



# Proposal Writing Toolkit

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This guide is designed to help Cooperative Extension professionals plot a feasible, lower-stress timeline to submitting a grant proposal. **It includes a suggested checklist of steps** that can be printed to help you:

- ☒ find funding opportunities that are the right fit for your projects;
- ☒ hone your project ideas while building consensus and understanding among your team;
- ☒ engage the funding, proposal writing, and evaluation resources available to you at the University of Arizona;
- ☒ draft and critically review your proposal; and
- ☒ submit through Sponsored Projects.

It also includes **a glossary of relevant terms** (p. 9), **links to helpful resources and more information** (imbedded throughout and in the appendix on p. 12), **a concept outline template** (p. 14), **and logic model template** (p. 16). In some cases, you may be asked to follow a specific format for a logic model (e.g., the CYFAR program currently requires that you use their system to create a logic model) or other program documents; the templates here are just one version of these products.

The checklist begins 3-4 months before submission in recognition of the time it takes to form cogent plans, gather collaborators, and write and review a winning proposal. However, the window between proposal announcements (or when a funding opportunity is identified) and submission deadlines may be narrower than this, and these same steps can be generally by applied on a shortened timeline. In fact, many of these steps can be completed as soon as you have a project idea, regardless of whether you've already identified a funding mechanism- for quicker turn-arounds, it can really help to have completed this groundwork in advance.

\*Note that the applicant for all proposals is the University, and (almost all) submissions will need to be approved and submitted by sponsored projects. See the last 3 steps of this timeline for more information about how to submit through sponsored projects-- keep these dates in mind as you're planning your proposal.

## Proposal Checklist

### Any time, all the time!

**Research funding opportunities:** *Use your resources, make it a part of your routine, and set up funding alerts where possible.*

**Tip: Prioritize funding opportunities that have fewer requirements (such as reporting, constraints on how funds are used, etc.). Funding from foundations and private organizations often has fewer requirements than government grants, for example.**

- Familiarize yourself with the [Office of Research Innovation & Impact \(RII\)](#) website, which has links to internal and external funding databases.

You can also set up a meeting with RII to discuss your short-, medium-, and long-term funding strategy. Email [resdev@arizona.edu](mailto:resdev@arizona.edu), and your request will be forwarded to one of their team members.

- Create an account with [Pivot-RP](#) (using your University of Arizona NetID) to access the most comprehensive database of global funding opportunities, save searches, and set up customizable funding alerts.

There are training materials about using the Pivot database on RII's website [here](#).

- Set up personal/ team alerts for yearly funding opportunities (such as [NIFA](#)). Knowing when these grants will open each year allows your team to brainstorm projects, bring in partners, gather needs assessment data, and start the proposal early.
  - **Tip:** Depending on your topic area, it might be possible to browse previous proposals to get a sense of the kinds of activities that have been funded and what might be novel. For example, if you're considering health-adjacent work, do a search of NIH's [RePORTER](#). You can also typically find recently funded projects for a given foundation, like [this list](#) of those from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- Reach out to UA development professionals. It's their job to court funders and help connect passionate philanthropists with UA changemakers. If you have a great idea that you'd really like to fund, set up a time to talk with Mike Celaya ([michaelcelaya@arizona.edu](mailto:michaelcelaya@arizona.edu)), Director of Development for the College of Agriculture, Life and Environmental Science (CALES). *Note that there are separate processes and resources for foundation applications, including foundation project managers and reviewers.*

- RII's website links to the [Foundation Directory Online](#), a database of US foundations with active grants. Note, if you can't access the database via the first link, login to the [University Libraries page](#) and type it into the A-Z Databases search bar.
- For health-related projects, [Vitalyst Health Foundation's](#) monthly e-newsletter includes relevant funding opportunities. Consider subscribing.

## 16-12 weeks prior to submission deadline

### Convene your team and refine your project idea

- Consider starting your proposal process by convening your core project team to **complete a concept outline** (see the attached template). This will help ensure everyone is on the same page about the project and elucidate next steps (such as whether any additional partners are needed to implement the program). It also builds writing momentum, and content from the outline may be pulled directly into the eventual proposal. *Note: this step can be completed before a grant opportunity has even been identified!*
  - **Tip:** At this stage, focus on ideas, not perfect writing. Bullet points are OK! Flag areas that feel less developed to come back to later.
  - **Tip:** If you need help justifying the need for the program, reach out to your [UA research librarian](#) to help with literature review.
- In completing the concept outline, you may realize that additional partners, expertise, or community connections are needed. At this stage, you and your project team could complete an [actor map](#) or [stakeholder analysis](#) to identify partners that could be involved in different ways.
- Use the concept outline to **build your theory of change or logic model** (see the attached template).

Logic models and theories of change (and concept maps) are similar, with the former usual a more simplified distillation of your program that serves as a convenient at-a-glance tool. Even in a simplified form, you should think critically about the desired outcomes of your program and how feasible it is that your planned activities will lead to the outcomes.

- **Tip:** Consider filling in the logic model backwards (from outcomes – outputs – activities – inputs). There are many online resources about creating logic models, including [this video](#) of working backwards through a parenting program logic model.
- **Tip:** It is okay if there are question marks in your logic model at this point.

Along with the concept outline, working through the logic model is a good way to identify these questions early on and think thoroughly about the reasoning behind your project. Then build your proposal off of your logic model (rather than your logic model off of your proposal).

<https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-theoryofchange-steps-2022.pdf>

- Once you have identified a specific funding opportunity**, consider how your program concept fits with the RFP and grant requirements (e.g., populations and geographic specifications, recipient institution and other limitations). Seriously consider the funding amount/period and your staff capacity to implement the program.

**Is there a required Letter of Intent (LOI)?** If so, make sure to factor this into your planning timeline. Optional LOIs can be a good opportunity to get feedback.

If you decide to apply, **notify the appropriate person in CALES** (your county's Grants and Contracts Manager/ "embed") as soon as possible, especially for grants where only one submission is allowed per institution. Be sure to send them the agency funding opportunity announcement as soon as possible; they can review it to be sure that you are eligible to apply.

- **Tip:** Check UA's [Limited Submission page](#) to see whether you'll need to first secure the application 'ticket' from UA RDS.
- **Tip:** Consider **contacting the program officer** for the funding agency to discuss your plans- their contact information is typically provided on the RFP, funding website, or PIVOT database. This is a common practice for major federal research grants, and they can give you a sense of whether your proposal idea is likely to be of interest given the current direction of research in the field. See RII's website for best practices on contacting the program officer.

## 12 weeks prior to submission deadline

### Engage your resources

- Share the concept outline and logic model with your program lead, supervisor, extended team, and any potential collaborators on the project to build buy-in and refine project objectives, roles, activities, etc.
- At least 12 weeks before the submission deadline, **contact RII** (by emailing [resdev@arizona.edu](mailto:resdev@arizona.edu)) to set up a date for them to review a full draft of your proposal. This is optional, but highly valuable. *This date should be at least 5 weeks*

before the submission deadline to allow you time to address RII's suggestions.

- **Review date:** \_\_\_\_\_

See other ways that RII can support your proposal [in this video](#) and at [this website](#).

## 12-5 weeks prior to submission deadline

### Proposal draft

- Review the Request for Proposals (RFP) as a project team and make sure all proposal requirements are understood and can be met. Using the concept outline as a general guide, fill out a **detailed project timeline** including information such as timeframe (e.g., month, quarter), activities to be performed, responsible partner, and objective fulfilled. *Most RFPs require a project timeline and may have different fields to include.*
  - **Tip:** Like the concept paper and logic model, completing the project timeline early can help elucidate any remaining questions that need to get ironed out. Again, it's ok to have question marks, just create a plan for answering them!
  - **Tip:** The **Community Research, Evaluation & Development (CRED) Team** can serve as the evaluator for projects. If you are interested in collaborating with CRED in this way, reach out as you gather grant collaborators and begin your planning work by [submitting a request for evaluation assistance](#).
- Set up a shared online document with a heading for each section of the narrative listed in the RFP. Using the same order and wording can help both you and the reviewers see that you've checked all the required boxes. *If you're working with RII, they may be able to help you format this project narrative template.*
  - **Tip: Consider using UA Box** to avoid version issues. In this app, collaborators must work in the document "online" instead of in "desktop" if multiple people are editing simultaneously. Google Drive is another option but may present more formatting challenges for the final document.
- Assign roles for completing the **first draft of the proposal** (by the review date set with RII), including the budget outline and justification, evaluation and data management plans, letters of support/commitment, etc.
  - **Tip:** [RII's website](#) has tips and templates for different proposal sections. If you are working with an evaluator (such as the CRED team), they can complete the evaluation and data management plan sections.

- Start working through the **budget**. Reach out to [ALVSCE Research Administrators](#), who can help prepare a budget or provide a template if the grant doesn't have a specific form. Make sure that you are factoring in a correct [indirect cost rate](#) based on the activity type or as stipulated in the funding opportunity.

- **Tip:** Include an inflation factor for salaries (usually 3-5%) in multi-year grants.

Decide on roles and discuss the percent effort for the Primary Investigator (PI), co-PIs, and key personnel. If cost sharing is required by the funder, work with your embed and business manager to identify an appropriate match. If you're working with colleagues at other institutions, be aware that setting up [subawards](#) can require additional steps and deadlines.

You will eventually also need a budget justification, i.e., a description of what each person will do on the project and why other items are included in the budget.

- (If needed) Start reaching out to partners for **letters of support**. The RFP will stipulate how many letters are needed or allowed, and who they should be from. These could come from industry partners, community organizations, or individuals who have expressed a need for the type of work you will be doing.

- **Tip:** You can provide a draft letter of support that can be altered as needed, or you can provide your partners with a summary of your planned project and ask them to fill in their own words.
- **Tip:** Give them plenty of time before the actual due date to make sure you get them back in time to address any issues. As long as you've asked long enough in advance, you could ask them to complete the letter 2-3 weeks before the proposal due date.



## 5 weeks prior to submission deadline

### Proposal review and submission

- "Pink team"/ RII review:** Review the principal ideas and scope of the project to identify major gaps or deficiencies and improve the design of your proposed work. Add in any missing elements which may cause you to reorganize your proposal.
  - If you are working with RII, congratulations! They will complete this step for you. RII will review for copy editing (e.g., grammar, syntax, flow) as well as content edits to help your proposal be more competitive based on the RFP. Just be sure to factor in the time to respond to RII's edits and suggestions.
  - **Tip:** Review [RII's list of grant-writing tips and reasons why proposals fail](#) to

check against your proposal.

## >15 business days prior to submission deadline

(20 business days for proposals involving subawards): \_\_\_\_\_

- [The ALVSCE Research Administrator team](#) must receive the agency funding opportunity announcement and budget outline. They can assist with preparing the full budget/ budget justification and other non-science related documents in the sponsor's requested format. This can be submitted using the [Proposal Intake Form](#), emailing your designated Research Administrator or by emailing the team at ALVSCE-Research@arizona.edu
- Full proposal/ "Red team" review:** Review a complete draft of the proposal against the RFP requirements. Identify missing elements, weak sections where specifics and data can be added, and how flow can be improved. Make sure word count meets any guidelines.
- Check that all PIs and key personnel are up-to-date on all [training requirements](#) relevant to their role in the research/ program.

## >8 business days prior to submission deadline

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- Grant support staff must receive:**
  - **Project Title**
  - **Project start and end dates**
  - **Project abstract/summary**
  - **Budget and budget justification**
  - **Final documents for any subawards (Scope of Work, budget, justification and subrecipient commitment form)**
  - **PI/Co-I distribution of credit and F&A**

Proposal documents received after this 8 business day deadline will be subject to the ALVSCE Late Proposal Policy- more information and FAQs on the policy can be found [here](#).

- Final/ "Gold team" review:** Critically review the final draft for use of acronyms, terminology, figures and tables, formatting, spelling and grammar.



>3 business days prior to submission deadline

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- Completed grant proposal package with all approvals due at Sponsored Project Services. Proposals routed outside of this [three-day deadline](#) run the risk of not being submitted to the sponsor. **NO SUBSEQUENT CHANGES TO DOCUMENTS ARE ALLOWED.**

- Make sure that PIs and key personnel are available to connect over a UA-connected computer or VPN to approve the routing in the UA system.



Sponsor submission deadline: \_\_\_\_\_



## Glossary

### Roles

The designation of PI, PD, co-PI, Co-I, or key personnel depends on UA role, expertise, previous leadership experience, and contributions to the project. RII maintains a page explaining eligibility criteria for different roles: <https://research.arizona.edu/administration/getting-started/principal-investigator-project-director-co-investigator>

**Principal Investigator (PI):** A PI is the lead researcher and is typically responsible for the overall design, implementation, and management of the research project.

**Program Director (PD):** The PD title is generally used to convey the same importance as a PI role, but indicates that the person isn't focused on research, rather that they are focused on the operation of a program.

**Co-Principal Investigator (co-PI):** A co-PI is a collaborator with the PI, sharing responsibilities for project leadership, design, and implementation. Some funders (e.g., NIH) don't acknowledge Co-PIs.

**Co-Investigator (co-I):** A co-I is a senior member of the team, sharing responsibilities for project leadership, design, and implementation but not as fully as a co-PI.

**Key Personnel:** Key personnel are individuals who have a significant role (e.g., contributing expertise and effort to specific aspects of the project) but may not have the primary responsibility or leadership role. This can include researchers, staff, technicians, or other team members critical to the project's implementation and success.

### Budgeting

**Cost sharing:** Some sponsors require that the University contribute to the funding of a project. Cost-sharing details, including identifying the specific source of funding, must be approved prior to routing the proposal. See RII's page on [Cost Sharing and Matching](#) and [ALVSE's research training](#) for more details. Consider reaching out to your business manager and pre-awards to discuss cost sharing and/or salary savings, which occur when a state-funded faculty member receives grant funding that covers a portion of their salary.

**Direct costs:** Direct costs are any expense that can be linked directly to your product/program. Common categories include people time (which is usually the largest total amount), travel, materials, software, and equipment. In your grant budget, you are asked to make reasonable estimates for direct costs, and most funders allow for small adjustments without having to make a formal amendment. However, you will not be able to make huge changes to the direct costs you've budgeted.

**Indirect costs:** Indirect costs, also called "overhead" or "Facilities & Administration (F&A)" costs, are a percent charge that is added to the direct costs (e.g., salaries, materials, travel and conferences). These costs represent the administrative and institutional infrastructure

the University of Arizona provides to university-based projects. Indirect cost rates vary substantially based on the activity type and funder requirements, so be sure to reference the [University's F&A](#) page and determine whether the funder specifies their own limit.

**Subaward/ Subrecipient:** For some programs, it can be helpful to designate a partner organization or institution as a “subrecipient” of the funding that will be responsible for completing certain components or bringing new expertise to the project. There are additional procedures that must be followed when submitting proposals and managing a project with subrecipients, which are detailed on the [Office of Research Innovation & Impact's \(RII\) webpage](#).

## General terms

**Business days:** Notice that some of the dates in the timeline specify a number of business days prior to the final submission due date. Business days are Monday-Friday and exclude University/Federal holidays.

**Conflict of Interest (COI):** A "conflict of interest" in a grant proposal refers to a situation where an individual or institution involved in the proposal has competing interests that could compromise the objectivity, integrity, or impartiality of the research or decision-making process. This conflict may arise when there is a financial, personal, or professional relationship that could influence the outcome or conduct of the research. PIs are asked to disclose potential conflicts of interest within the [University of Arizona's e-Disclosure system](#) as part of the grant application process and periodically throughout the funding period. For more information, see the [Conflict of Interest and Commitment Policy](#).

**Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC):** Like the IRB, the IACUC ensures the safety and humane treatment of animals used in research, teaching, or testing. IACUCs review and approve protocols for animal research, inspect facilities where animals are housed and used, and ensure compliance with regulations and guidelines for animal care and use. For guidance on submitting to University of Arizona's Animal Welfare Program, see these [Resources for PIs and New Investigators](#). Note that PIs and key personnel should check that their [IACUC training](#) is up-to-date.

**Institutional Review Board:** An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is an independent body whose responsibility is to ensure the protection of the rights, safety, and well-being of human subjects involved in a research study. IRBs review and approve research protocols, assessing ethical considerations, potential risks, and the informed consent process. While Extension programs often involve human subjects, they are usually not considered “research” and will not require a submission to [Arizona's Human Subjects Protection Program](#). If you are unsure if you need IRB review, see [this guidance document](#) or complete the [IRB Protocol for Determination of Human Research](#). Note that PIs and key personnel should check that their [IRB training](#) is up-to-date.

**Letter of Intent/Interest (LOI) or Concept Paper:** For some proposals, a brief (~2 page) LOI or concept paper must be submitted as the first round of review, usually several

months before the final proposal is due. LOIs include information about the organization(s)/institution(s) that are applying, a brief statement of need, and a description of the proposed project and activities. Only applications of interest to the review team will proceed to the full proposal. Some proposals have optional LOIs, which can be a good opportunity to get feedback from the reviewers. LOIs can usually be submitted by the project team without going through sponsored projects.

**Limited submissions:** Limited submission funding opportunities are where the funder stipulates that an organization (i.e., UA) can only have a specific number of applicants. To address this stipulation, UA has developed a process where prospective applicants must signal their interest to Research Development Services (RDS) by submitting a pre-proposal, and RDS then decides who from UA will get to apply. For more, see the [limited submissions](#) page.

**Logic model:** Logic models are a graphic depiction of the proposed project. They include a description of the “situation” or need for the program, the resources available to run the program, planned activities, and intended shorter- and longer-term impacts of the project. Most RFPs/RFAs require a logic model, and creating one can be a good exercise for the project team to consider the relationship between program activities and what you hope to achieve. They are a simplified communication tool, and it is worth thinking in more detail about the plausibility of causal connections between your activities and outcomes, for example. *See the attached template.*

**Request for Proposals (RFP)/ Request for Application (RFA)/Request for Grant Application (RFGA):** RFPs/RFAs/RFGAs are funding opportunities issued by a foundation, government or other organization. They are sometimes issued on a recurring basis (e.g., annually) and include stipulations on who can apply, how funding can be used, and requirements for the application. Proposals must be submitted through the University’s sponsored projects office (3 business days prior to the funder’s deadline). Once submitted, they are reviewed by a panel, and a specified number are awarded funding. *Reviewer comments are valuable feedback that should be considered for future applications.*

**For more funding terminology help, see the [USDA’s Grants Terminology](#) page, [CDC’s Dictionary of Terms](#), or search the funders’ page for terms that may be specific to the agency.**

## Appendix of Links

### University of Arizona Office of Research, Innovation, and Impact (RII)

Home page: <https://research.arizona.edu/>

Research Development Services (RDS): <https://research.arizona.edu/development>

Email: [ResDev@arizona.edu](mailto:ResDev@arizona.edu)

How to engage with RDS: <https://research.arizona.edu/development/research-development-services/how-engage-rds>

Top Three Questions video clip: <https://vimeo.com/705497079>

Contacting Program Officers: <https://research.arizona.edu/development/proposal-development/opportunity-id-assessment/contacting-program-officers>

Funding page: <https://research.arizona.edu/development/find-funding>

Cost-sharing and matching: <https://research.arizona.edu/development/find-funding>

Facilities & Administration (F&A) Rates: <https://research.arizona.edu/administration/build-budget/FA-Costs/FA-rates>

Subawards page: <https://research.arizona.edu/administration/subawards-outgoing>

Compliance training: <https://research.arizona.edu/compliance/training>

Human Subjects Protection Program/ IRB: <https://research.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program>

Animal Welfare Program/ IACUC: <https://research.arizona.edu/compliance/IACUC>

Conflicts of Interest & Commitment/ eDisclosure: <https://policy.arizona.edu/ethics-and-conduct/conflicts-interest-commitment-policy>

### College of Agriculture, Life & Environmental Sciences (CALES)

Research administration page: <https://research.cales.arizona.edu/>

Contacts for grants and contracts: <https://research.cales.arizona.edu/pre-award-process>

### University of Arizona Libraries

UA Library's A-Z Database search: <https://libguides.library.arizona.edu/az.php>

Contact your research librarian: <https://lib.arizona.edu/about/contact/your-librarian>

### University of Arizona Community Research, Evaluation, and Development (CRED) Team

Website: <https://research.arizona.edu/>

Data sources & other resources that can help document need for a proposed project: <https://norton.arizona.edu/cred/resources>

Request for evaluation assistance:  
[https://uarizona.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6DnxlmMkUT1tcrA](https://uarizona.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6DnxlmMkUT1tcrA)

Email: [CRED@arizona.edu](mailto:CRED@arizona.edu)

## **Funding terminology**

CDC Dictionary of Terms: <https://www.cdc.gov/grants/dictionary/index.html>

USDA Grants Terminology: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/fm/grants-terminology>

NIH Glossary: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/glossary.htm>

## **Funding databases/ resources**

Pivot-RP database: <https://pivot.proquest.com/>

Foundation Directory Online: <https://fconline-foundationcenter-org.ezproxy1.library.arizona.edu/?r=%2Fsearch%2F>

Vitalyst Health Foundation: <http://vitalysthealth.org/>

## **Funded projects**

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation- Awarded Grants example:

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/grants/awarded-grants.html>

NIH RePORTER: <https://reporter.nih.gov/>

## **Planning your program and partnerships**

FSG Guide to Actor Mapping: <https://www.fsg.org/resource/guide-actor-mapping/>

Community Tool Box Stakeholder Analysis: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/encouraging-involvement/identify-stakeholders/main>

Logic model example video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lah-Gf114U>

## Concept Outline

### What do you want to do, and why do you want to do it?

(Program activities/ implementation) What actions will you be taking to achieve the goals of your program? Include details about - How often? How long?

(Need) Describe the community need, citing any relevant data, literature, needs assessments, etc. *Tip: It's okay to start with anecdotes and impressions of need here, but ultimately this section will need supporting evidence with citations to convince funders of the need.*

(Target population) What are the specifics of who you intend to reach through this programming? If your programming isn't about people, then what geographic areas, etc. will you focus on?

### What do you hope to achieve through your programming?

Short-term outcomes (1-3 years)

Long-term outcomes (>3 years)

### What does success look like, and how will you know you're there?

Success is:

How will you evaluate and assess your progress? *Tip: don't write this and expect someone else to do it later! Your evaluators, whether they are internal to the project team or external, should be at the table ASAP.*

### Who will bring their expertise to the program?

List the team members and partners who will be involved.

Who (name, organization)	Expertise/ role in the program

Insert more rows as needed!

(Organizational information) This is about you & UA! Why are you the right entity to lead this work (unique facilities, resources, institutional contributions, regional setting)? What makes this an all-star team (unique competencies, thought leadership, cultural connection, past performance)?

(Partners needed) Would the program benefit from additional expertise? Are there any strategic collaborations you can make?

### **Is the project feasible?**

If awarded, would everyone involved be able to dedicate the necessary time for the program to succeed?

Can you demonstrate feasibility based on previous projects or published work?

Do you have alternative strategies if the objectives aren't achieved?

### **Is the project sustainable?**

Do you know of any funding mechanisms that could support this program?

How will the target population access and interact with this program (and its outcomes) over time?

Other notes/ next steps:

**Project Title:**

**Situation statement:** Briefly describe the condition that is creating a problem; the problem that needs to be solved, the population affected by the problem; and the specific need you are addressing with your program.

**Strategy/ objectives:** Briefly describe your program intervention strategy and the main changes you hope to achieve.

<b>Resources</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes (1-3 years)</b>	<b>Impacts (3+ years)</b>
Funding Staff Partners & relationships Community spaces Values/Principles	Program activities implemented to meet the need	Activities will produce these specific outputs (participants recruited, enrolled, trained, demographic targets, number of workshops, number passing post-test, etc.)	Short-term: changes in knowledge/attitudes/skills Medium-term: Changes in behavior	Longer-term: Changes in participant condition/status, community-level change