

Proposal Planning

- Statement of Problem and Need
- Goals and Objectives
- Plan of Action/Methods
- Evaluation
- Personnel
- Budget Development
- Personnel Involved with a Project
- Fringe Benefits
- Equipment
- Travel
- Supplies, Participant Costs, Other, Consultants, Contractors
- Total Direct Costs
- Facilities and Administration Costs (F&A) (a.k.a. Indirect Costs)

The Office of Sponsored Programs will assist faculty, staff and students with planning a grant proposal. When planning a proposal, it is important to develop an approach or outline that effectively manages the proposal development. This allows for a manageable means of working from section to section without the whole process becoming overwhelming.

The core elements of almost any proposal are the same. A proposal outline is arranged to provide a logical sequence for the reviewer to follow when reading the proposal. Developing an initial outline around these elements will provide a logical well-conceived framework that can be developed into a proposal sample.

Statement of Problem and Need

This is the section of the proposal where the applicant must convince the funding source that a problem does exist and that it is a significant problem. The problem statement consists of analysis of the nature and extent of the problem or need, and the resources or causes. When addressing the need, be realistic in defining the problem and do not put the proposal in a position that the solution becomes unrealistic or not achievable. Always remain objective in presenting the idea and not subjective. Remember to use current local, state, and national data, and cite sources.

Goals and Objectives

Goals provide a method of presenting the concept of the ultimate purpose of the project. The statement of goals should be the basis for determining outcomes listed as objectives. A goal cannot be measured. The statement of objectives should be specific and concrete. Objectives identify measurable outcomes and address short-term or intermediate accomplishments. The intended results should be formatted effectively, remain as brief as possible, and fit the scope of the problem statement and need.

Plan of Action/Methods

This section of the proposal must present how the program will be implemented. Describe what actions are to be taken and who will be responsible for insuring the program progresses along the course and timetable set for completion of the program. Identify the scope of activities that stay within the limits of a time-frame, program activities as related to the program objectives and staffing for the program indicate who will be responsible for what. The grant writer is responsible for recognizing and understanding that it is important to develop a methodology that is clearly presented and one that leaves no questions as to the project director's ability to relate the problem to its proposed solution.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a form of verification of a good or poor funding decision by the funding agency. A good or poor evaluation can be the determining factor in whether a grant recipient will receive future funding. An evaluation mechanism should be developed before the proposal is complete and closely connected to the goals and objectives of the funding agency. In order to add credibility to the proposal, consider obtaining an outside organization to develop an evaluation design. Evaluation activities should be both formative and summative. Formative evaluation occurs while the project is still underway. Summative evaluation occurs at the conclusion of the project and examines the accomplishment, impact, or effect of the project. It focuses in intended and unintended outcomes. Evaluation tools often include surveys, specific assessment tools, standardized tests, focus groups and interviews, participant reports, and structured observations. Evaluators should be brought into the proposal development at the onset.

Personnel

The project personnel are an integral part of the program and should be included in the proposal. The project director/principal investigator should be clearly identified. The project director should be identified before the proposal is submitted. The project director should be qualified for the position and evidence should be submitted in the form of a vita or in other means as specified by the sponsoring agency. Other personnel should be named only if they play a significant role in implementation of the project. The proposal should indicate what the major personnel have to offer to benefit the program and avoid any lengthy description that are not relevant to the administration of the program.

Budget Development

The budget, for many individuals, seems to be the most difficult part of a proposal to develop. However, this stage of the proposal need not be difficult and knowing a few tools will help develop a clear and concise budget.

In most budgets the first step is determining the starting and ending dates of a project and who will be involved in a project, who will receive extra pay if allowed, who will receive released time, students to be hired, etc.

Personnel Involved with a Project

Once the individuals who will be involved with a project have been identified then a draft budget can be initiated.

The Office of Sponsored Programs is available to assist faculty with budget development and will use Excel to prepare all draft and internal budgets. A draft budget is required to accompany a proposal or contract for review and approval by the institution. The principal investigator or project director should send an email to wetherholt_michael@columbusstate.edu with the names of individuals who will be listed on the project budget. In addition the principal investigator or project director must decide the percentages to be used in the calculations, whether undergraduates or graduate students will be on the project and the hours they will work. The Office of Sponsored Programs will obtain the individual's current salary or wage information from Human Resources, appropriate fringe benefits information and develop a draft budget for the principal investigator or project director.

Fringe Benefits

The Office of Sponsored Programs will assist faculty and staff with proper fringe benefits calculation for budgets. However, when hiring a new, exempt position paid for by award or contract funds the rule of thumb is to use 38% of salary as the percentage for fringe benefits.

When paying an individual extra pay from an award or a contract use 7.65% of salary for FICA and FICA Med.

If undergraduate or graduate students are hired by an award or contract and are enrolled in class at least half-time they receive no benefits. If they are not enrolled in class at least half-time such as in the summer, they will be hired as causal labor and a fringe benefit rate of 7.65% for FICA and FICA Med must be applied to their wages.

Graduate assistants receive no fringe benefits.

When calculating Released Time (or time bought out) for an individual it is recommended that principal investigators and project directors contact the Office of Sponsored Programs. Such calculations require the addition of the percentage of the health insurance premium paid by the institution for the individual. Due to HIPPA the Office of Sponsored Programs must contact Human Resources for the proper amount to include into the fringe benefit calculation. Failure to calculate the exact amount of fringe benefits to be used as institutional cost share as in the case of release time paid by the university may inflate the amount the university must contribute.

Equipment

Usually sponsors determine if an item can be classified as "equipment" is if the item costs more that \$5,000 to purchase and it has a useful life of more than one year. If an item does not meet this criteria it is most likely classified as a supply item.

Travel

Calculating travel can be confusing for principal investigators and project directors. But simple organization can help develop this section of the budget easily.

First, check the sponsor guidelines and make sure there is no mandated travel listed. Sometimes sponsors require awardees to attend training sessions and such travel must be budgeted.

If airfare is warranted then use one of the online sites to determine an average cost of round-trip airfare.

If you will drive to the airport determine the round-trip mileage to the airport and use the current state rate per mile. For calendar year 2013 the rate is \$0.565 per mile.

If you will use a transportation service such as Groom Transportation contact the company for the current round-trip rate to the airport.

Calculate airport parking. The Office of Sponsored Programs uses a daily airport parking rate of \$15.

Depending upon the city in which you will be staying use one of the online sites to get an average of nightly lodging.

Depending upon the time of travel and the city in which you will be staying you may be able to claim a per diem rate. Current per diem rates as allowed by the University System of Georgia can be found [here](#):

Calculate lodging. Use one of the online sites to obtain an average nightly stay at a hotel/motel.

Calculate ground transportation. If you will require ground transportation, the Office of Sponsored Programs uses \$20-50 per day as an average charge for ground transportation.

Add any registration fees.

It is advisable to separate domestic travel from international travel on the budget.

Supplies, Participant Costs, Other, Consultants, Contractors

These sections are self-explanatory and line items should be added accordingly.

Total Direct Costs

These are the total costs of the project less any F&A costs (indirect costs) added.

Facilities and Administration Costs (F&A) (a.k.a. Indirect Costs)

F&A and Indirect Costs are used interchangeably. These are costs that cannot be easily applied to a project and are broad categories of costs. "Facilities" is defined as depreciation and use allowances, interest on debt associated with certain buildings, equipment, and capital improvement, operation and maintenance expenses and library expenses. "Administration" is defined as general administration and general expenses, departmental administration, sponsored projects administration, student administration and services, and all other types of expenditures not listed under one of the subcategories of Facilities (including cross allocations from other pools) as listed in the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-21.

Columbus State University has a federally negotiated on-campus F&A rate of 53% of salaries and wages excluding fringe benefits. The off-campus rate is 26.5% of salaries and wages excluding fringe benefits. The institution's cognizant federal agency is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. You may also download a copy of the university's [Facilities and Administrative Rate Agreement](#).

Many sponsors will not allow an applicant to request their full F&A (indirect costs) rate. Some sponsors will only allow a reduced F&A rate to be requested. Many sponsors do not allow any F&A to be requested. While the institution certainly welcomes proposals or contracts that carry the full F&A rate or even a partial rate, the university will try to support proposals or contracts that do not allow F&A costs.