

UAF Principal Investigator (PI) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Prepared by the Research Advisory Committee
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1. Getting Grants

1.1. How do I start getting funding?

- 1 Establish credibility by writing publications in the area you want to fund.
- 2 Find a *call for proposals* that could fund you.
- 3 Find Co-PIs and write up your proposal.
- 4 Develop a budget with your *proposal office* and sign the OSP routing form.

- 5 Send off the proposal via OSP and your proposal office before the deadline.
- 6 Wait six or more months, get the good news that you were funded.
- 7 Wait a few more months until your *business office* has accounts set up.
- 8 Hire graduate (or undergraduate) research assistants.
- 9 Do the research, write publications, and write grant progress reports.
- 10 Repeat until retirement!

1.2. Who issues Calls for Proposals?

First, talk to your outgoing proposal coordinator, who is often part of your business office. You'll need them to help you get the proposal sent out via OSP. OSP also has [an excellent list of funding opportunities](#).

The [National Science Foundation](#) funds both pure and applied science. UAF gets [a huge amount of funding from NSF](#), often via [NSF Office of Polar Programs](#) (OPP). Not-yet-tenured tenure-track faculty should consider a [NSF CAREER grant](#). NSF proposals are usually submitted via "[FastLane](#)". Also, with a successful NSF grant, then it is possible to submit a NSF equipment grant in addition to supplement the grant. You will find out which grants fit to you through the NSF website.

NASA funds a substantial amount of general research, space, and earth science, the biggest being the [annual ROSES call](#). UAF's own Denise Thorsen runs the NASA-funded [Alaska Space Grant](#), which offers both student fellowships and small startup-scale grants; both require 1:1 non-federal match, typically state fund 1 money. NASA is quite particular about citizenship, for example you can't have a Co-PI at a non-US institution. NASA proposals are typically submitted via [NSPIRES](#).

[grants.gov](#)

This a resource for you to find and apply directly for Federal grants. You can search here under the different categories (such as Agriculture, Disaster Prevention, Education and Environment) or by Agency (such as Department of Commerce or Department of Interior). For example, NWS/NOAA grants will be under Department of Commerce and USGS grants will be under Department of Interior.

Once you have chosen an Agency, you can find the closing date, Opportunity Title, Agency name and Funding title. You can then find the grant for you. Each grant will have a Synopsis page, Full Announcement and Application page. Here, you will find the Request for Funds or RFP and then you can go through the proposal writing, editing, reviewing process and then through OSP, submit the proposal through grants.gov.

Funding is also available through NIH and USGS.

1.3. Where do I find UAF's Dunn & Bradstreet number?

From UAF's [Office of Sponsored Programs faculty reference section](#): 615245164.
Tons of other good information at the same link.

1.4. What is the IACUC or IBC?

UAF's [Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee \(IACUC\)](#) approves research using live vertebrates. UAF's [Institutional Biosafety Committee \(IBC\)](#) approves research using recombinant DNA and genetically modified organisms.

1.5. What is the IRB?

UAF's [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#) approves research using human subjects. The PI needs to get [CITI](#) training, write up a UAF IRB Protocol for the research, and get it approved by the IRB before starting the research.

These boards are important, because not only you the PI but all of UAF could lose federal funding if we don't follow the rules!

1.6. Does UAF require a special software license?

Software that faculty write as part of their teaching or service duties is controlled by the faculty member, which means you can pick any license you like.

Software that faculty, staff, or students write as part of sponsored external research belongs to UAF by default. If you want to use another license, such as public domain or GPL, for externally sponsored research, you need to do two things:

- 1 Specify the exact license in the proposal body, for example, "All code prepared for this grant will be released to the public domain."
- 2 Check the "Potential for copyright, patent, intellectual property, ..." box on your OSP routing form.

Under the previous director of intellectual property, UAF preferred to release software under [a BSD-style license](#), rather than GPL, because the GPL makes it very difficult to commercialize software.

2. Managing your Budget

2.1. Where does the budget come from?

Along with your proposal office, you prepare your budget in the initial grant proposal, typically as an Excel spreadsheet. OSP approves outgoing budgets, which are entered into Banner. Once you get funded and the money arrives, UAF GC&A will attempt to divide it into the correct categories:

- Personal Services, for payroll
- Staff Benefits, to pay your retirement and benefits (often merged with Personal Services)
- Travel, to pay Travel Vouchers
- Contractual Services, to pay subcontractors
- Commodities, to pay for small parts
- Equipment, to pay for big parts
- Student Aid, to pay for tuition and fees
- F&A Cost, to pay university overhead

Like making a sausage, what comes out isn't always recognizable as what went in! Talk to your business office.

2.2. What's the difference between my proposal coordinator and my business office?

The proposal office is before you get the money (pre-award); the business office is after you get the money (post-award).

Your research institute's *proposal coordinator* works with UAF Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) to help you prepare and format your outgoing grant requests (pre-award). They help you put together your budget, format the proposal, track down all the agency's requirements, etc.

- [GI Proposal Office](#)
- [INE Proposals & Publications Office](#)
- [IAB Proposal Office](#)
- [SFOS Proposal Coordinators](#)

Your research institute's *business office* works with UAF's Office of Grants and Contracts Administration (OGC&A) to help you spend your incoming grant money (post-award). They tell you how much money you have left in your grant, help you hire employees, and ensure the agency's requirements are followed.

- [GI Post-Award Office](#)
- [INE Business Office](#)
- [IAB Grant Office](#)
- [SFOS Fiscal Office](#)

In a small research organization, these roles may be merged, or subsumed into the Dean's office. For example, CNSM's research wing is [ESTES](#), which has a single merged "grants coordinator" position.

2.3. What is “overhead” or “F&A”?

UAF has to add on a certain percentage to the direct costs of the grant, to cover the salary of your administrative assistant, the cost of maintaining your office, paper clips, and such. These are added on as a fixed percentage, typically 30-50%, called “Facilities and Administrative” (F&A) costs. [OSP describes the various rates here.](#)

2.4. How much money do I have left?

Ask your business office. They can use [QMenu](#) to very easily give you an “REPORTS...FINANCE” -> “Inception To Date Query” that lists the current balances. Some deans/directors let PIs get their own QMenu accounts, some don’t and want you to go through your business office.

2.5. What are “GRANT”, “ORG”, and “FUND” codes?

Talk to your business office.

These are all used inside UAF’s accounting system, Banner. GRANT codes are a “G” followed by an 8 digit number (mostly zeros). FUND is a six digit number indicating where the money comes from; typically each grant has its own fund code. ORG describes where the money is going; typically each grant also has its own org code. Sometimes when a new fiscal year starts in July, the FUND and/or ORG codes will be changed. FUND and ORG show up on timesheets.

Incredibly, the fund and org codes are NOT automatically verified, so a mistyped fund/org can very easily charge money to the wrong account, and only be discovered years later. This happens surprisingly frequently at UAF, and needs a “Journal Voucher” (JV) to correct.

3. Managing Co-PIs, Students & Staff

3.1. How do I hire a student research assistant?

- 1 Talk to your business office and fill out a position description form.
- 2 UAF HR will process the form and post the position to uakjobs.
- 3 Sort through the uakjobs resumes, and make a short list (often very short).
- 4 Interview the applicant, and be very clear about what you need and want.
- 5 Start the hire paperwork.
- 6 Find them a place to work.
- 7 Give them concrete, achievable tasks. “Make the Kholffloss work” is a goal, not a task. “Plug in the Kholffloss, and follow the calibration instructions in the manual” is a task!

3.2. How do I find a GOOD student research assistant?

The sad part about uakjobs searches is that superstar students do not send out resumes, because they spend essentially zero time looking for work. Often, you can only find the best students by asking around, especially faculty who teach courses.

3.3. Why isn't my student doing any work?

It may not be them, it may be you. Does the student have an absolutely crystal-clear idea of what you need from them, and how to do it? Do they have a quiet, well-lit place to do work? Do they need a Windows machine instead of a Linux workstation (or vice versa)?

Or it may be them. They're fighting a bad cold. There's a big class project due. They're having problems at home. Except as to how it narrowly affects their job, this isn't actually your business, and it may resolve itself in a week or two. Or not.

3.4. How do I fire a student employee?

Talk to your business office. Establish a paper trail indicating exactly what they should be doing, verify they know they should be doing it, and aren't. Sometimes this fixes the problem.

If not, write a "termination memo" outlining the above. Be nice--it may still be you, not them!

4. Research Space

4.1. Where do I put my Research Assistant?

Talk to your department head, dean, or director. Maybe you need to clear out a corner of your office. Maybe there's a spot down the hall. Be sure to keep up with the RA, and make sure they can actually do work there--there's a comfortable chair, good desk, and good light.

4.2. How do I buy new furniture, or a new computer?

Your department head, dean, or director often has some funding for office equipment like furniture, desktop PC, printer. Or you may be able to spend your grant overhead money.

5. Meta-Questions

5.1. Who is this document for?

This document is intended for new UAF faculty and staff, or existing faculty and staff who want to better understand the process of doing research. This document is intended to be very broad, covering everything from getting grants to setting up lab space.

5.3. What other FAQs exist?

The UAF Office of Grants and Contracts Administration has a good [Frequently Asked Questions](#) list.

CEM's research institute INE has a list of "[Things Every PI Wants to Know](#)".

The Center for Research Services published a [Research Resource Guide](#), though it's mostly phone numbers and other web addresses, and doesn't explain much.

5.2. How do I change/extend/correct this FAQ?

Contact UAF CS faculty Dr. Orion Lawlor, lawlor@alaska.edu, x7678, [201E Chapman](#) with any changes, or to get write access.