Working Document on Proposal Submissions

H. zur Loye
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**USCERA:** To most of us, the USCERA proposal submission system appears to be simply that, a method of submitting proposals. It does serve this function; however, it actually is quite a bit more than that. For one, it is a record of who agreed to what. And because of that, it is important that the form is completed correctly. Often checking an inappropriate response might appear to be a minor inconvenience; however, it can have significant consequences. If you forget to include your co-PI from another department in USCERA, the other department chair will not see the proposal and will not sign off on it. Hence, any agreements that might be part of the proposal submission, e.g. cost share, faculty release time, etc. may not be honored should the grant be funded. To avoid such complications, this document describes how to complete correctly select portions of the USCERA forms that often create difficulties. As this will not cover every conceivable scenario, please feel free to contact Associate Dean for Research, Hanno zur Loye at zurloye@mailbox.sc.edu, or the SAM office for assistance.

**Fellowships:**

Fellowship applications often raise numerous issues, in particular, when the fellowship requires the applicant to spend time away from campus. Issues, including salary, benefits, and teaching relief, often come up and need to be addressed BEFORE work on the fellowship proposal is started. It is strongly advised to have a discussion with the department chair and the associate dean for research when considering a fellowship application.

**Important note:** Postdoctoral fellowships for faculty and fellowships that require the faculty member to teach at another institution will not be supported by the college.

**Fellowship budgets:** The level of support provided by a particular fellowship is often set by the funding agency. Nonetheless, a budget and a budget justification must be uploaded in USCERA. The budget may be short and simply state that the amount requested is set by the funding agency. The budget justification must address how this money will be used – for salary, for travel, for course buyouts, etc. Any potential co-funding from the department or college should have been discussed prior to submission in USCERA.
NOTE: You can start your USCERA submission before you have finished writing the proposal. To complete the USCERA application you need a complete budget (Excel file or the funding agency’s budget pages), the budget justification and a proposal summary/draft narrative. These need to be uploaded in USCERA for departmental, chair, and SAM review. It is strongly suggested that you submit these well before the due date so that any budget problems will not delay the submission of your proposal. Nothing fun about hitting a snag at the 11th hour.

At the top of the log in page: https://sam.research.sc.edu/uscer/login.do there are links for registering in USCERA and for help files that include a budget prep guide, a quick reference guide and more.

1. Co-PIs
   All Co-PI’s must be listed along with their home department. Use the Add/Change button to search for and enter their names.

   This is important because only if they are listed in USCERA will their department chairs (and dean if it involves another college) receive a notification to sign off on the proposal.

   If you check yes for “#8 Does this proposal involve faculty/staff from more than one department/unit?” then you should have listed them as Co-PI’s.

   Checking #8 without listing the Co-PI’s will result in the proposal being disapproved.

2. Costs
   When you fill out the cost section, be sure to enter the indirect cost rate (a percentage value) used for the proposal (currently 46.5%) and the amount (a dollar value) that this percentage corresponds to. If you enter a percentage other than the currently agreed indirect cost percentage, you will need to explain this in the budget justification and also in the remarks section at the bottom of the page. Current rates can be found at: https://sam.research.sc.edu/idc14-17.html Reasons for a different percentage rate include: 1. The proposal describes predominantly training and not research. 2. The proposal takes place more than 50% of the time off campus or expends more than 50% of the funds off campus. 3. The proposal is a fellowship and the sponsor does not allow indirect cost. The latter should include a link to the funding agency page that states their policy on indirect cost. 4. The funding agency
limits the indirect cost rate different from our current rate. This should include a link to the funding agency page that states their policy on indirect cost.

3. Agency Deadline Date
List the deadline. If the deadline has passed, for example if you already submitted a fellowship proposal and are only now submitting this to USCERA, explain why the USCERA submission was delayed. Issues such as faculty release time, cost share, etc. are addressed in USCERA and need to be approved by the department and the college. Submitting a proposal with the expectation that the department or the college will provide co-funding without having discussed it with the department and college first is risky. Many proposals do not receive co-funding and, if acceptance is predicated on co-funding, all the time spent writing the proposal may be for nothing if co-funding is not provided. Especially for fellowship applications, check with the Dean’s office and the Department before you start working on the application to make sure that both the department and the dean’s office will support it.

4. Internal Requests
This concerns internal submissions, such as ASPIRE, the Visiting Scholar Grants, Distributed Learning Applications, Provost Social Science Grants, etc. If you check that this is an internal request, either from the VP for Research or from the Provost’s office, you MUST fill out the Internal Commit form. The amount you are asking for needs to go into the year 1 line. For a multi year request, put the appropriate amounts into the year 1, year 2, etc. lines.

5. Questions in USCERA (only the questions that often create problems are discussed here)

1. **Cost share in proposal?**
   If cost share is required or if you are claiming cost share, check this box. This opens up a cost share link when you return to the main page that you need to fill out. Unless you have a written confirmation that the college (Dean’s office) is providing a cost share, this cost share will typically go under “Department”. You will need to discuss this with your department chair prior to USCERA submission. If you are cost sharing academic year salary, you can also include the fringe benefits and typically the indirect cost on the sum of salary and fringe to count towards the cost share. You can only cost share your time once and you should not exceed 35-40% of your time as a cost share in any one year. This is especially important if you are submitting more than one proposal in which you are cost sharing academic salary. If both are funded and you exceed the allowable cost share, you will have to decline one or more of the proposals. If you are providing the cost share from start up funds, this still goes under “Department.”

   If your budget and budget justification list a cost share, you MUST check yes to question 1 and fill out the cost share section, otherwise the proposal will be disapproved.
Topping off salary for prestigious fellowships, such as the Guggenheim, ACLS, Fulbright, and NEH, is not a cost share and, therefore, cost share should NOT be checked.

2. Is the project part of a USC intra-university center/institute? Check ‘yes’ if that is the case. Examples are Baruch, Marine Science, etc.

3. Faculty release time?
If you are asking for teaching relief or buying out a course, this needs to be checked as yes. You should check with your department chair prior to USCERA submission that you will be granted teaching relief. In your budget you will need to set aside money, including fringe, to pay for the T-fac. The rate varies by department, so check with your chair before submitting the proposal to be sure that the amount is correct and that you will receive permission from the chair to buy out a course. If you are on campus, “faculty release time” does not absolve you from your normal faculty duties, such as committee work, advising, etc., nor does it release you from the normal expectation to be at work on campus.

4. Additional space or facilities?
Only check yes if you require new space and have arranged for this with your department chair and facilities planning. This is extremely rare. This needs to be detailed in the remarks section. If that is not done, the proposal will be disapproved.

5. Inst. faculty/employees extra compensation, consulting? (Does not apply to summer salary)
Only check this if you will receive extra money that will increase your salary above what you normally make. This is extremely rare. It does not apply to money for course buy-outs or summer support.

6. Indicate whether your project involves the following:
6a. Restrictions on publications in a sponsored project or involvement of proprietary information? 6b. Restrictions/limitations of USC normal intellectual property rights?
Check yes or no, as appropriate

7. Does the PI hold Joint Appointment?
If you hold a joint appointment between two units, check yes.

8. Does this proposal involve faculty/staff from more than one department/unit?
If you check yes, make sure that the other faculty or staff are listed as Co-PI’s to enable their chair to sign off on the proposal. When in doubt, ask.
If you are collaborating with another institution or if you are receiving a sub-
award from another institution, check NO. This question concerns USC faculty and staff only.

9. **Question number 9 has to do with sole source.**
   The answer to the question is yes if you: 1. Have co-PI(s) from other institution(s); 2. Purchasing a piece of equipment over $10,000 and only 1 vendor can provide it (do not answer yes if you have a preferred vendor, but that vendor is not the only one that can provide the piece of equipment. Because you complete the sole source certification does not meant that the Purchasing department will not go out to bid); 3. Have a consultant that you’re paying over $10,000 for the entire award period (it can be $3,000 per year for 5 years). Please note that you have to complete the certification forms and you have to do 1 certification per item (if you have 2 co-PIs at two different institutions, one piece of equipment, and 3 consultants then you need to complete 6 sole source certifications – to add a certification you need to click “Add Certification” link under Tools on the main page of the proposal (Proposal Summary). In addition, you cannot use the budget justification as a sole source; the sole source justification has to explain why you’re using that particular co-investigator, company, consultant and not someone else or another company.

Got a question that was not covered here, feel free to contact Associate Dean for Research, Hanno zur Loye at zurloye@mailbox.sc.edu, or the SAM office for assistance.