



SRA INTERNATIONAL  
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# Introduction to the Pre-Award Process, Proposal Preparation & Best Practices

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# Agenda

- ❖ Proposal Notification Systems
- ❖ PI Eligibility Constraints
- ❖ PI Roles & Responsibilities
- ❖ Reviewing Requests for Proposals (RFP)
- ❖ Developing a Summary of Required Elements (SRE) Checklist
- ❖ Communicating with the PI
- ❖ Budget Development Considerations
- ❖ Budget Elements
- ❖ Developing a Budget Justification
- ❖ Working with Subawards
- ❖ Tips for Effective Communication
- ❖ Common Resources & Links



**You've been notified of an upcoming  
proposal submission...**



**Now what?**

# Develop a Proposal Notification System or Checklist

- ❖ Principal Investigator (PI) Name
- ❖ Sponsor
- ❖ Solicitation/Call
- ❖ Co-PI's & Key Personnel
- ❖ Proposal Due Date
- ❖ Title
- ❖ Start Date & Duration
- ❖ Compliances Expected
- ❖ Budget Information



# Determining PI Eligibility Constraints

## From the Sponsor

Does the sponsor limit who can apply for the specific call?

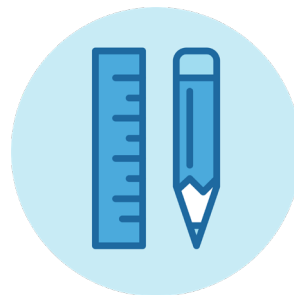
E.g., NSF CAREER Submission:

- ❖ Limit on number of proposals submitted
- ❖ Degree Type
- ❖ Research Area
- ❖ Tenure-track
- ❖ No previous awards
- ❖ Title (no Associate Professors)

## From University/Institution

Are there any institutional policies that limit who may serve as the principal investigator?

Are there any eligibility exemptions that the PI may need to apply for?



# PIs, Co-PIs, and PDs are responsible for **the conduct of a sponsored project**:

- ❖ Intellectual Direction
- ❖ Resource Allocation and Fiscal Stewardship
- ❖ Representing the Project to the Sponsor
- ❖ Administrative and Personnel Oversight
- ❖ Adherence to Relevant Policies and Regulations
- ❖ Meeting the Terms of the Award



# Proposal Checklist Development: Reviewing the Request for Proposals (RFP)



- ❖ Review the RFP and highlight pertinent information:
  - ✓ Deadlines
  - ✓ Budget Limitations
  - ✓ Period of Performance
  - ✓ IP-related issues that need to be brought up to the authorized representative
  - ✓ Exceptions/additions to standard guidelines
  - ✓ Eligibility of the PI/Institution
  - ✓ Items that may result in return without review (RWR)

Also, be sure to...

- ❖ Ensure the most current version of the RFP is used
- ❖ Read related documents and notices as linked in the RFP

# Proposal Checklist Development: Summary of Required Elements (SRE)



Pull information from the RFP into a templated SRE

- ❖ Keep templates for different sponsors (e.g., NIH, NSF, DOE, DOD)
- ❖ Keep templates for specific solicitations (e.g., NIH R01, NSF CAREER)
- ❖ Update templates with each new solicitation
- ❖ Provide links to resources within the document
- ❖ Provide page numbers for quick reference

Highlight important information in **bold** or **red** (e.g., items that will result in return without review)

Use SRE as you obtain final documents/upload to submission system  
Include last updated date in the margins of the SRE

*Remember, the SRE is as much for you as the research administrator as it is for the PI!*



# Sample NSF SRE Checklist

- ✓ Links to templates and documents (RFP)
- ✓ List out deadline dates and times
- ✓ Developer Tool allows for checkable boxes
- ✓ Include important information (see Summary)
- ✓ Set expectations and roles
- ✓ Sr./Key Personnel Documents – per person
- ✓ Formatting information
- ✓ Budget Information (collect at intake)
- ✓ Other Notes
- ✓ Highlights other important info (e.g., RWR)

Sponsor: NSF  
 Title: [TITLE]  
 RFP: PD 20-1417 (Follow the [PAPPG 22-1](#))  
 Research.gov Proposal ID: [ID]

Deadlines (no deadline for sponsor, operating on PI deadline)		
OSP (Full Review): 6/28/2022 4PM	OSP (Limited Review): 7/1/2022 4PM	Sponsor: 7/6/2022 5PM (COB)
Elements		Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Cover Sheet		PI to Start; PRO to Complete
<input type="checkbox"/> List of Suggested Reviewers		Optional; PI to provide if wanted
<input type="checkbox"/> Project Summary (1 page max) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sure to put headings on their own separate lines</li> </ul>		PI to provide
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Table of Contents		Automatically Generated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project Description (15 page limit), including sections: DRAFTED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Results from Prior NSF Support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Broader Impacts</li> </ul>		PI to provide
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> References Cited DRAFTED		PI to provide
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Biosketch (Cornell Only)- using <a href="#">sciENCy format</a> or <a href="#">NSF fillable format</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LAST, FIRST</li> </ul>		PRO Drafted; PI/Co-PIs to confirm
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Budget		PRO to Draft; PI to confirm
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Budget Justification		PRO to Draft (once budget is final); PI to confirm
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current & Pending (Cornell Only) - using <a href="#">sciENCy format</a> or <a href="#">NSF fillable format</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LAST, FIRST (DRAFTED 6/22)</li> </ul>		PRO Drafted; PI/Co-PIs to confirm
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Facilities, Equipment & Other Resources		PRO Drafted; PI/Co-PIs to confirm
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Data Management Plan (2 pages max)		PI to provide
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan (1 page max, N/A)		PI to provide; if applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Letters of Collaboration (limited in scope, <a href="#">see directions here</a> )		PI to provide; if applicable N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaborators & other Affiliations (COA) (Cornell Only) - using the <a href="#">NSF format</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LAST, FIRST</li> </ul>		

## Formatting:

### Fonts Allowed:

- Arial (not narrow), Courier New, Palatino Linotype – 10pt +
- Times New Roman or Computer Modern Family – 11pt +
- 10pt or less allowed for mathematical formulas or equations, figures, tables, or diagram captions and when using a Symbol font to insert Greek letters or special characters.

Spacing: No more than 6 lines of text within a vertical inch

Margins: 1" on all sides, no proposer supplied information may appear in the margins

Paper Size: 8.5" x 11"

LIRI 5: PIs are cautioned that the Project Description must be self-contained, and that LIRI 5 must not be used

## Budget

Start Date: 1/1/2023

Duration: 36 months

Total Amount: \$360,000

## Other Notes:

- Proposals should be submitted through Research.gov, [PI to start in system](#), PRO to upload docs

# Proposal Checklist Development: Communication with PI

## Subject Heading Example:

OSP 146051 | Summary of Required Elements | PI: Smith, B. | NIH Proposal Target Due Date 8/10/2023 5PM

Internal ID      Subject of Email      PI Name      Proposal Type & Due Date

- ❖ Keep email brief
- ❖ Have a call to action for the PI
- ❖ Include any draft documents that may be available:
  - ❖ Previous submissions
  - ❖ Templates
  - ❖ Draft budget based on proposal notification

# Budget Development: What is a Proposal Budget?

A budget is the formal **estimated** description of the total costs (direct and indirect) necessary for the PI to conduct the activities described in the Scope of Work

- ❖ The budget is an indicator of the magnitude of the project.
- ❖ Serves to identify the cost of the project to the sponsor.
- ❖ The budget is used as a measurement of the PI's capabilities to manage the project. A well-developed budget may strengthen the proposal by demonstrating management ability.
  - Budgets that are too high or too low can alert a reviewer to the possibility that the PI does not have a realistic grasp of project needs
  - Must be a reasonable correlation between the project as described and the assessment of the various cost elements

# Budget Development: What to Consider

A budget must include...

- ❖ **Detailed estimate** that reflects the cost required to perform the work
  - Should be prepared for all proposals
  - At a minimum, even when the sponsor does not require a detailed budget (e.g. fixed price agreement, modular), a high-level budget should be prepared for institutional Sponsored Programs Office (SPO) review
  
- ❖ **Budget Justification.** Sponsors typically request detailed information in support of the budget request.



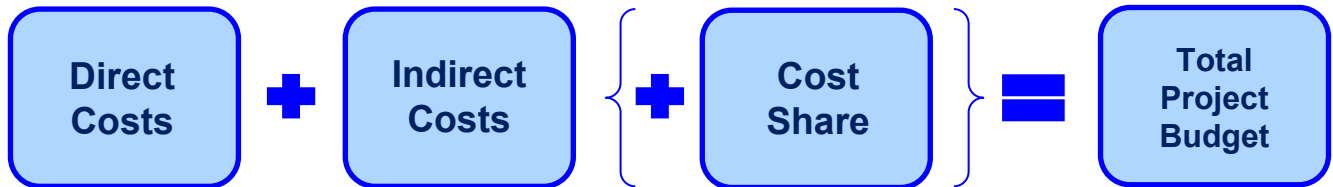
# Budget Development: Additional Items to Consider

- ❖ For Multi-year projects, annual budgets *and* a summary budget must be prepared.
- ❖ Many sponsors provide budget-related guidelines and sponsor-specific budget forms.
  - The proposal budget needs to conform to the sponsor requirements, while still retaining the ability to map to your institution's financial systems.
  - Some sponsors or solicitations may not pay for certain expenses.
  - **PLEASE NOTE:** We should not deliberately propose in one category with the intention of spending in another
- ❖ Funds being requested must be sufficient to perform the work proposed.
- ❖ Sponsors typically request detailed information in support of the budget request.

# Budget Development: Budget Elements

A sponsored project budget is generally comprised of the following elements:

- ❖ Direct Costs
- ❖ Indirect Costs (Facilities & Administrative)
- ❖ Cost Sharing (if applicable)
- ❖ Budget Justification



# Budget Development: Direct Costs

- ❖ With only rare exceptions, budgets must conform to the OMB Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200), for **allowability, allocability, reasonableness, and consistency**
- ❖ Costs that can be identified with a specific sponsored project, and that **can be directly assigned** to such a project with relative ease and a high degree of accuracy

## Standard Direct Costs Budget Categories:

- ❖ Salary & Wages
- ❖ Compensation, Graduate & Sabbatical
- ❖ Employee Benefits
- ❖ Capital Equipment & Fabrication in Progress
- ❖ Travel
- ❖ Participant Support Costs
- ❖ Graduate Student Tuition/Health Insurance
- ❖ Materials & Supplies
- ❖ Publication Costs
- ❖ Services
- ❖ Subawards
- ❖ Other Direct Expenses (e.g. Shared Facilities fees, hosting conferences/seminars, etc.)



# Budget Development: Indirect Costs

- ❖ Are requested to cover real costs to the University
- ❖ These costs are incurred for common or joint objectives and **cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular sponsored project**
- ❖ Based on **Total Direct Costs (TDC)** or **Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC)**, the total direct costs less modifiers)
  - ❖ Per 2 CFR 200.68, “MTDC means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000.”
- ❖ Refer to your institution’s Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)
- ❖ If your institution does not have a NICRA, use the ***de minimis indirect cost rate*** of 10%

$$\text{Indirect Costs Base (typically, MTDC or TDC)} \times \text{Indirect Cost Rate (Percentage)} = \text{Total Indirect Costs}$$



# Budget Development: Cost Share

## Cost Sharing...

- ❖ Is a portion of the costs of a project (direct or indirect) that is **not borne by the sponsor**.
- ❖ Is sometimes referred to as “**matching funds**” or “**in-kind support**”.
- ❖ May be **mandatory or voluntary**. Mandatory cost-share is required by the sponsor and will typically be mentioned in the RFP. Voluntary cost-sharing is not required, but PIs sometimes elect to cost-share anyway.

## May include:

- ❖ Faculty salary
- ❖ Graduate Research Assistant Tuition
- ❖ Unrecovered indirect costs
- ❖ Donated equipment, supplies, time, or other outside entity commitments (third party or external cost share)



Requires specific approval from each cost-sharing party to be included in a proposal budget. Third party cost-share approval is typically in the form of a cost-share commitment letter.

# Budget Development: Budget Justification

The **budget justification**...

- ❖ Must “tie” to the detailed budget and prepared in the same order as the budget cost categories.
- ❖ Is typically a written narrative that explains the various items included in the detailed budget.
- ❖ Describes why those items are allocable to the project.
- ❖ Is the key element of documenting “thoughts” behind the budget development.
- ❖ Includes rates (ex: benefits, indirect costs, escalations), bases, exclusions, etc., and include details on each category.
- ❖ Identifies any normally indirect costs that will be charged directly.
- ❖ Can be vital for resolving audit issues years after project completion.



# Working with Subawards: Where to Start

- ❖ Request Co-PI and/or administrative contact information as soon as possible
- ❖ Determine from the SRE what documents you will need from the subaward
- ❖ Determine what date you will need all documents back (at least 1 week)
  - ❖ Consider any internal deadlines for review
- ❖ Draft an email to the Co-PI and/or administrative contact
  - ❖ Be as detailed as possible
  - ❖ Include a firm due date
  - ❖ Include links to template for requested documents, if available
  - ❖ Include your PI on the correspondence (cc them into the email)



# How can we communicate needed information and documents to a subaward?

*A checklist, of course!*

Subaward: [NAME] University		
Subaward PI:	[NAME]; [PHONE]; [EMAIL]	
Admin Contact:	[NAME]; [PHONE]; [EMAIL]	
Due to PRO:	MM/DD/YYYY	
Elements		Notes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scope of Work	Detailed scope required; only for work to be done at the subaward institution
<input type="checkbox"/>	Institutional LOC or Subaward Commitment Form	If your institution is a part of the <a href="#">FDP</a> , please provide a signed letter on letterhead. Otherwise, please use <a href="#">Cornell's Subcontractor Commitment Form</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Budget Start Date: 1/1/2023 Duration: 4 Years Amount: \$567,032 (direct+indirect)	Detailed Budget required
<input type="checkbox"/>	Budget Justification	Detailed Justification required
<input type="checkbox"/>	Biosketch <input type="checkbox"/> [NAME]	Please provide using <a href="#">sciENCv format</a> or <a href="#">NSF fillable format</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Current & Pending <input type="checkbox"/> [NAME]	Please provide using <a href="#">sciENCv format</a> or <a href="#">NSF fillable format</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Facilities, Equipment & Other Resources	Please send a word document so we can merge into one file
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborators & Other Affiliations (COA) <input type="checkbox"/> [NAME]	Please provide using the <a href="#">NSF format</a>

# Tips for Effective Communication

## Choosing A Method of Communication

- ❖ Various ways to communicate (e.g., email, phone, instant messaging, zoom, in-person)
- ❖ Urgency
- ❖ Previous communications and relationship with PI
- ❖ Does this need to be documented?

## Timeliness

- ❖ Each department has its own expectations on turnaround (e.g., 24 or 48-hours)
- ❖ "Soon" means different things to different people
- ❖ If you cannot answer questions immediately, still let the PI know you received their email

## Clarity & Consistency

- ❖ Professionalism, even with familiarity
- ❖ Consistent tone and message
- ❖ Be brief and provide only pertinent information
- ❖ Provide confident responses –use your resources!



# Tips for Effective: Communication (continued)

## Provide Clear Expectations

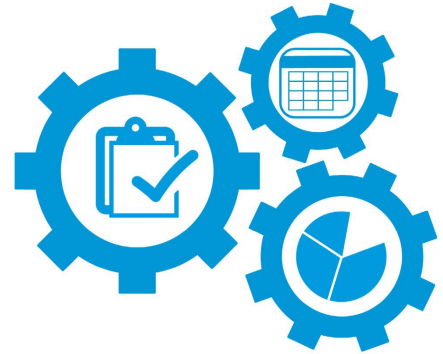
- ❖ Deadlines
- ❖ Call to action when needed
- ❖ Under promise, over deliver

## Keep it Moving!

- ❖ Check-in regularly with everyone on the project
- ❖ Switch up the method of communication if the first is not working
- ❖ Let PI know you are there to help or answer questions if they are unsure

## Know Your Resources

- ❖ If you cannot get ahold of the PI, who might be able to?
- ❖ If you are unsure or not the subject matter expert, who on campus is?
- ❖ What resources can we share with our PI's? (e.g., FAQs, sponsor guidelines)



# Common Resources & Links

## Sponsor Guidelines

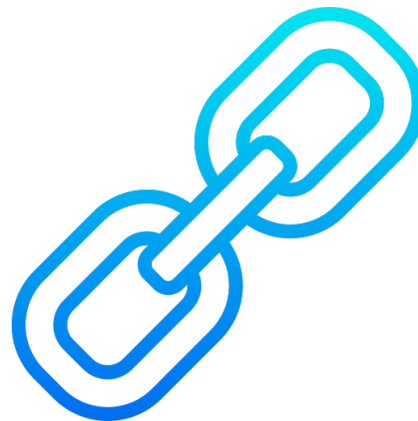
- ❖ NIH Specific Resources
  - [Standard Due Dates & Start Dates](#)
  - [Page Limits](#)
  - [Guides](#)
- ❖ [NSF PAPPG 23-1](#)

## Proposal Content

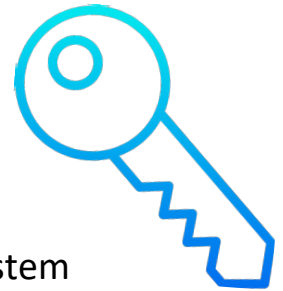
- ❖ [FDP Clearing House](#)
- ❖ [ZIP Code +4 Look-Up](#)
- ❖ [Congressional District Look-Up](#)

## Potential Institutional Resources

- ❖ **Sponsored Programs Office** – pre- and post-award administration
- ❖ **Research Development** – large scale proposals, specialized training, early-career faculty support
- ❖ **Research Integrity & Assurance** – compliance and responsible conduct of research
- ❖ **Animal Resources & Education** – when projects involve vertebrate animals
- ❖ **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office** – when projects involve human subjects
- ❖ **Economic & Venture Development** – entrepreneurship and innovation
- ❖ **Technology Licensing** – technology transfer and commercialization



# Key Take-Aways



- ❖ Develop and utilize a standardized proposal notification system
- ❖ After reviewing the Request for Proposals (RFP) develop a Summary of Required Elements (SRE) for quick reference
- ❖ The proposal budget is an integral part of the proposal and requires careful consideration of both sponsor guidelines and institutional requirements
- ❖ Working with subawards requires collaboration and communication
- ❖ Communication is a critical aspect of proposal development
- ❖ Utilize resources, both internal and external to your institution, to prepare a competitive and comprehensive proposal



# Thank you for attending our session!

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*Presenters: Su Ghosh, Mindy McGill-Carlison, Samantha Grace, Jacob Kurtz*