# **GRCC** Grants Department

**Grant Development Guide** (Pre-Award)

**Revised October 2022** 

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# Welcome to grant development at GRCC. We're glad you're here!

#### Dear colleague:

If you're reading this guide, then there's a good chance that you have an innovative idea and you're interested in applying for a grant. If so, you're in the right place. Helping you find resources to enhance student learning and success or to provide new infrastructure or improvements is our goal. This is exciting work and we are happy that you are taking the initiative to create new programs and services, or to expand existing ones, for current and future GRCC students.

The GRCC Grants Department supports all phases of the grant lifecycle—from project planning to closeout. We developed this guide to support you throughout the pre-award phase. A separate, post-award guide is also available for project directors who are implementing new projects. While this is not an exhaustive "how to" manual, it will answer many of your questions and provide you with a framework for pursuing grant funding in collaboration with the Grants Department and in accordance with College policy.

One of the most important roles of our office in the pre-award phase is facilitating project development. We coordinate meetings with administrators, faculty, and staff to discuss grant opportunities, develop fundable concepts, and lead the design and writing of the proposal. We also advise on goals, activities and outcomes, evaluation methods, conformance with sponsor guidelines and federal agency regulations, and the selection of project partners.

We want this guide to be useful for you, so please give us any feedback that you would like to share.

We look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

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# **Purpose of Grant Funding**

The primary purpose of external grant funding is to provide support for projects and activities that cannot otherwise be conducted with general operating funds. Grants are an investment in Grand Rapids Community College by the sponsor (i.e., grant-making organization) for the purpose of achieving agreed upon goals and outcomes. Sponsors provide grant funding for projects that are unique and innovative, and that build the capacity of the institution to serve students more effectively.

GRCC pursues grants in order to develop additional resources to strengthen the college's capacity to meet its mission of being an open access college that prepares individuals to attain their goals and contribute to the community. In general, grant-funded projects include as their outcomes things like:

- Attracting and retaining new students
- Upgrading current programs, equipment, or facilities
- Creating new academic programming and resources
- Promoting and enhancing access and diversity
- Expanding opportunities to build a strong workforce in the West Michigan region
- Providing wraparound support for students with academic or economic barriers, above and beyond the routine services for the larger student body

GRCC is particularly committed to pursuing grants that support the accomplishment of the College's shortand long-term goals and institutional priorities, as identified in the College's strategic plan.

# **Role of the Grants Department**

GRCC's Grants Department is the college-wide point of contact that manages all aspects of grant-seeking and grant administration functions to ensure that projects are developed and managed in compliance with the sponsor's terms, college policies, and applicable federal and state rules and regulations. **No work should begin on a proposal until the Grants Department has been contacted.** 

This guide provides basic information on how grant opportunities are identified, how concepts are developed, and the process for developing a project that will succeed in securing grant funding for institutional projects. As such, the Grants Department provides a full array of services to assist faculty and staff in obtaining grant funding. **Pre-award services** include the following:

- Working with cross-college teams to develop good ideas into fundable concepts
- Researching and disseminating summaries of grant opportunities
- Coordinating the grant development process (providing task-timelines, scheduling meetings, creating proposal templates, gathering data, etc.)
- Providing feedback on proposed project activities, work plans, deliverables, and outcomes
- Grant writing and editing services
- Budget development
- Serving as a liaison for grant-related community partnerships
- Obtaining approvals from college leadership to submit a proposal for funding
- Assembling and submitting proposals as the college's certifying official

# **Important Considerations**

While we are a full-service department, it's important to know that the preparation of a grant proposal is a time-consuming and intense process. Many proposals are 25-50 pages or longer with many required attachments (e.g., work plans, budgets with justifications, logic models, etc.). They cannot be written in the spur-of-the-moment. Therefore, the process for developing a grant must begin at least one month, if not sooner, before the deadline. It's also important to note that pre-approvals from a dean or supervising administrator must be acquired BEFORE work begins on developing a proposal.

Grant proposals that are planned in advance have a much higher success rate than those that are written at the last minute. In fact, the most successful grant writers often refuse to work on 11th-hour grant applications because they know that the chances of winning an award are slim. If you come across a grant opportunity that seems promising, consult with the Grants Department as soon as possible to ensure there is enough time to prepare a proposal, budget, attachments, and obtain internal approvals.

As you consider the timing of the deadline, keep in mind that GRCC's executive leadership team requires at least one week prior to the deadline to complete a full review of the final proposal package and budget before they will approve the submission of a grant proposal. The Grants Department coordinates this approval process.



#### Primary considerations before taking on a grant project:

- 1. **Fit:** Is GRCC eligible? Will this project help the college reach its strategic goals? What are the chances of winning this grant? Will this grant be a drain on faculty and staff resources or will it bolster them?
- 2. **Timing:** Because the span of time between grant announcement and submission deadline is often a month or less, there either has to be a very rapid proposal development process, or steps in the process need to have been completed in advance in anticipation of the announcement.
- 3. **Readiness:** Willingness of faculty or staff with subject expertise to participate in proposal development and eventual project implementation and management if the award is received.

A Grant Decision Matrix is included as an appendix to assist you with determining whether a funding source is a good fit.

# **Overview of GRCC Grant Development Process**

The most important thing to remember about developing a grant proposal is that the Grants Department is a full-service unit of the college that takes the lead on writing and submitting proposals. Project teams do not need to be grant experts, nor do they need to be registered users in grant submission portals. As such, one of the most important roles the office has in the pre-award process is facilitating project development. The department provides advice on proposal content, evaluation, budget items, conformance with federal or state rules and guidelines, and the selection of project partners. This section provides an overview of the process so project teams know what to expect.

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## How do I get started?

- Screen the project: Present your idea to the Grants Department for a technical feasibility
  review using the <u>Grant Concept Form</u>). The Grant Concept Form requires information on the
  problem or need to be addressed, a summary of the proposed solution, and anticipated
  preliminary costs, and is used to research potential grant opportunities if a sponsor has not
  already been identified.
- 2. **Seek approval:** Next, consult with your supervising administrator (dean or department head). They will need to sign-off on the <u>Supervising Administrator Pre-Approval Form</u> before work can begin on a proposal.
- 3. **Next steps**: If given the go-ahead, the Grants Department will prepare a timeline, application templates, request or compile data, and assist with convening a project team to develop and write the proposal.

#### **Proposal Concepts**

Proposal concepts can come from any member of the campus community—faculty, staff, or the executive leadership team. Ideas may be stimulated by past programming, ideas for innovations or new research, capital planning, GRCC's strategic plan, or critical campus or community needs. To assist the department in researching grant opportunities, faculty or staff who are interested in grant-seeking will be asked to fill out the <u>Grant Concept Form</u>.

#### **Identifying Grant Opportunities**

Grant opportunities are identified in several ways. The Grants Department routinely conducts research to find potential opportunities from a variety of sources, including government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional organizations, and corporate giving programs. The department then informs faculty and staff of relevant grant competitions by publishing them in *GRCC Today* or reaching out to department heads, deans, or staff/faculty directly. Faculty, staff, and community partners may also identify potential grant opportunities and request that further research be conducted by the department.

#### **Pre-Approvals**

Once a suitable sponsor is matched with a project concept, the Grants Department works with the project lead to seek approval from their supervising administrator prior to beginning work on a proposal. The administrator will evaluate the technical merit of the concept and advise the project lead on potential improvements to the concept, as appropriate, as well as ascertain and mitigate any risks associated with

pursuing the grant. The administrator is ultimately responsible for approving the allocation of space and other departmental resources, instructional reassignments, assigned time and salary arrangements, cost share, and other administrative details.

# **Proposal and Budget Development**

To ensure a competitive proposal, the Grants Department will thoroughly review the sponsor's guidelines and proposal requirements (i.e., request for proposals), and then provide the project lead with a summary, templates, and a timeline with task assignments and internal deadlines. The department will also assist the project lead with convening a project team to ensure the right people are in the room. Proposals are not solo efforts. Project teams may include other colleagues or partners from community organizations.

The Grants Department typically takes the lead on writing the proposal with significant input from the project team. An exception to this practice is when subject matter expertise is required. For example, for a grant proposal to fund research or a STEM project, a faculty/staff member will be expected to lend their expertise and actively participate in drafting sections of the proposal with editing support provided by the Grants Department.

A project team may meet once or several times throughout the proposal development process. Team meetings will generally be led by the Grants Department to ensure the process moves along smoothly, and pitfalls that may hinder a timely submission are avoided. The Grants Department will coordinate budget development and approval by GRCC's grants accounting specialist and compile required attachments. In doing so, the department ensures GRCC policies are followed and all of the proposal content is compliant with the sponsor's guidelines and requirements.

#### **Internal Approval to Submit a Proposal**

To protect the interests of the college and ensure all grant-funded activities align with the GRCC's strategic goals, all grant proposals must be reviewed and approved by the executive leadership team prior to submission of a proposal. With input from the project team, the Grants Department will route a Final Submission Approval Form to the executive team 5-7 business days before the submission deadline to allow time for clarifications and to secure approvals. Once approvals are secured, the Grants Department submits the proposal.

Per the college's <u>11.2 Grants Policy</u>, only the president, chair of the Board of Trustees, vice president for Finance and Administration, or the director of the Grants Department have the authority to sign and submit grant applications, proposals, and bids for grant contracts on behalf of the college.

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# Key proposal development tasks:

- Convene project team to help plan the project
- Work with the Grants Department to draft a proposal in response to required criteria
- Obtain letters of support or letter of commitment, as required by the sponsor
- Conduct subrecipient risk assessments and conflict of interest checks, as applicable
- Develop a sound budget that is *necessary* and *reasonable*, along with a budget justification
- Obtain approval to submit the proposal

# **Common Components of a Grant Proposal**

The grant announcement—also called the request for proposals (RFP), program solicitation, sponsor guidelines, or notice of funding opportunity (NOFO)—summarizes in detail the instructions and requirements for the proposal package. First and foremost, the announcement describes the purpose of the grant program and the specific funding objectives tied to the opportunity. If your project falls outside of those interests, then you will not be funded. Matching your project activities with the right grant opportunity is essential. Also, the eligibility requirements must be reviewed to be sure the college can apply, whether as the lead or as a member of a consortium.

Typically, the RFP will outline the proposal criteria and other requirements (e.g., page limits, formatting requirements, budget rules, etc.) in the instructions. As such, there is more than one way to prepare a proposal and it will depend on the guidelines. There are, however, common themes. A general list of the elements of a grant proposal are as follows:

#### **Executive Summary/Abstract**

Although requirements vary from one grant opportunity to the next, a proposal will usually include a summary of the project that is limited to one page in length. This overview includes a statement about why the project is needed, a description of the primary activities, goals/objectives, and organizational qualifications. It describes the project in a nutshell and highlights the most compelling parts of the proposal. It should be informative to persons working in the same or related fields, and as much as possible, understandable to a scientifically or technically literate lay reader.

#### **Need Statement**

The need statement (sometimes called a problem statement) describes the issue the project will address and the individuals it will serve. It outlines who will benefit and how. Need statements are always supported with relevant data from reputable sources. The Grants Department takes primary responsibility for gathering all data.

#### **Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes**

The first thing to know about goals, objectives, and outcomes is that sponsors often have their own definitions of these terms. Here are some examples:

**Goal**: A broad statement of what the project will accomplish. An overarching aim.

- Reduce food-access disparities for low-income, underserved communities.
- Increase the completion of postsecondary credentials by underrepresented minorities and women in STEM fields.
- Advance health equity and support for underserved communities by increasing the number of health support workers that are employed as integral members of integrated care teams that use their expanded skills to reduce health disparities.

**Objective**: Statement about how you will measure achievement of the goal. Objectives should always be S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound).

- By the end of Year 1, GRCC will increase food pantry offerings by 25% through a process that
  provides extra food from events to enrolled students registered for the food pantry program
  and thereby reduces overall food waste for the campus.
- Recruit 20 professionals in the community to serve as mentors for STEM students who are identified as underrepresented minorities and women.
- By the end of Year 1, increase the number of health support worker apprenticeships placed in target communities by 15%.

**Outcomes (Impacts)**: Are the quantifiable impacts that result from the project.

- Increased number of food pantry participants who are retained as students to the next semester.
- Increased number of STEM students, who are identified as underrepresented minorities and women, who persist through completion of the two-year curriculum.
- Decrease in the overall number of unfilled health support worker positions in target communities.

## **Project Description (Work Plan)**

This section has a lot of names depending on the sponsor. It is the section most people consider the crux of the proposal. It is a detailed description of proposed activities that directly support the project's objectives. It is like a recipe – it shows all the ingredients and how they combine to achieve the project's goals and objectives. After reviewers read this section, they should not have any questions about how the project will be carried out. Oftentimes a sponsor will dictate which elements to include in the project description.

#### **Evaluation Plan**

An evaluation plan is a written plan that describes how you will monitor and evaluate your project, as well as how you intend to use evaluation results for program improvement and decision-making. The evaluation plan clarifies how you will describe the "What," the "How," and the "Why It Matters" for your project. For additional information on all aspects of evaluation, check out WMU's Evaluation Center. Links to the most helpful webpages are included at the end of this guide.

#### **Sustainability Plan**

The sustainability plan tells potential funders that the project team and the college have a plan for how the project or specific aspects of the project will continue when the grant period ends. Generally, a sponsor will not fund a grant project in perpetuity. The sustainability plan is a plan for the future to ensure the good work continues.

#### **Collaborations and Stakeholder Involvement**

#### Collaborations

Sponsors like to see collaboration. Strong partnerships woven into programming have many benefits:

- Better solutions: GRCC and its project teams have expertise/resources, while other
  organizations offer different or complimentary areas of expertise/resources. When
  organizations come together, there is the potential for multiple solutions tailored to the unique
  needs of the people served. It also often reduces duplicated efforts.
- Multiple, relevant perspectives: Complicated issues can benefit from having stakeholders from different sectors and backgrounds working on them.
- Broad appeal for the project: Partnerships encourage support beyond the lead applicant.

#### Stakeholders

A stakeholder is a person or group with a shared interest or concern in addressing the problem or need. Once stakeholders are identified, the project team can engage them in the project. Why is stakeholder engagement important?

- Getting the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders, including the individuals served, ensures a stronger program. The project team brings one perspective to the table, but others are also needed. By listening to others, the project is more likely to address the underlying issues with the appropriate solutions.
- Another reason to involve stakeholders is to gain support and buy-in for the project. Broad support is one ingredient to ensure success.

### **Budget Preparation**

A budget outlines, line by line, all of the costs of the project or program. It is important to capture all the costs associated with a project, so there is enough funding to accomplish the project goals. There may be limits on the types of expenses (e.g., no construction expenditures allowed), spending caps on certain expenses (e.g., travel limited to \$5K), and overall funding limits (e.g., total costs cannot exceed \$300K per year). Costs must be allowable, necessary and reasonable to complete the work described in the proposal. Examples of budget areas include, but are not limited to:

- Personnel (Salary and Fringe Benefits)
- Travel
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Contractual Services
- Other Direct Costs
- Indirect Costs

It is advisable to start the budget early in the proposal development process because working on the budget can help the project team think through all aspects of the project (e.g., personnel, time commitment, supplies, travel, etc.), which is a helpful step in writing the proposal narrative. Further, the budget is a key part of the approval process and requires many levels of approval at GRCC. There are often questions about the budget—it's best to get them out of the way so they don't hold up the final submission.

The other part of grant-proposal budgeting is the budget justification. The budget justification explains and justifies each cost. It details what each staff member is going to do, their qualifications, and how

much effort they are going to commit to the project. It explains the necessity of each cost to the project and how those costs were established.

- Why is the project team asking for these funds?
- What will they be used for?
- How were the costs calculated?
- A sponsor is going to ask: Is the budget adequate? Is the budget reasonable?

#### **Common Attachments**

Grant proposals often require ancillary components. Here are some common items that may be part of the submission:

- Letters of support from partners. Letters of support demonstrate broad-based commitment to the project
- Letters of commitment from a member of the college's leadership team or partners that will contribute to the project
- IRS 501 (c) (3) determination letter
- Board of trustee list and their affiliations
- Diversity and inclusion policy and/or other policies
- Organizational demographics
- Financial information like the annual audit or IRS 990
- Resumes or biographical sketches of key program staff

# **Pre-Award Roles and Responsibilities**

In addition to the Grants Department, several organizational units are involved in developing grants at the college. Grant development involves cooperation between idea or project visionaries, deans, directors, administrators, and the Grants Department. The development of most grant proposals entails a broad organizational focus—that is, it requires a team effort. The following is a general outline of the roles and responsibilities of key personnel typically involved in development of grant proposals:

#### **Project lead**

- 1. Develops a grant concept
- 2. Uses the Grant Concept Form to notify the Grants Department of an interest in seeking grant funding. Email the Grant Concept Form to the Grants Department.
- 3. Meets with the Grants Department to discuss the project concept and next steps. As necessary, drafts a short concept paper outlining the project concept.
- 4. Discusses the project with their department head and/or dean to ensure college resources necessary to complete the proposed project would be available if the project is funded. The project lead should also talk through the time commitment required for the project, any required cost share, and other relevant aspects of the project.
- 5. Contacts the Grants Department to discuss whether it's a good idea to contact the sponsor's program officer to discuss the project.
- 6. Informs the convening of the project team.

- 7. Partners with the Grants Department in developing the project narrative, budget, budget justification, and other attachments.
- 8. Along with the Grants Department and the Accounting and Budget Services Department, ensures the proposal complies with sponsor and GRCC guidelines and rules. To ensure proposal integrity, the proposal must be complete, factual, and accurate.
- 9. Requests letters of support or letters of commitment from external stakeholders.
- 10. Provides any information required by the Grants Department or the Accounting and Budget Services Department to secure all appropriate approvals.
- 11. Once awarded, implements the project as specifically outlined in the proposal.

### **Department Head and/or Dean**

- 1. Evaluates the technical merit of the proposal and ensures it aligns with the goals of the college.
- 2. Advises the project lead on improvements to the proposal.
- 3. Approves cost share, the allocation of space and other resources, instructional reassignments, and other aspects of faculty time on the project.
- 4. Ascertains and assists in mitigating any risks associated with the project.
- 5. Provides the appropriate level of oversight for the proposal if an award is received.

# **Grants Department**

- 1. Conducts grant opportunity research and provides potential project lead with information.
- 2. Informs project lead regarding policies and procedures: institutional, sponsor, and governmental.
- 3. Leads all aspects of the grant development process:
  - a. With input from the project lead and the Accounting and Budget Services Department, develops a budget and budget justification.
  - b. With significant input from the project lead and the team, writes the grant proposal.
  - c. With the assistance of the project lead and team, ensures all required grant proposal components are completed and included in the final submission.
  - d. Conducts initial grant conflict of interest process.
  - e. Coordinates completion of subrecipient commitment forms, as necessary.
- 4. Reviews and certifies the proposal for consistency with institutional policies, sponsor's regulations, and any other relevant regulations.
- 5. Routes the proposal for approval by the executive leadership team and helps answer questions that may arise.
- 6. Submits proposal.

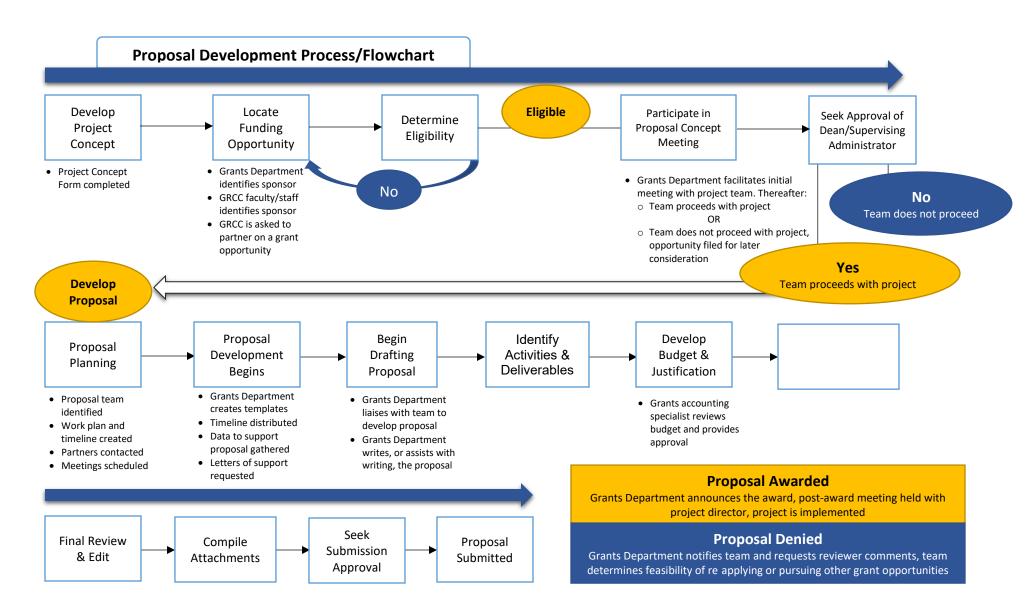
#### **Executive Leadership**

- 1. Evaluates the technical merit of the proposal and ensures it aligns with the goals of the college.
- 2. Reviews and approves project budget, including cost share, if applicable. Assures that all costs are incorporated and are necessary, reasonable, and allowable.
- 3. Provides the appropriate assurances as required by the sponsoring agency.
- 4. Provides the appropriate level of oversight for the proposal with respect to compliance requirements and other grant management responsibilities at the college level.

# **GRCC** Grants Department

# **GRANT PROPOSAL DECISION MATRIX**

Sponsor:			Decision	☐ Yes
Project:		T		□ No
Factors for Consideration	Negative (0-3)	Neutral (4-6)	Positive (7-10)	Rating
<ol> <li>Fit of project concept with sponsor's</li> </ol>	Not aligned with mission/program	Marginally aligns	Aligns	
mission/program purpose.	purpose			
2. Fit of project with GRCC mission, alignment	No college alignment, low priority	Moderate alignment and impact,	High alignment and impact, major	
with strategic plan and priorities	and low impact	related to priority	priority	
3. Experience: GRCC project team/project	Team is either not identified or	Team has some experience,	Team has extensive experience,	
champion has related experience	not experienced w/proper credentials	related credentials	exceptional credentials	
Time commitments: Project director (PD)	PD has no time to commit; no	PD has some time to commit;	PD has ample time to commit;	
and department are not overcommitted	support to release/reassign	limited support to reassign	support to release/reassign	
5. Public or college data is readily available to	Only anecdotal, qualitative	Limited data to document need;	Multiple public data sources,	
support the need for the project	information	no strong case for need	verified by research, GRCC data	
5. External partners: Major subcontractors are	No known partners	Known potential partners who	Longstanding relationships with	
known and available and pose low risk		pose low risk	partners who pose low risk	
7. Financial potential: Generates new	Poor short-term and long-term	Moderate short-term and long-	Excellent short-term and long-	
revenue, additional students, innovations	financial potential	term financial potential	term financial potential	
likely				
3. Perceived return on investment (including	Project ROI is low and/or cannot	ROI is adequate for the level of	ROI is high and results will	
number served): Anticipated project results	be adequately assessed before	investment	contribute to improved practices,	
versus time and resources needed	deadline		national recognition, more funding	
9. College and external resources:	Requires significant investment of	Requires reasonable investment of	The project requires minimal	
Renovations, space, IT resources,	resources and no time to vet with	resources and there is time to vet	resources and/or will primarily be	
personnel, cost share	internal stakeholders	with internal stakeholders	self-supporting	
10. Cost of ownership (sustainability	Low interest from college on	Medium interest from college on	High interest from college on	
expectation)	sustaining project with general	sustaining project with general	sustaining project with general	
	operating funds	operating funds	operating funds	
11. Executive leadership support/champion	No support	Limited support	Full support	
12. Capability of Grants Department and	Does not have staff time to	Stresses staff time, but able to	Staff has time to develop a	
project team to prepare a competitive	adequately respond with a	respond with a competitive	competitive proposal	
proposal	competitive proposal	proposal		
TOTAL SCORE (approved projects must carr	ry an average score of 75)			



# **Helpful Definitions**

The following are terms used throughout this handbook and for all grant-related processes:

**Project Lead:** A project lead (may also be titled the project manager, principal investigator, or project coordinator) is the individual designated by GRCC to have the appropriate level of authority and responsibility to direct a project or program. The project lead is primarily responsible for the preparation, conduct, and administration of a grant, cooperative agreement, training, contract or other sponsored project in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and institutional policies.

**Proposal:** A request for financial support of a project/activity, submitted to an external sponsor in accordance with instructions provided by the sponsor.

**Request for Proposals:** A request for proposals (RFP) is a solicitation from a sponsor to submit a grant application. RFPs provide guidelines about the requirements for a submission, including deadlines, award ceiling, proposal components, etc. There are several terms that are used interchangeably that refer to this type of document, such as Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), Call for Proposals, Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), Request for Applications (RFA), and the like.

**Sponsor (i.e., Grantmaking Organization):** Sponsors are federal, state, or local government agencies, philanthropic organizations, corporations/corporate foundations, or other institutions that provide grant funding for a project or program.

#### **Additional Resources**

#### **National Science Foundation**

Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide

#### **U.S. Department of Education**

• Information and Tips for Preparing and Submitting an Application

#### **U.S.** Department of Labor

• Competitive Grant Application Tips

#### **WMU Evaluation Center**

- Resources
- Evaluation Plan Checklists