**PROCEDURAL STATEMENT**

**Policy Title:** Proposal Submission to The Research Office

**Functional Area:** Research Administration

**Related Policy: None**

**Effective Date: April 19, 2018**

**Approved by:** David Stone, Chief Research Officer

**Responsible Body:** The Research Office

1. **POLICY STATEMENT**

The number, size, and complexity of proposals for external support of research, scholarship, and creative artistry are continuing to grow from year to year. In order for TRO to properly exercise its function to review, approve, and submit proposals in a timely fashion, TRO staff rely on Principal Investigators (PIs) to contact them, and to provide all materials needed to satisfy the proposal requirements to them in a timely manner. To fulfill that requirement, the procedures outlined in this document have been established.

1. **DEFINITIONS**

Grant and Contract Officer. A Grant and Contract Officer (GCO) is an employee of The Research Office who has the delegated authority to review and submit proposals on behalf of the University, and to review and sign awards coming to the University from external sponsors. GCOs are assigned to projects based on the sponsor to whom a proposal will be submitted.

Research Development Officer. A Research Development Officer (RDO) is an employee of The Research Office who is assigned to work with researchers, scholars, and creative artists in designated departments, units, schools, or colleges. RDOs work closely with GCOs, but do not have authority to submit proposals on behalf of the University. PIs are encouraged, but not required, to work with an RDO (if one has been assigned to their department or unit) before contacting the appropriate GCO nearer to the submission deadline.

Sponsor’s Announced Deadline. The sponsor’s announced deadline is the date (and time, if one is specified) on which a sponsor stops accepting proposals for a particular program or competition. If a sponsor specifies a range of dates during which it will accept proposals, the sponsor’s announced deadline will be the last day that falls within the announced range.

Signature Authority. The Research Office holds the authority, delegated by the Board of Trustees, to submit proposals and to accept awards for sponsored project activity on behalf of the University. PIs are normally not authorized either to submit proposals or to accept awards for externally funded projects; however, there are certain cases (certain types of fellowships and individual awards, for example) where the PI can submit him/herself. When in doubt, always contact TRO staff for a determination as to whether or not you can submit a proposal or accept an award yourself.

Proposal Materials. The number and type of documents required as part of a proposal package will vary from sponsor to sponsor and even from program to program, depending on the nature of the work proposed and on other factors. Generally, proposals will include some form of introductory statement, a research or project narrative describing the amount and type of work to be done, a budget, and one or more supporting documents/materials.

Limited-Submission. In some cases, a sponsor limits the number of proposals that may be submitted by a single institution. If an institution submits more than the allowable number of proposals, some or all of them will be rejected and returned without review. In order to avoid that unhappy situation, TRO will announce deadlines and procedures for an internal competition to be held whenever it becomes apparent that there are more investigators or teams interested in submitting proposals than there are allowable slots. Only those investigators/teams whose projects are selected through the internal competition process will be allowed to submit formal proposals to the external sponsor for such competitions.

1. **PROCEDURES**
2. *Proposal and Award Process*

The lifecycle of a sponsored project can be roughly separated into pre-award and post-award phases, depending on where things happen with respect to the receipt of an award from the sponsor to carry out the project. The chart in Appendix A provides a brief overview of the full process, and identifies the major steps involved. TRO encourages researchers, scholars, and artists to contact the appropriate RDO or GCO as soon as they think they might want to submit a proposal, as this provides TRO staff with the maximum possible time to plan workflows, review applicable guidelines and procedures, register in any new systems that may be required, and to obtain subcontract or subaward proposals. The more time we have, the more support (and the better the quality of that support) we can provide.

1. *Working with RDOs*

Researchers, scholars, and artists can meet with the RDO at any stage in the proposal process. Research development assistance is usually most helpful early in the process of developing a research project or a proposal to support such a project. Working with an RDO or a faculty fellow is not required in order to submit a proposal for external support, but it is nevertheless strongly encouraged if one is available. The RDO or faculty fellow will normally alert the appropriate GCO to any upcoming submissions (and vice versa), so it is not usually necessary to alert both when you have a proposal on the horizon. As you and the RDO or faculty fellow complete work on a proposal component, send it to the appropriate GCO for inclusion in the proposal file.

1. *TRO Deadline*

To ensure that workload is effectively distributed and to be able to robustly support our faculty, The Research Office should know that a proposal is intended at least three weeks (15 business days) prior to submission. If the faculty member is working with an RDO, rest assured that notification has been made. If the faculty member is working independently, please send an email to gcsradmin@oakland.edu indicating that there is a proposal planned for an upcoming deadline. Including a link to the relevant guidelines would be quite helpful.

Moreover, in order to ensure that TRO has sufficient time to review and revise proposal components, prepare proposal budgets, and assemble and review proposal packages for submission to external sponsors, PIs must provide the necessary materials to TRO staff *at least five business days before the sponsor’s announced deadline for submission of proposals*. The more complex the proposal, the more time is required to prepare, review, and submit it. For proposals with multiple subawards, or that involve intellectual property or export control concerns, or where the PI is requesting a reduction or a waiver of some or all of the University’s federally negotiated indirect cost rate, this deadline is increased to *seven business days* before the sponsor’s announced deadline for proposal submission.

Proposals received by the TRO Deadline will be given priority. Proposals received after the deadline will be processed based upon their readiness for submission and the amount of time available before the sponsor’s announced deadline, taking into account the workload of TRO staff. TRO reserves the right to refuse to submit proposals or to withdraw submitted proposals that were received too close to the sponsor’s announced deadline to ensure compliance with all applicable sponsor and University guidelines, policies, and procedures, in order to protect the University’s good name and reputation and to avoid any possibility of sanctions or other adverse consequences from the sponsor.

*C.1 – Inside the 5-Day Window*

If the deadline is five or fewer days away, and TRO is missing documents required for submission, the Chair, the Dean, and the Vice President for Research will all be notified of the enhanced risk for a failed submission. This notification is not intended, nor is it treated as, punitive. Rather, all parties are looking for ways to be helpful; it is time for creative solutions. To close the communication loop, these same parties are notified when the proposal is either successfully submitted or postponed.

1. *Provision of Necessary Materials*

In order to create a proposal file and begin the necessary compliance reviews before submission, the cognizant GCO must have, at a minimum, the following documents/components in hand by the applicable TRO Deadline:

1. A copy of the applicable proposal guidelines from the sponsor (or a link to where these may be found);
2. A complete proposal budget, including all required materials for each subcontract or subaward, and any necessary supporting information (e.g., vendor quotes for capital equipment, documentation of consultants’ fees, etc.) for particular items of cost, whether or not these supporting materials must be provided to the sponsor; and
3. A substantially complete narrative or scope of work for the project, to be used to assess the reasonableness of the proposed budget.

Bear in mind that the RDO or GCO will help you to develop the budget and many budget drafts are often required as the project evolves. However, by the beginning of the 5-day window, the final budget must be locked down.

Other proposal materials required by the sponsor may be submitted either before or after the applicable TRO Deadline, as these are less critical and usually easier to review. The PI or project team may continue to polish and revise the proposal narrative up to the sponsor’s announced deadline if necessary, as long as no changes to the original scope of work or objectives of the proposal are made, unless corresponding changes are also made to the originally proposed project budget.

1. *Deadlines After Normal Office Hours*

Some sponsor deadlines occur outside TRO’s normal office hours (8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday). When this is the case, the TRO deadline for submission will be 5 p.m. irrespective of the actual sponsor-announced deadline.

1. *Post-Submission Issues and Requests*

Once a proposal has been submitted, the PI should immediately review a copy of the submitted documents (either after receiving a copy from the cognizant GCO or downloading such a copy from the sponsor’s submission portal), to ensure that everything is correct and accurate. (It is rare, but it does sometimes happen that documents are garbled in transmission, or a sponsor’s submission processing algorithm interferes with the spacing of figures, charts, etc., or the formatting of special characters.) If an issue is discovered, the PI should alert the cognizant GCO as soon as the issue is noted, so that appropriate corrective action (if any) may be taken immediately. If there is still time before the sponsor’s announced deadline, it may be possible to submit a corrected version of the proposal and, in some cases, sponsors may (but are not required to) allow submission of updated documents.

It is also sometimes the case that staff at the sponsor will spot an issue with some component of a proposal, and request an update. If the cognizant GCO is not contacted directly or copied on the communication requesting such an update, the PI should alert him/her immediately: usually, such sponsor requests come with very tight deadlines that must be met. Sponsors may also request the submission of supplementary materials, revisions to the project’s scope and/or budget, or Just In Time information. Again, if the cognizant GCO was not copied on or contacted directly regarding such requests, the PI should alert him/her immediately so that appropriate action may be taken.

1. *Frequently Asked Questions*

Question: I am interested in submitting a proposal to a sponsor that does not allow indirect costs on the proposal budget. Must I still submit the proposal through TRO?

Answer: Usually, yes. If the sponsor requires any kind of institutional approval or certification, or if the project involves research with human or animal subjects, or other compliance concerns, the proposal must be submitted through TRO. As long as none of those cases apply, and where funds will be paid directly to the investigator (as with NEH and similar fellowship programs), you may submit the proposal yourself. However, TRO recommends that you contact us (and provide a copy of the sponsor’s guidelines under which you plan to apply) for a determination before proceeding. In all cases, you are encouraged to have TRO staff review the budget and other documents for compliance with the applicable guidelines, even if you submit the proposal as an individual.

Question: A colleague of mine just alerted me to a funding opportunity that would be perfect for my research, but there are only three days left before the sponsor’s announced deadline. Can I still submit the proposal?

Answer: Yes, provided that you have all of the necessary proposal materials ready to go and alert TRO as soon after becoming aware of the opportunity as possible, and there are no obvious significant compliance issues. Bear in mind, however, that other proposals may be given priority if they were received by the TRO Deadline, and that the level of support TRO can provide will necessarily be less than it would normally be if the proposal had come to us ahead of the TRO Deadline.

Updated 5/7/2021

**APPENDIX A**

Lifecycle of a Sponsored Project

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| Pre-Award | **Stage** | **Deadline/Comments** |
| Idea Generation | Researcher/scholar develops an idea. Can engage with an RDO or with TRO staff (or both) to help identify interested sponsors, or proceed independently. |
| Proposal Development | Once a suitable funding opportunity is known, researcher/scholar should contact RDO and GCO to begin developing proposal (RDO) and proposal budget (GCO).  |
| Proposal Review & Approval | Researcher/scholar sends proposal documents to GCO for review at least five business days in advance of the sponsor’s submission deadline. GCO provides institutional review and approval of the proposal and budget. |
| Proposal Submission | GCO submits all proposals for sponsored projects as the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) where institutional approval is required by the sponsor. Researcher/scholar may submit proposals for individual support (e.g., fellowships) where institutional approval is not required, but only after GCO review. This ensures minimum issues at award review/acceptance stage. |
| Sponsor Review | Sponsor reviews proposals received in accordance with announced criteria/guidelines. If issues are identified, sponsor may return proposal without review, or may allow correction of a limited number of non-critical issues. Just In Time (JIT) and other sponsor requests should be communicated to the GCO (if they are not directly notified by the sponsor) for response. |
| Notice of Award | Sponsor notifies Principal Investigator (PI) that the proposal is likely to be (or has been) funded. Note that a ***recommendation for award*** is not the same thing as an award notice, and does not legally obligate the sponsor to fund the proposal. |
| Award Review & Acceptance | TRO has the authority, delegated by the President and the Board of Trustees, to sign grant and contract awards for sponsored projects on behalf of OU. GCOs review all awards and negotiate terms with the sponsor as needed. If human subjects, animal subjects, or other compliance reviews are required at this time, the PI works with TRO and the appropriate institutional offices/bodies to ensure completion of all such reviews. |
| Post-Award | Award Setup | After review and acceptance (including negotiation of any terms or conditions found to be problematic for OU), TRO assigns a project number and [funding id number]. This activates final processing of any outgoing subawards. |
| Outgoing Subawards | If a portion of the project will be conducted outside of OU, the GCO works with the PI and the subaward recipient(s) to ensure all required documentation is complete. Final execution of a subaward only takes place once the main or prime award has been set up in the financial system. |
| Project Performance & Oversight | During the lifetime of the award, TRO provides guidance to ensure that the project is carried out, and the award managed, in accordance with university and sponsor requirements. As needed, GCO will contact sponsor personnel on behalf of the PI. PI must report progress (and certain other information, as specified in the award documents) to TRO to ensure appropriate oversight and maintenance of required records. |
| Award Management | PI, with support from departmental administrators and TRO (as appropriate), provides overall financial and programmatic supervision and stewardship of the award. GCOs provide expertise in financial information and cash management. |
| Compliance Requirements | TRO supports award management by interpreting sponsor requirements and establishing procedures and guidance for compliance. This includes, but is not limited to, responsibility for property; acceptance of certifications, representations, and clauses; technical and administrative reports; and releases at closeout. |
| Financial Reporting | GCO, working with the PI, prepares and submits financial reports to sponsor, depending on sponsor requirements. |
| Technical Reporting | PI prepares and either submits to sponsor or transmits to GCO for submission to sponsor, depending on sponsor requirements, technical and progress reports as required by the terms and conditions of the award. |
| Closeout | At the end of an award, TRO works with PIs and other implicated personnel to complete all financial and administrative obligations, including financial closeouts in Banner. |
| Audit | TRO is responsible for coordinating all sponsored project audits for OU. |