Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About External Funding

Beginning the Proposal Process

**Question**
I want to write a grant proposal. How do I begin?

**Answer**
Begin by searching for a sponsor that fits your research or creative activities area in the links listed on the web page of the Office for the Vice President for Research (OVPR): http://www.wmich.edu/research/fundingsources.html. The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs is available to assist you during the entire pre-award process from brainstorming ideas, budget development, WMU’s internal approval procedure, to submitting the proposal. To find the research officer for your department and area of expertise go to http://www.wmich.edu/research/directory/findstaff

**Question**
Why do I have to go through the Office of the Vice President for Research to submit my grant?

**Answer**
An award is made to the University not an individual. Therefore, the ultimate responsibility is assumed by the University. This is why the government and most sponsors require certifications and assurances signed by the University’s official signatory. The principal investigator is not an official signatory or authorized to act on behalf of the University. In addition, OVPR and your research officer will work with you to ensure that the best quality proposal is submitted to the funding agency. For WMU’s Policy for Signature on Grants and Contracts: http://www.wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/u5/2013/policy_for_signature_authority_on_grants_and_contracts.pdf

**Question**
What is the definition of an externally-funded, sponsored project/program?

**Answer**
A sponsored project is defined as any externally funded research or scholarly activity that has a defined scope of work or set of objectives, which provides a basis for sponsor expectations. This more specifically involves research, demonstration, professional development, instruction, training, curriculum development, community and public service, or other scholarly activity involving funds, materials, other forms of compensation, or exchanges of in-kind efforts under awards or agreements. Sponsored awards are made to the University on behalf of the principal investigator (PI), who is primarily responsible for carrying out the requirements of the award.

**Question**
When should I start working on my proposal?
**Answer**
The earlier you start the better. Preparation of a good proposal often takes several weeks or months and proposals must be approved by WMU before the application deadline. It is likely to take more time than you think to submit a fundable application. Contact your research officer to help you work up a time line for submission.

**Question**
What kind of proposal preparation support is available from OVPR?

**Answer**
OVPR has a number of tools and support mechanisms to help you craft a strong proposal. Your research officer and the staff of sponsored programs can provide you with help in the areas of budgeting, compliance, proposal reviews and other areas that will be essential in assuring a strong grant or funding application. Contact your research officer to discuss options specific to your research or creative activity.

**Question**
What is the difference between a grant (OVPR) and a gift (WMU Development Department)?

**Answer**
It is not always easy to determine whether funding is a grant or a gift. Researchers and project directors should discuss opportunities with their research officer to determine the best strategy for applying and whether the PI should work with OVPR or Development. A **grant** is an agreement formalizing the transfer of money or property from a sponsor in exchange for specified services (e.g., research). It may require specific deliverables including financial and/or technical reporting by the recipient. The agreement is enforceable by law, and performance is usually to be accomplished within a specified time frame. Payment is subject to revocation. A sponsored project may be thought of as a transaction in which there is a specified statement of work with a related, reciprocal transfer of something of value. A formal “request for proposal” from a sponsor is a strong indicator the funds are meant to be given as a grant.

A **gift** is a contribution with no reciprocal benefit to the donor. No contractual requirements are imposed. However the gift may be for a stated purpose, with the use of the funds restricted to that purpose. The award is typically irrevocable, with no specified “period of performance.” There is no formal fiscal accountability beyond periodic progress reports and reports of expenditures. These reports may be thought of as a requirement of good stewardship, rather than as a contractual obligation.

**Question**
If I am applying to a foundation, does this mean I should work with the Development office rather than OVPR?

**Answer**
No. Whether you work with OVPR or Development will depend on whether it is a grant or a gift. See the previous question to determine if it is a gift or a grant.

**Budgeting**

**Question**
How do I start drafting a budget?
**Answer**
The OVPR web page has useful information for creating budgets at [http://www.wmich.edu/research/tools/proposal-development](http://www.wmich.edu/research/tools/proposal-development)

Your research officer can also provide you with a budget template and assist you with capturing the costs associated with your project using Federal OMB, state, and University regulations.

**Question**
Where can I find a budget template?

**Answer**
Ask your research office to provide you with a budget template.

**Question**
What is F & A and why is it important?

**Answer**
Facilities and administration costs (F & A) are sometimes referred to by funding agencies as indirect costs, overhead, or general and administrative costs (G & A). F&A costs are expenses that cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular sponsored project, but these costs contribute to the ability of the University to support research projects and programs and are used to maintain and operate University facilities and services, such as building (lab and office space), utilities (water, electricity, heating, and air conditioning), general administration (purchasing, accounting, payroll), departmental administration (dean’s offices, academic departments and divisions). WMU distributes the F & A costs it recovers across the University to support research and creative activities. It is important to budget for the full, allowable F & A costs. The resources required to undertake a sponsored project are determined by direct as well as indirect costs. To overlook F & A would mean that the project budget does not accurately reflect the true cost of the work. F&A costs do not disappear simply because they are not budgeted; the University must pay these actual costs from other sources. In addition, the recovered F & A distributed to the PI is a critical part of funding the PI’s future research and creative activities.

**Question**
How are F & A returns distributed when WMU receives them from the sponsor?

**Answer**
During June of each year, F & A costs recovered during that fiscal year are distributed as follows: 5% WMU Research Foundation; 5% Research Development Fund; 10% PI; 10% PI's department; 20% PI's college; 20% WMU General Fund; 30% OVPR.

**Question**
What if a sponsor does not allow F&A or, has a limit on F&A?

**Answer**
In most cases, if a sponsor has a published limit on F&A, or does not allow F&A, OVPR will approve the sponsor’s allowable rate. Approval requires that you note the sponsor’s published rate on the PAF in the F&A section and attach documentation to the Proposal Approval Form (PAF) showing the published rate.

**Question**
When is a project considered "off campus" and subject to the off-campus F&A rate?
**Answer**

Off-campus is defined as all activities performed in facilities not owned by the institution and to which rent is directly allocated to the project(s). Grants or contracts will not be subject to more than one F&A cost rate. If more than 50% of a project is performed off-campus (as defined), the off-campus rate will apply to the entire project.

**Question**

What is cost share?

**Answer**

Cost share, also referred to as match, as a general term, represents that portion of the total project costs (direct or indirect) of a sponsored agreement borne by the University, rather than by the sponsor.

**Question**

What is the difference between mandatory cost share, committed cost share, uncommitted cost share, and voluntary cost share?

**Answer**

There are primary types of cost sharing. Mandatory cost sharing is that portion of the University contribution to a sponsored project required by the sponsor as a condition of receiving an award. It must be included or a proposal will receive no consideration by the sponsor. Voluntary committed cost sharing is defined as those resources that are committed and budgeted for in a sponsored agreement, although such cost share is not specifically required by the sponsor. Voluntary uncommitted cost sharing is effort or other costs over and above that which is committed and budgeted for and/or agreed to as part of the award. Since it was not proposed and constitutes “additional” time or materials it is not considered a binding agreement and does not need to be tracked for cost accounting purposes or reported to the sponsor.

Cost share, whether mandatory (required by the sponsor), or voluntary (not required by the sponsor), once committed, becomes mandatory and must be tracked, documented, and reported to the sponsor.

**Question**

Does voluntary cost-share need to be shown on the Proposal Approval Form (PAF)? What about uncommitted cost share?

**Answer**

All planned cost share should be documented and approved on the PAF. If the cost share is committed, then it will need to be tracked and reported; documenting it on the PAF is the first step in this process. A fund and cost center for the source of the cost share must be listed on the PAF and the person with budgetary control of the funds must approve the cost share on the PAF. Uncommitted cost share should also be documented on the PAF so that all parties involved in the cost sharing arrangement are aware of and can approve the arrangement. This prevents questions and/or problems from arising when an award is made. This also allows the University to more accurately track the internal commitment to research and creative activities.

**Question**

What is the difference between buyout, overload, and summer salary for board-appointed, AAUP-contract faculty?
For board-appointed faculty with eight-month appointments, **buyout** refers to the sponsor paying a portion of the faculty member’s base salary in exchange for release time from some portion of their regular duties during the academic year. **Overload** refers to the sponsor paying salary over and above the base salary during the academic year and the faculty member commits to working on the project in addition to their regular duties. Generally speaking, federal sponsors will not pay overload salary unless expressly requested and approved ahead of time. **Summer salary** refers to salary paid above and beyond the AY base salary for work performed during the four summer months.

**Question**
How do I figure "buyout"?

**Answer**
Buyout will depend on your workload agreement in your department. Buyout should be calculated based on the portion of your load that the course (or other duty) from which you are buying out represents of your workload. In many cases, buyout of one class in the fall and one class in the spring = salary x .25.

**Question**
How do I figure summer salary?

**Answer**
1 full-time equivalent (FTE) in summer 1 (37.5 days) = 25% salary; 1 FTE in summer 2 (37.5 days) = 25% salary; 1 FTE in summer 1 AND summer 2 (75 days) = 50% salary.

Rules of thumb: 1 month’s effort = 12.5% and is .25 FTE summer 1 and 2; 2 month’s effort = 25% and is .5 FTE summer 1 and 2; 4 month’s effort = 50% and is 1 FTE summer 1 and 2

**Question**
Are time commitments on a project and salary the same thing?

**Answer**
No. Effort is the percentage of time (effort) that you will be working on a project during a given period of time. You may work on a project 12.5% of your time during the academic year (1 course release); and 50% of your time during summer sessions I and II (which would be 25% of your AY salary). Salary for effort is calculated at a percentage of your base salary in that given period of time.

**Question**
How do I figure "overload"?

**Answer**
Number of days committed to project ÷ 150 days

**Question**
How many days and hours in a faculty member’s academic year?

**Answer**
150 days or 1,200 hours = 1 FTE

**Question**
How many days and hours in 12-month employee's year?
260 days or 2,080 hours = 1 FTE

Fall = 15 weeks (75 days); spring = 15 weeks (75 days); summer 1 = 7.5 weeks (37.5 days); summer 2 = 7.5 weeks (37.5 days)

The WMU per diem rate is $45. The United States General Services Administration and the United States Department of State publishes allowable national and international per diem rates. Refer to these rates when budgeting. It is important to obtain receipts for per diem reimbursement, especially if it is above the allowable rate.

Participant support costs are direct costs for items such as stipends or subsistence allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with meetings, conferences, symposia, or training projects. Expenses not considered participant support include honoraria to a guest speaker; conference support such as facility rental, media equipment, conference food; human subject payments for research study; and faculty or staff reimbursement in events related to the grant (meals, lodging, conference, etc.). Participant support costs are removed from the total direct costs before figuring F & A as participant support costs are not subject to F & A recovery.

The United States Office of Management and Budget Circular A-21 states that F&A costs shall be distributed to applicable sponsored agreements and other benefiting activities within each major function on the basis of modified total direct costs, consisting of all salaries and wages, fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and sub grants and subcontracts up to the first $25,000 of each sub grant or subcontract (regardless of the period covered by the sub grant or subcontract). Equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care and tuition remission, rental costs, scholarships, and fellowships as well as the portion of each sub grant and subcontract in excess of $25,000 shall be excluded from modified total direct costs.

How do I budget for students to assist in my research?
Answer
OVPR highly encourages inclusion of graduate assistants and doctoral associates in research proposals. Inclusion of students often enhances the proposal in the eyes of the sponsor. WMU's graduate college publishes a guide for budgeting students who assist in research and creative activities. You may access the newest rates at: http://wmich.edu/grad/facultystaff/index.html. In addition to these rates, PIs should budget a certain amount toward the student's health insurance. Ask your research officer for the latest insurance rates.

Proposal Development

Question
I want to write a grant proposal. Where do I start?

Answer
The OVPR web page and your research officer are two good places to start. For more information on developing your proposal, go to: http://www.wmich.edu/research/tools/proposal-development. To identify your research officer go here: http://www.wmich.edu/research/directory/findstaff

Question
What is a quality circle and how can I leverage one to help with developing my proposal?

Answer
Quality circles help you improve your proposal by allowing peers and previously funded faculty to review your plan before submitting it. This peer review identifies strengths, weaknesses, and errors. OVPR can help you identify people to serve on a quality circle.

Question
How can I get a copy of a funded proposal to use as a guide to writing my own proposal?

Answer
Call or email the funding agency and politely request a copy of a funded proposal. If it is a government agency, proposals are part of the public record and can be obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request. You may also request a copy of a funded grant proposal directly from the funded party. Most often awardees are happy to share. Also ask your research officer, as he/she may know of a funded proposal written by a WMU faculty member that can help.

Proposal Approval and the Electronic Proposal Approval Form (PAF)

Question
How do I get a proposal approved so I may submit my grant application?

Answer
This is a very important step in the submission process. Without approval by an authorized University official, a PI cannot submit a grant application.

OVPR created a web-based system to make proposal approval easy. Access the Proposal Management Center via the OVPR home page or at this address: http://www.wmich.edu/research The system allows you to create, track, and approve your Proposal Approval Form (PAF), also known as the "bucksheet."It's an intuitive system, which captures all the information important for getting a proposal approved, including your project narrative, the project budget, and the budget justification.
**Question**
It is a good idea to become familiar with the PAF system before you get too far along in the process so you know what information you will need?

**Answer**
If you have any questions while completing the PAF, your research officer can assist you.

**Question**
How long does it take to get a PAF approved?

**Answer**
Each department determines who must sign off on a proposal before it is submitted. Depending on the details of the proposal, there could be several levels of approval required. This can be a time-consuming process, so OVPR recommends routing a PAF 1-1/2 to 2 weeks before the grant submission deadline. In many cases the sign-off process can be facilitated by discussing the proposal plans with the relevant parties ahead of time.

**Question**
I want to submit a letter of intent or pre-proposal to a sponsor. Do I need to submit a PAF for this?

**Answer**
In some cases: yes. If the letter of intent or pre proposal includes a budget or proposes cost share, then a PAF is required. If you are unsure whether you need to submit a PAF, call your research officer to discuss it ahead of time.

**Question**
The PAF requires me to identify how F & A and intellectual credit is split. How do I do that?

**Answer**
This is something that should be discussed early in the process with the members of the project team, the chairs of the departments involved, and any other relevant stakeholder.

**Question**
Do I have to be on-campus to use the PAF system?

**Answer**
No, but if you are off-campus, you will need to use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) so that you can access the secure PAF system. More information on using the VPN can be found on the OIT website (hyperlink). If you are having trouble using the VPN to access the PAF system, contact your research officer.

**Question**
What if one of the people who need to approve my project is unavailable to review and approve it?

**Answer**
Remember, even if someone is off-campus, they can access the PAF system using the VPN and still review and approve your PAF. If they do not have internet access or are otherwise unavailable, the PAF system allows for pre-determined back-up approvers. However, in order to keep the process running smoothly, it is a good idea to let your approvers know you are working on a project and that you will be asking them to review it. Advanced communication is essential to preventing approval slow-downs.
**Question**
What if I am not available to approve my PAF?

**Answer**
If you are going to be unavailable to approve a PAF as a PI or CO-PI, then you may designate an alternate approver via the electronic PAF system. You will only be able to select an alternate approver from a list of your immediate supervisors. You should not delegate your approval authority unless it is absolutely necessary. When you delegate your approval authority, you are giving another person the authority to make decisions on your behalf that could have legal ramifications. When you delegate you approval authority, you are, in effect, creating an alternate approver.

**Question**
How can I track the status of my PAF approvals?

**Answer**
The PAF form has a "status" button that allows you to see where your PAF is in the approval process.

**Sponsor Applications**

**Question**
What is WMU's DUNS number and Employer Identification Number (EIN) also known as a Federal Tax Identification Number?

**Answer**
The DUNS Number - Dun & Bradstreet (Federal) is 622364479 and the WMU Federal EIN or Tax Identification number is 1-386007327-A1 (some use only 9 bold #s).

**Question**
Are we registered with grants.gov and the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) database?

**Answer**
Yes.

**Question**
Who is the authorized representative for the University and when can I sign off on an application?

**Answer**
The Vice President for Research and the Associate Vice President for Research are authorized officials for the University. The PI is never authorized by the University to commit University funds and may not sign on behalf of the University in any circumstance.

**Question**
How do I get a letter of support from the University?

**Answer**
OVPR leadership is authorized to write and sign letters of support for external funding proposals. Work with your research officer to compile the information OVPR leadership will need to write and sign a letter for your project.
Question
How do I get registered for FastLane, eRA Commons or other sponsor's electronic systems?
Answer
Contact your research and program officer. We can help you get registered.

Post-Award

Question
What do I do if the sponsor wants me to revise my budget before an award is made?
Answer
This is not uncommon. Let your research officer know about the request for a revised budget as soon as you hear from the sponsor. Your research officer can help you with revising your budget and getting internal approval to submit a revised budget to the sponsor.

Question
What do I do when my project gets funded?
Answer
Congratulations on your funded project! If you found out about your funding directly from the sponsor, be sure to let your research officer know. OVPR will communicate WMU's Grants and Contracts Office about the award. The Grants and Contracts Office is responsible for all post-award activities and will lead you through the post-award process.

Question
What if I don't get funded?
Answer
Don't get discouraged! Call your research officer to talk about next steps. Many very good projects do not get funded simply because there is not enough money for all the good ideas. OVPR has many resources available to PIs may use to improve their proposals for the next round.

Question
What if my project is supposed to start and the final award paperwork has not yet been processed?
Answer
Don't panic. You can request a Pre-award (backstop) account through the Grants and Contracts office. Find your Grant and Contract Specialist here: http://www.wmich.edu/grantscontracts

Question
How do I request a no-cost extension?
Answer
This will depend on the sponsor's requirement. Many federal sponsors allow a "grantee approved" no-cost extension on the first request for the project. This means that the University approves the request and notifies the sponsor that a no-cost extension is needed. In other cases, the sponsor will review and approve the no-cost extension. If it is a "grantee-approved" no-cost extension, then you must complete and submit a University Prior Approval form (hyperlink). Once it is approved, the sponsor can be notified per the sponsor's procedure for doing so. If the no-cost extension must be approved by the sponsor, a
University Prior Approval form is not required. Follow the sponsor's procedure for submitting the request.