Understanding a Request for Proposal (RFP)

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

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WHAT IS AN RFP?

An RFP, Request for Proposal, is a formal request from a sponsoring agency to solicit multiple proposals or bids for a project.

The RFP will typically contain detailed information about what the sponsor is looking for and the criteria they will use to evaluate submission.

RFPS ARE ALSO KNOWN AS...

NOFO   *Notice of Funding Opportunity*

FOA   *Funding Opportunity Announcement*

PA   *Program Announcement*

RFA   *Request for Applications*

IFB   *Invitation for Bid*

BAA   *Broad Agency Announcement*

CFP   *Call for Proposal*

PS   *Project Solicitation*

STANDARD STRUCTURE

Most RFPs have a somewhat standard structure, even if the content and sponsor type vary. The most used sections are below:

- Introduction and Overview *General information about the sponsor and the purpose of the RFP*

- Narrative/Scope of Work *Describes the specific work being sought*

- Submission Guidelines *How to submit, deadlines, proposal format, etc.*

- Evaluation Criteria *How proposals will be reviewed and judged.*

- Terms and Conditions *Contractual and legal details.*

HOW TO READ AN RFP

Once you receive an RFP, you should first skim through the document to make sure you meet all the key requirements and that you have time to develop a proposal.

Below are the key sections to find when skimming through an RFP:

- Key Dates
- Project Description
- Applicant Eligibility
- Submission Details
- Proposal Format
- Terms and Conditions

HOW TO READ AN RFP

Once it has been determined that you are eligible to apply and that you have enough time to develop a proposal, it is time to conduct a deep dive into the RFP.

Go back and read each section meticulously. Take notes, highlight, and underline key points.

CREATE A CHECKLIST

When reviewing an RFP, keep a running checklist of the required content, noting page limits and other formatting requirements. This checklist will help you determine if there is enough time to develop a quality proposal.

The Office of Research Administration has crafted a checklist form that is available to all faculty interested in applying to a funding opportunity.

Proposal Development Checklist

KEY DATES

What are the due dates?

- Pre-Application/Letter of Intent Due Date

- Proposal Due Date

- Anticipated Award Date

- Project Start and End Dates

The ORA requires that the routing of your application for institutional review and approval takes place no later than *10 business days* before the proposal due date. Please keep this in mind when considering whether or not there is enough time to develop a proposal.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The submission guidelines are strict rules and failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in the rejection of your proposal.

It is important to take note of page/word limits, formatting standards, file naming structures, and submission methods.

Also keep in mind how the proposal should be delivered. Do you need to submit a physical or digital copy and if digital, do you need to create and account or register with the sponsoring agency?

NARRATIVE/SCOPE OF WORK

It is important to understand the heart of what's being asked and how it relates to the mission of the sponsor. The narrative or scope of work is the core of your proposal, and you should tailor your proposal to the specific RFP.

To help with the writing of your narrative, review the evaluation criteria detailed in the RFP, which will help you understand the metrics against which your proposal will be judged.

CONTACTING THE PROGRAM OFFICER

Program Officers (PO) are a valuable resource for applicants, as they can provide insight and often give direct feedback.

Contacting a PO before submission of a grant applications can:

- Confirm if a project idea fits with the sponsor's/program's objectives.
- Provide insight into the potential enthusiasm for your project.
- Provide suggestions about more appropriate programs, institutes, or mechanism if appropriate and necessary.
- Expose underlying considerations, methodology trends, preferences, dislikes, and shifting priorities that do not appear in published material.
- Provide guidance about your project design, collaboration, budget, and timeline.