



Tuesday Tips is a new outreach effort by OGCA. The idea behind *Tuesday Tips* is to convey tips, tricks and other helpful information around the area of research administration. Our goal is to post on (almost every) Tuesdays. If there is something you would like to see covered on *Tuesday Tips*, email: UAF-GCReATE@alaska.edu. For more Tips visit [OGCA website](#).

How to Review the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) and Deconstruct the FOA

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) both have a general format for individual research grant applications. Additionally, many NIH and NSF proposals have "standard" sections - those elements of a proposal required by almost every Request for Applications (RFA) or Program Announcement (PA), regardless of the size of the project.

OGCA has developed tools to help make [writing standard sections](#) more efficient while tailoring them to your particular goals or aims.

How to Deconstruct a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)

Initial Questions:

- When is the submission deadline? Does the due date allow sufficient time to develop a competitive application? What are the internal deadlines? Start internal approval process well in advance.
- Is there an earlier deadline for a letter of intent (LOI) or pre-proposal?
- Are you eligible to serve as the PI? Do you need to complete any registrations prior to submission? ([eRA commons](#), [Fastlane](#), [CDMRP](#), [Proposal Central](#), etc.)

- Is this a limited submission funding opportunity (i.e., a limited number of applications from the University are allowed)? If so, see [Limited Submissions](#).

Program Description:

- Does your research fit the funding agency's research objectives?
- Publications, reports, or workshops referenced by the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) are good sources for finding the agency's vision for the program.
- Are there help documents (i.e., outlines/templates) linked to the FOA?

Document Specifications:

- What are the page limits?
- What sections of the proposal are included within the page limits? What sections are excluded?
- What are the allowable fonts and font sizes? Margin sizes? Spacing requirements?
- Are headers and footers allowed and/or required?
- What is the submission method (electronic or hard-copy)? If it's a hard-copy submission, how many copies do you need to send and by what date/time must they be received?

Budget:

- What is the budget cap? Can your research (or an aspect of your research) be completed with the funds available?
- How many awards do they expect to make (i.e., how competitive is this competition)?
- Is there a cost-sharing requirement? If so, contact your Sponsored Projects Officer to start the internal approval process.
- Is there a minimum time commitment (i.e., how many person-months)? NOTE: Generally, PIs cannot have zero time committed.
- What forms/format does your budget require? For example, a modular budget form vs. a fully-itemized budget form at NIH.
- Does the agency require inclusion of any specific costs (e.g., travel costs to attend a required meeting)? Are there any normally allowable costs that are not allowed under this FOA?
- Is there a cap on the recovery of indirect costs (facilities and administrative (F&A) costs)? If the allowable F&A rate is below the University's current F&A rate, please discuss this with OGCA and start the internal approval process.

- Are there caps or constraints on the allocation of specific funds or line items (e.g., line item X must not exceed 10% of total direct costs)?
- What requirements are in place for sub-awards?
- What are the requirements for the budget justification?
- Is there a salary cap?

Narrative Structure:

- Are there required sections of the proposal narrative that are standard to this funding agency/mechanism? If so, refer to the agency's proposal guidelines document for more information ([NIH SF424 R&R](#), [NSF Grant Proposal Guide \(GPG\)](#)). It's important to be familiar with these instructions, and to use them as a reference for each proposal. They are also a place to find rules regarding any significant changes to proposal format.
- Are there required or suggested subheadings? Funding opportunity announcements often provide information regarding the structure of your proposal.
- If there are not required subheadings, are there easily identifiable headings that can be gleaned from the review criteria (e.g., Significance, Goals, Broader Impacts, Evaluation)? NOTE: Required or suggested subheadings are sometimes found in agency instruction documents, i.e., [NIH SF424 R&R](#), [NSF GPG](#).
- Organize your proposal in the same format described or implied in the FOA.
- Reflect the language the funding agency uses to describe the program and its mission (check the agency's website). Use these key words in your proposal.
- Subject headings, graphics, bullets, and bolded statements using language similar to that used in the FOA can all be used to make the reviewers' jobs easier as they assess how well the proposal meets review criteria.

Review Criteria:

- What are the review criteria? Are there any special/unusual review criteria?
- It is particularly important to read the review criteria carefully when you respond to an RFA or Program Announcement (PA). Review criteria for "parent" or investigator-initiated announcements are typically found in agency submission regulations.

Special Sections Required:

- What sections other than the main narrative are required? (Examples include "Management Plan," "Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan," "Multi-PI Leadership Plan," "Protection of Human Subjects.")
- Are there required letters of support/collaboration? (Start the process of acquiring these letters early.)
- Are appendix materials or supplementary documents allowed? If so, become familiar with what materials will/will not be accepted.

If you have questions about the funding opportunity announcement:

- Contact OGCA
- Some departments and units have resources available to assist proposal development.
- It is not uncommon to find ambiguities or apparent contradictions within the RFP/FOA. If, after re-reading the announcement, you are still in doubt, ask questions. Contact the relevant program official with your specific question or concern and ask for clarification. Contacts are provided within the RFP/FOA. Ask early; some funders have a deadline for the submission of questions.

For additional information visit the [Office of Grants and Contracts Administration](#)