Medford AAPLS Session 1 - Finding Funding and Getting Started
How to Deconstruct a Funding Opportunity, Program Announcement, RFP, or RFA

Introduction:
- When you find a funding opportunity that looks promising, it’s time to review the funding announcement.
- Every funding opportunity is different, but the information that you need to know to successfully apply is consistent.
- Reading a Funding Opportunity Announcement takes practice. You must read it like a lawyer.
- Key is to know what basic types of information to look for in any funding opportunity announcement.
- Non-Program related information may not be found within the RFA, but instead in supplementary documents.

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 Tufts 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 Specs:
- What are the page limits?
- What sections of the proposal are included within the page limit? 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 Department Administrator to start the internal approval process.
• Is there a minimum time commitment for the PI and other project staff? (i.e., how many person-months/percent effort?)
• Is there a salary cap?
• 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 Tufts' current F&A rate, please discuss this with your Department Administrator 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? If sub-awards will be requested, speak to your research administrator well in advance of your deadline.
• What are the requirements for the budget justification?

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 familiarize yourself 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.

Additional Tips:

- Discuss the application with your Department Manager or Grant Administrator as soon as you decide to apply.
- Learn which colleagues have successfully applied for similar grants and use them as resources.
- Contact program officers at agencies.
- Always check for updates to a RFA. Both federal and non-federal funders often issue updates after a RFP or RFA is released.
- Remember to check the funder's proposal guide for additional key information on page limits, fonts, etc.
- When reviewing a funding opportunity announcement, check funder databases to see who has been funded previously using this mechanism. This can give you great insight into whether your work is a good fit.

If you have questions about the funding opportunity announcement:

- Contact your Research Administrator and proposaldevelopment@tufts.edu
- Some departments and schools have resources available to assist with grants.
- It is not uncommon to find ambiguities or apparent contradictions within the 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 FOA. Ask early! Some funders have a deadline for the submission of questions.