directors will be asked to indicate whether you have any significant financial interests related to the proposed project (see [Furman's policy](#)). If there appears to be a potential conflict, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost and Dean of Faculty will, along with the department chair, review the potential conflict of interest and initiate steps to manage or eliminate the conflict(s), if appropriate.

#### Special Review:

##### *Institutional Review Board (IRB) – Human Subjects*

If you are preparing a grant proposal seeking funding for a research project that will engage human subjects, please keep in mind that you must receive the required IRB approval **before** performing any research on human subjects. The forms required for review are on [Furman's Institutional Review Board website](#).

##### *Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)*

If your project involves vertebrate animals, you must seek IACUC approval ([190.4](#)) prior to the onset of the research. Contact [Dr. Dennis Haney](#), Chair of the IACUC.

## Proposal Submission

### Application Portals

When proposal submissions involve an application portal, contact the Grants Office to ensure whether Furman is already registered an organization. Do not create a separate registration using individual department or institute names.

### Final Submission

Once your proposal has been reviewed and approved internally, it can be submitted to the external funder. The Grants Office will assist in the final editing to ensure consistency and completeness of the proposal with funder guidelines. For many funders, Grants Office staff will perform the final submission of your proposal and share the uploaded files with you. In cases where you submit yourself, the final versions must be sent to the Grants Office.

### Submission Updates

In some instances, funders will request additional information or budget modifications after a proposal submission and before making award decisions. If contacted by the funder, contact the Grants Office for advice and support before responding to the funder.

### Decisions

If your proposal is turned down, don't be discouraged. Remember that success rates are typically limited for proposal submissions. Carefully evaluate the reviewers' comments and consider how you to address these points most effectively in a subsequent application. If reviewers' comments aren't provided automatically, reach out to the program officer to see if it is possible to obtain feedback. Make sure to share your feedback with the Grants Office as well, so that we can help you address these points in your next proposal.

If your proposal is awarded, the Grants Office will work with Finance to set up your new award in Workday. Additional procedures and guidance related to awards can be found in the Award Guide.