

UA Cooperative Extension Grant-Writing Checklist

Developed from [UA's Office of Research Innovation & Impact Proposal Planning Guide](#) and [Plugged In: For UMaine Extension Staff & Volunteers](#).

1. Develop a project idea.
 - a. A project should be based on an established community need. Document the need by gathering community input (through surveys, interviews, previous needs assessments, etc.), relevant community statistics, and other people's research. [Helpful resources for secondary and primary data collection](#)
 - b. The project should align with [UACE's mission](#), fall within your scope of work, and be non-duplicative of other work being done.
 - c. Pick a Principal Investigator (PI) to lead the proposal.

2. Write a brief (1-2 page) concept paper that succinctly describes the proposed project and goals (see the [Concept paper template](#) at the end of the checklist). This process can help focus the project and ensure the scope is feasible. It is also useful for bringing in support and make sure everyone has a common understanding from the beginning of the project. Share your concept paper with:
 - a. Your supervisor and team. Determine if there is adequate internal support (team and supervisor) and staff time for completing the proposal and conducting the work. Are the necessary facilities and resources available? How much funding will you need to seek out?
 - b. The financial administration office and your program administrator.
 - c. Potential collaborators. Are other individuals, organizations, agencies working on similar projects or addressing the same community need? Collaboration with University and community partners can bring additional knowledge and skills to the table. Potential partners should be approached early and be involved in honing the project idea.
 - d. Your evaluation team.

3. Solidify partnerships. You should only involve partners if they improve your team's capacity or expertise. There must be a firm, reciprocal commitment to working collaboratively on the project.
 - a. Identify a point person within each organization and preferred method and frequency of communication. Discuss potential barriers to collaboration and decide whether/how these may be overcome. These strategies will be included in the "management plan" section that is commonly required in proposals.
 - b. Identify each organization's capacity; what will they bring to the proposal and project, specifically? What is really feasible to expect from each organization?
 - c. Communicate specific tasks the partner will need to complete (and associated deadlines) including:

- i. Contributing to the proposal
 - ii. Letter of commitment submitted with the proposal
 - iii. Possibly a partnership contract or memorandum of understanding (MOU)
4. Congregate a grant-writing team. Directed by the PI, the team should include coworkers/supervisor, grant support staff, evaluators, and any program partners.
 - a. All team members should be involved in regular check-in meetings and be provided:
 - i. The concept paper and other information relevant to the project
 - ii. As they are identified, funding opportunities and guidelines (i.e., a copy of the request for proposal)
 - iii. All deadlines
 - b. Work as a team to develop a timeline and division of tasks and responsibilities. This will need to be created/updated as you hone in on specific funding opportunities.
 - c. It is recommended to keep an online folder of shared materials (Box is recommended because it is secure and available for all UA employees)
5. Research funding opportunities. Make this a part of your routine and set up funding alerts where possible.
 - a. Strategies:
 - i. The [Office of Research Innovation & Impact \(RII\)](#) has links to internal and external funding opportunities by topic
 - ii. Create an account with [Pivot-RP](#) to access the most comprehensive database of global funding opportunities, save searches, and set up customizable funding alerts
 - iii. 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.
 - b. Assess how well the funding opportunity fits your project and goals. Examine the funding topics, the amount and type of funding, funding period, populations and geographic specifications, recipient and other limitations.
6. Alert your program officer, your UA departmental business office, and Research Development Services that you will be applying for a grant. It is suggested that you do this *at least three months before the proposal deadline* (longer for large/complex or multi-institution proposals).
 - a. At this stage, update your proposal timeline so that a complete draft will be ready for review by RDS 3-5 weeks prior to the deadline. [Schedule a review time with RDS](#)
7. Begin writing your proposal *at least two months before the proposal deadline*.
 - a. Resources:

- i. [Templates and guidelines for specific proposal sections](#) (Letters of Support, Project Management Plan, Mentoring Plan, Facilities, Evaluation Plan, etc.)
 - ii. [Writing a grant proposal 101](#)
 - iii. [USDA General Grant Writing Tips for Success](#)
 - b. To start, it can be helpful to convene your grant writing team to complete the project timeline (including columns for the grant quarter, activities to be performed, responsible partner, and objective fulfilled) and logic model before beginning the other proposal sections.
 - i. Include as many specifics and details as possible
 - c. Pay attention to the structure of the RFP. Mirror the RFP's section numbers, titles, and terminology.
 - d. Why proposals fail:
 - i. Failing to address sponsor requirements/ proposal is not compliant (e.g., line spacing, pages)
 - ii. Lack of experience/ track record
 - iii. High-risk project with no contingency plan
 - iv. Lack of clarity and specifics
 - v. Lack of front-end planning
 - vi. Lack of rationale for project aims/objectives
 - vii. Lack of identified pitfalls (potential problems) and proposed alternatives
 - viii. Lack of a clear evaluation and monitoring plan; lack of a clear management plan
 - ix. Proposed activities do not align with project aims/objectives
 - e. Describe your competitive advantage- how are you, your collaborators, your research, and your environment different from others applying for the same funding?
 - i. Personnel-related advantages- unique capabilities, knowledge, backgrounds, strengths; exemplary past performance; specific experience
 - ii. Technical advantages- original approaches, specific technical training, rare access to instrumentation
 - iii. Institutional advantages- unique facilities and resources, UA's status as a Hispanic-serving institution
 - iv. Regional advantages- community partners, school districts, proximity to US/Mexico border, arid/semi-arid setting
- 8. Write, review, and revise.
 - a. (*T-6 weeks*) Strategy/ "Pink team" review: Review the principal ideas and scope of the project to identify major gaps or deficiencies and significantly improve the design of your proposed work. Add in any missing elements which may cause you to reorganize your proposal.
 - b. (*T-4 weeks*) Full proposal/ "Red team" review: Critically 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.
 - i. Research and Development Services can review a draft of the proposal at this stage and provide important feedback. Make sure to engage with RDS early, set

up a time for their review 3-5 weeks prior to the due date, and plan to have a completed draft by the review date.

- c. (*T-2 weeks*) Final/ “Gold team” review: Critically review the final draft for use of acronyms, terminology, figures and tables, formatting, spelling and grammar.

9. Proposal Submission: [There are several internal due dates that precede the due date listed on the RFP.](#)

- a. *T-2 weeks*: Project title, abstract, budget (including cost sharing or an exception to the F&A cost rate), and budget justification will need to be submitted to the business office.
- b. *T-3 business days*: The final proposal will need to be submitted to Sponsored Projects & Contracting Services for final review and approval through UA’s electronic research administration system.
 - i. *The funder may require a pre-proposal (letter of intent, concept paper) submitted significantly in advance of the full proposal due date. In this case, contact SPCS early to make sure this is submitted on time.
 - ii. Requests for indirect cost waivers should be submitted with signatures 8 business days prior to electronic submission (5 for paper submissions)
 - iii. Once the proposal is created in UAccess Research, attach the following documents:
 1. Application/ title page
 2. Abstract
 3. Budget, budget justification
 4. Letters of financial commitment, letters of support
 5. Other documents that require UA signature (such as assurances)

Concept paper template

1. Target population and community need:
2. Organizational information (background, staff experience, cultural knowledge, achievements):
3. Project objectives:
4. Project partners:
5. Program activities and implementation:
6. Evaluation plan:
7. Project sustainability:
8. Key personnel: