

TENNESSEE TECH UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF SPONSORED PROGRAMS

Getting Started with Research Grants *The Proposal Process*

Navigating the full grant lifecycle – from the first idea to project close-out.

September 25, 2026



What Is a Sponsored Project?



Externally Funded Activity

Projects or activities conducted by faculty – and sometimes staff or students – supported wholly or in part by external, restricted funds awarded to the University.



A Formal Written Agreement

A grant, contract, or cooperative agreement entered into by the University and an external sponsor, carrying defined obligations, deliverables, and terms.

Restricted funds must be spent according to the sponsor's terms – the defining feature of sponsored work.

Why Sponsored Programs?



Career Enhancement

- Fund publications and other academic production
- Build a team for longer-term plans and goals
- Third-party validation of your work



Resources to Pursue Your Goals

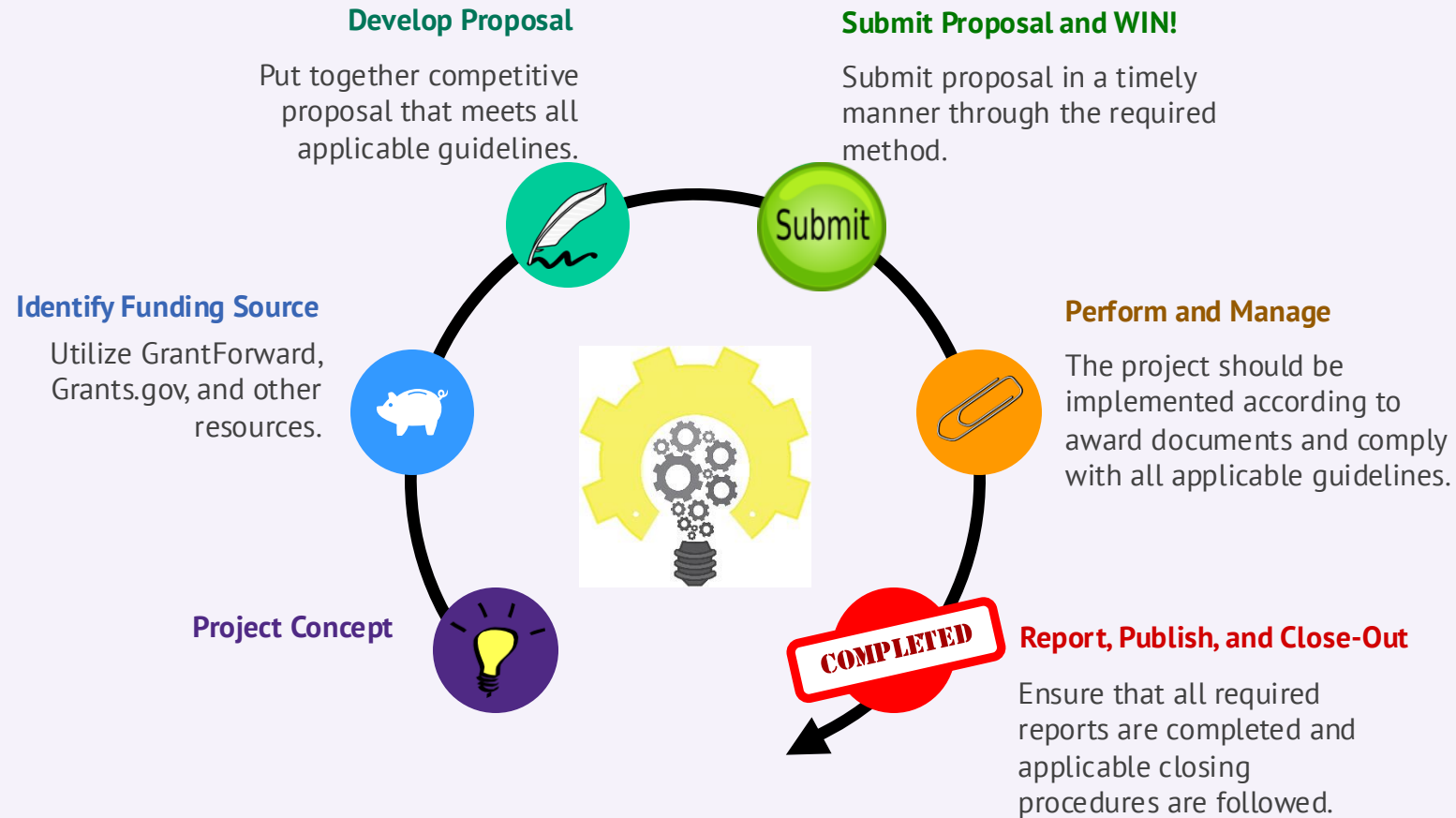
- Course release and summer funding
- Student workers
- Conference travel



Improve Community

- Academic field and curriculum
- Local community
- National and international dialog

Life Cycle of a Sponsored Project



Developing Your Concept

“Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” – President and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1957



Create Ideal Research Project

- Concept paper or white paper describing the ideal
- Consider whether parts of the project could be done independently
- Think through similar or adjacent projects



Plan the Pitch

- What makes the project exciting to your field? To a lay person?
- Who are potential funders? What are the funders' priorities?
- Sketch out your sales pitch(es) based on anticipated funder and reviewer

Suggestion: Have 2-3 projects, with alternatives, ready to go.

Tools in Place

Set these up before you find a solicitation — not the week it's due.

SciENcv

Recently adopted,
standardized format

- National Library of Medicine:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/>
- Biosketch
- Current and Pending (Other) Support

System IDs

- Login.gov
(federal credential)
- Grants.gov
- Research.gov
- Foundation portals

Other Pieces

- ORCID (used as “persistent identifier”)
- Collaborators and Co-Authors
- Facilities and resources boilerplate

Where to Look – and How

Funding Sources



Federal

26 federal grant-making agencies



State

Agencies such as THEC and TBR



Local

City & county governments



Industry

National, regional or local



Foundations

National, regional or local

Active Strategies

Keyword searches in GrantForward, Grants.gov and agency websites; direct correspondence with agencies and colleagues.

Passive Strategies

Automatic email alerts from GrantForward and Grants.gov subscriptions whenever a search returns a match.

Reading the Solicitation

Also known as

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Call for Proposals (Call)

A well-written solicitation holds every key to a successful proposal – funding amount, deadline, required documents, and priorities.

- ✓ Read carefully so you and any collaborators understand every expectation
- ✓ Determine the funding priorities and align your idea to them
- ✓ Identify required documents: project description, biosketches, current & pending support
- ✓ Review budget guidelines – allowable and required costs
- ✓ Understand the review criteria that will be applied

Checklists are your friends!

Strategize Your Proposal

1

Answer the Mail!

- Mirror the RFP structure
- Address all items
- Include all requirements

2

Value Proposition

- Proposal is sales and marketing
- Demonstrate academic value
- Align with program goals

3

Make It Easy

- Call attention to scoring items
- Keep audience in mind

Mirror the solicitation, prove the fit, and make the reviewer's job easy.

Budget With Your Project Plan

Building from your project plan will help you:

- ✓ Identify all potential expenses
- ✓ Factor in unexpected costs – identify where it can go wrong
- ✓ Draft your budget justification and narrative as you go
- ✓ Keep project plan, budget, and budget narrative aligned



DO NOT procrastinate the budget!

Recommendation: Gantt Chart

Benefits of a Gantt Chart

- **Planning**
 - Responsibilities
 - Deadlines
 - Resources
- **Identify dependencies**
 - Prerequisite tasks
 - Critical time windows
- **Keeps planning realistic**
- **Project management and tracking**

Free Excel templates:
create.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/gantt-charts

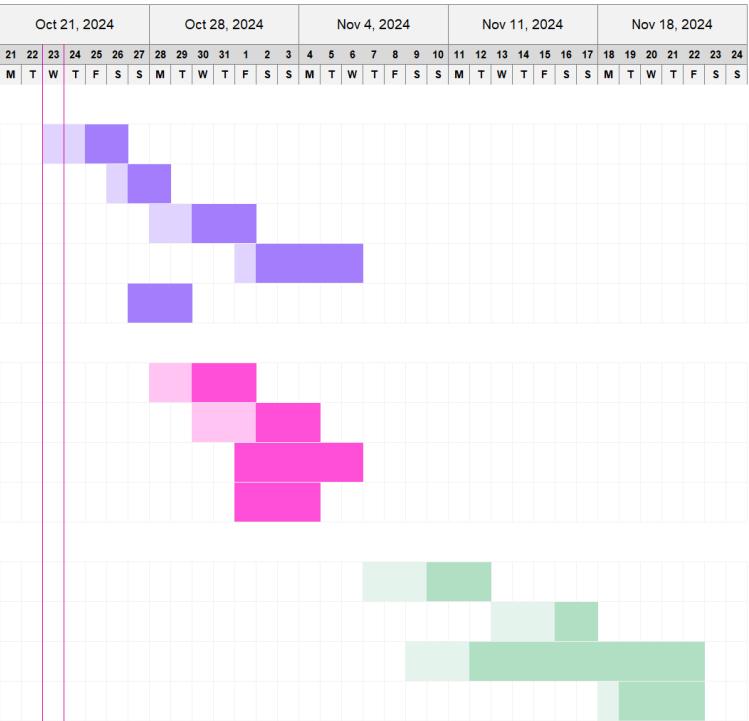
Sample project

Project lead

TASK	ASSIGNED TO	PROGRESS	START	END
Initiation				
Define goals	Gokce Aslan	50%	10/23/24	10/26/24
Conduct studies	Hayden Cook	60%	10/26/24	10/28/24
Establish comms	Jens Martensson	50%	10/28/24	11/1/24
Develop charter	Nuria Acevedo	25%	11/1/24	11/6/24
Set up team	Olivia Wilson		10/27/24	10/29/24
Planning and design				
Create schedule	Gokce Aslan	50%	10/28/24	11/1/24
Identify deliverables	Hayden Cook	50%	10/30/24	11/4/24
Define scope	Nuria Acevedo		11/1/24	11/6/24
Identify risks	Olivia Wilson		11/1/24	11/4/24
Execution				
Execute tasks	Gokce Aslan	50%	11/7/24	11/12/24
Monitor progress	Hayden Cook	60%	11/13/24	11/17/24
Provide updates	Nuria Acevedo	25%	11/9/24	11/22/24
Testing and validation	Olivia Wilson	25%	11/18/24	11/22/24

Project start: **Wed, 10/23/2024**

Display week: **1**





Don't Forget!

Management / Admin Tasks

- Hiring and scheduling students
- Technical and progress reports
- IRB / IACUC process
- Project manager? ~10% admin effort

Academic Production

- Paper writing
- Conference presentation

Facilities Upgrades

- Equipment installation
- Hazmat storage or handling

Post-Project Costs

- Data storage
- Sample storage
- Hazmat disposal

Omitted work and costs add up — budget the admin, reporting, storage, and disposal.

PART TWO

You Won the Award — Now What?



Project Launch

Kickoff meeting & award activation



Post-Award Processes

Contracts, reporting, and more



Bookkeeping Overview

Day-to-day financial operations



Compliance

Common issues, help & resources



Launching Your Project

Award Activation

Setting up the award in the financial system (Talon) – internal approvals, budget, effort, and certifications.

Kickoff Meeting

A face-to-face meeting where PIs and support staff align on roles and responsibilities.

Who does what



Principal Investigator

Performance of the project, including financial decisions and compliance.



Bookkeeper

Day-to-day operations: purchasing, reconciling accounts, and HR.



Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP)

Signature authority, grant/contract changes, and compliance support.



Grant Accounting

Setting up the financial system, invoicing, and financial reporting.

Post-Award Processes



Subawards & Contracts

OSP drafts subawards for research collaboration; Purchasing handles fee-for-service contracts. Use OSP's "Subrecipient vs. Contractor" worksheet when unsure.



Annual & Final Reports

Reporting is a team sport, with different areas contributing; OSP can assist with reporting; funders or individual programs may set unique requirements.



Day-to-Day Operations

Bookkeepers and Grant Accounting keep purchasing, reconciliation, and records on track.



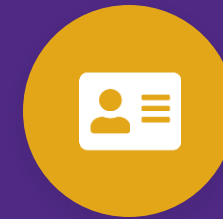
Compliance Functions

Ongoing monitoring keeps the project aligned with sponsor and institutional rules.

Grant Accounting

Core responsibilities

- ✓ Establish a project in Talon for each externally sponsored award
- ✓ Monitor budgets and approve expenses in Talon
- ✓ Invoice and draw down reimbursement for grant expenses monthly
- ✓ Prepare and submit federal SF-425 quarterly reports; SEFA, NSF & other reports
- ✓ Monitor for overspending and coordinate resolution with bookkeepers and Pls
- ✓ Disseminate effort reports each semester and perform grant closeout



Grant Accounting Staff

Gail Ligon

Director · ext. 3312

Tara Lytle

Assistant Director · ext. 3026

Reporting

OSP can assist with any reporting processes. Funders or individual programs may have unique reporting requirements. The most common reports:

Report	Responsible Party	Signatory (if needed)
Technical/Progress	PI	OSP
Financial	Grant Accounting	Business
Invention/ Intellectual Property	PI	OSP
Property Inventory	PI/Facilities	Varies, usually OSP
Anti-discrimination (Title VI, IX, etc.)	PI/OSP/Compliance	Varies, usually Compliance

A Cautionary Tale

**What do you get when
you cross a cow with an
octopus?**



**A visit from the ethics
committee and immediate
withdrawal of your
funding.**

Compliance Essentials



Compliance Training

TTU contracts with CITI.
Required: Responsible Conduct of Research,
Export Control, and Research Security.



Ethics Committees

IRB for human-subjects work; IACUC for
vertebrate-animal work. Also: Institutional
Biosafety (IBC) and Radiation Safety.
OSP contacts guide each review.



Sensitive Information

Medical (HIPAA), student (FERPA), and Controlled
Unclassified Info (NIST 800-171) need special
handling.



Research Security & Export Control

Security is a rapidly evolving area. Foreign
involvement needs OSP review. Activity that
used to be exempt may no longer be.

QUESTIONS?

Reach out to the Office of Sponsored Programs – we're here to help at every stage.

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