

# Finding Funding

Which came first . . . the project or the funding?

**OR**

Should you write the proposal and then find the funder or find the funder and then write the proposal?

The answer is BOTH. You need to have at least an idea before you seek out funding, but you should already have a sponsor in mind when you write the proposal.

Many researchers have written quality proposals only to discover that there is no suitable funder for their project. Some have elected to significantly alter their projects to meet funder guidelines, other have abandoned the project altogether, even more have submitted inappropriate proposals funders and been rejected.

Save yourself the heartache and check with potential funders early in the development process.

Most funders (and all major/government funders) identify their areas of interest on line. Many provide expansive lists of funding areas and detailed requests for proposals (RFP). It is common for established researchers to review sponsor sites frequently to keep up to date on current and future sponsor initiatives. It is not uncommon, for a proposal idea to develop after the researcher has read an RFP that sparked their interest.

Below is one suggested series of steps for proposal development and finding funding.

- Come up with an idea and spend some time defining the problem (review the literature, situate you idea in the context of the literature, generate some ideas for the experiments/activities)
- Browse potential funder sites for relevant funding opportunities
- Select a potential funder (or a few) and carefully read their RFP and program descriptions
- Reconsider the problem in the light of sponsor need – can you develop a proposal around you idea that will be interesting to the funder? If yes, go to the next step. If no, look for more funders, or consider a new ides
- Develop the proposal, keeping sponsor needs in mind
- Revise, Review, and Submit.

# The Usual Suspects

Every field has a list of potential funders. The list may be long, but there are typically a small group of funders that provide the bulk of support.

**National Science Foundation** – Founded in 1950, the NSF has the mandate to: “promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense.”

Notably, the NSF is the ONLY federal agency with a mandate to support ALL fields of science. **Translation:** these are the go to guys for projects that might not find a home anywhere else. Competition is fierce with a funding rate hovering at about 15%.

<http://www.nsf.gov/funding/>

**National Institutes of Health** – NIH is the nation’s national medical research and public health agency. If your research has practical implications for medicine and health then NIH might be the funder for you.

Composed of 27 distinct institutes and centers with an annual budget of over \$30 Billion, the NIH is the cash cow of the research world. Like NIH, competition is fierce, but not so fierce, and funding levels are much more generous.

<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm>

**Department of Defense** – DOD is the umbrella organization for all US Military Research. Defense research is not all weapons or even military based. DOD sub units cover nearly as many fields as the NSF including, health, communication, data management and control as well as the stand-by’s of weapons and armament.

The major research funders under DOD are:

Office of Naval Research –  
<http://www.onr.navy.mil/02/rfps.asp>  
<http://www.onr.navy.mil/02/baa/>

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency  
[http://www.darpa.mil/funding\\_opportunities.html](http://www.darpa.mil/funding_opportunities.html)

U.S. Army Research Lab  
<http://www.arl.army.mil/www/default.cfm?Action=6&Page=8>

U.S. Air Force Research Laboratory  
<http://www.wpafb.af.mil/AFRL/>

## The Usual Suspects (Cont)

**National Aeronautics and Space Administration** – NASA puts people in space. What can we say; it's cool. NASA also funds a large portion of research into aerospace and astronomy related projects.

<http://www.nasa.gov/about/research/index.html>

**Department of Energy** – DOE has the broad mission to advance the energy security of the United States, to promote science and technology innovation in support of that mission, and to ensure environmental clean up when those first two parts make a mess of things . . . Still, a great source of funding for energy related research.

<http://www.sc.doe.gov/grants/grants.html>

Do not limit yourself to these funders if you have a novel/interdisciplinary idea that might be of interest to other groups, but these are a good place to start.

Other funding opportunities may arise in the form of fellowships through professional associations and foundations. Talk to your peers or sponsored program manager to find out about other possible sources.

## Other Places to Find Research Money

There are a large number of web sites and databases offered (for a fee) that can help you find research dollars. The University of Oregon has a contract with one of the high-end providers, Community of Science (COS). This database will be changing names some time in the near future. The new name is ProQuest.

You can access the database for free anywhere on campus or off utilizing a the UO Virtual Private Network.

<http://fundingopps.cos.com/>

COS does require you to log in and create a profile. Once you have created a profile, COS will email you notices for funding award opportunities as they come up. The Office of Research Services and Administration offers regular training for COS use.

[http://orsa.uoregon.edu/index.cfm?toplevcat=proposals&page=ppp\\_cos](http://orsa.uoregon.edu/index.cfm?toplevcat=proposals&page=ppp_cos)

**OR**

You can cover most of your bases at:

### **GRANTS.GOV**

The federal Government has required all grant making agencies to list their funding opportunities on the grants.gov web site. You can find and apply for nearly any federal grant on grants.gov.

The interface is less than perfect, but there are a few nice features (automatic updates on funding requests) and multiple search options.

For the major funders, you will probably do best starting with their web pages, but most require submission through grants.gov.

[http://www.grants.gov/applicants/find\\_grant\\_opportunities.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/find_grant_opportunities.jsp)

# Submitting Proposals

So you've written the proposal and you've formatted it exactly how the sponsor required. What do you do now?

Submission of proposals can be very easy or very complex. Each sponsor and each institution will have different requirements for submission (though the federally mandated site grants.gov is theoretically designed to minimize variance).

You need to be familiar with the rules of your home institution and those of the funder. Do not worry though, there are people here to help you.

What we outline here is the standard model for research institutions. Though some things may vary from place to place, the concepts are the same.

## **Rule #1 – Sponsors fund institutions not individuals.**

Yes, it is your idea and you will be responsible for heading up the project. Ultimately however, sponsors sign contracts with institutions, disburse funds to institutions and entrust those institutions with managing them according to the rules set out in the grant contract.

*What does this mean?*

It means you have to get the permission of your institution before submitting a proposal. Typically, the institution will submit the grant for you. Which is great, because you don't have to worry about it.

# The Players

## Home Team

**Researcher/Principle Investigator** – this is you, the person with the idea. The PI will carry out the experiments and be the primary contact for all questions of science related to the project.

**Departmental Grant Administrator** – This is the person in your department who will help you create a budget, gather letters of support, answer questions, format documents and whatever else it takes to put the grant together. DGA duties will vary from department to department. The DGA is usually a liaison to the central research office/SPA.

**Sponsored Programs Administrator** – SPA's work in the central research office and are similar to DGA's but they work with a lot more grants and cover several departments/units at a time. SPA's have the authority to submit grants and authorize a number of activities.

SPA's typically come in two types – pre-award and post-award. Pre-award SPA's specialize in submission. Post-award specialize in management after funding. There is also a third kind of SPA – the contracting officer – researchers rarely interact with the contract officer, but it's good to know who they are.

**Central Research Office** – All proposal submitted from the home institution must be reviewed and approved by the sponsored research office. The central office provides tools and guidance to researchers in the realm of proposal submission and management. Activity and technical reports should go through the central office.

## Visitors

**Program Manager** – The program manager is the scientific expert for the sponsoring agency. Program managers review incoming grants, assign them to review panels/sections, provide guidance to researchers and (sometimes) make funding decisions.

**Budget Manager** – The budget manager is the expert on sponsor rules for funding. He or she will determine which parts of your budget are allowable. If you need to make a significant change to your project budget contact the budget manager.

**Review Panel** – The program manager will select a group of experts to review your proposal. Reviewers do not make funding decisions, but their recommendations are used by program managers and funding councils to make final decisions.

# Submitting Proposals Online

Funders have many different methods for submission. All government agencies are required to accept submission through grants.gov. A few federal agencies (like NSF) still maintain their own submission sites. Private funders may utilize web, email or paper submission methods.

When identifying a funder it is important to read their submission guidelines very carefully and log into any relevant submission sites early.

## **Primary Online Submission Sites:**

NSF Fastlane - <https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/jsp/homepage/proposals.jsp>

Grants.gov – <http://www.grants.gov/>

## **Important Notes for Online Submissions:**

Online submission servers are frequently overloaded on due dates. Significant slow downs or outright crashes are common. Try to submit early if at all possible.

Make sure you have the correct software and that your version is supported.

Give yourself plenty of time to navigate systems you are new to.

Don't be afraid to contact program or web managers with questions (but try to do that early in the process).