Office of Sponsored Programs
Standard Operating Procedures

Proposal Review Procedures

I. Background and Purpose

University policy and sponsor regulations require that all Boston University grant proposals be reviewed by the Office of Sponsored Programs prior to submission.

The primary purpose of OSP proposal review is to ensure that proposals submitted to external sponsors meet all sponsor requirements and fully comply with Boston University policies and procedures for sponsored research.

Time permitting; the review process can draw upon the expertise and experience of the OSP Research Administrator (RA) conducting the review to help investigators prepare highly professional, competitive grant proposals.

Similarly, a thorough and thoughtful review of the proposal can help investigators identify key issues that may need to be addressed in later stages of the pre-award process.

The full review procedures listed below will be followed when a proposal has been received in the Office of Sponsored Programs five days in advance of the sponsor deadline for submission. An appropriate expedited review procedure will be followed for proposals received on shorter notice.

II. Overview

A. Proposal Package. In order to facilitate a timely, orderly, and thoughtful review in OSP, it is expected that investigators and their departmental administrators will provide a complete proposal package well in advance of the sponsor deadline (preferably five business days). The proposal package should include the following documents.

For all proposals:
- A completed Boston University Proposal Summary form signed by the investigator and appropriate administrators at the department, center, and college levels.
- A copy of the sponsor’s proposal guidelines or program solicitation number.
- Completed application forms as required by the sponsor (e.g., standard cover sheet, biosketches, current and pending support pages, description of facilities and equipment, NIH F&A checklist for paper submissions).
- A project summary and draft technical narrative. (Note: required for all CRC proposals. Not required for electronic applications submitted from the Medical Campus, as these documents are included in the electronic application file saved in the PI’s folder.)
- The final budget and budget justification in the format required by the sponsor.
- Completed and signed Boston University compliance forms as required (e.g. Conflict of Interest Project Specific Disclosure forms for all investigators involved in designing, conducting or reporting research, Export Control Checklist).

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If applicable:
Complete documentation for all proposed subcontracts (including the authorized institutional letter of intent to subcontract, scope of work, budget/budget justification, the subcontractor’s most recent negotiated rate agreement, CVs for key personnel, information on the status of IRB and IACUC approvals [if applicable], and other documents as required by prime). Note: The Medical Campus also requires a contact information sheet for all subcontract proposals.
Consultant Letter(s) of Intent/Commitment and Biosketch(es).
Memorandum of Understanding for Joint VA-BUMC Appointments.
F&A waiver/reduction approvals for voluntary indirect cost sharing requests.
Documentation of appropriate approvals for all direct cost sharing requests.
Major Project Status documentation if administrative and clerical costs are budgeted.
Approved requests for Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Principal (Co-PI) status.

B. Research Administrator Proposal Review: Core Tasks. The review by the RA will consist of the following core tasks.

1. An initial high-level review of the proposal package.
2. A detailed review of sponsor application guidelines and any program-specific solicitation (which includes confirming the sponsor due date).
3. A targeted, limited review of the draft technical narrative.
4. A detailed budget review.
5. A check for the status of compliance committee reviews and approvals.
6. A review of sponsor specific application forms for accuracy and completeness.
7. A check to determine that all required proposal components have been included in the proposal and have the information they need to complete any sections of the proposal which may be unfamiliar to them.
8. For electronic submissions, a final check prior to submission to confirm that the proposal is complete, passes sponsor system requirements for successful transmission, and is as the investigator wants it to be.
9. The RA is also expected to verify that any proposal submitted electronically has been successfully received by the sponsor in time to meet the sponsor’s deadline.

Note: For paper submissions returned to the investigator or department administrator to submit, a copy of the proposal as submitted to the sponsor will be requested and checked by the RA for consistency with the proposal as approved by OSP before it is filed in OSP records.

III. Detailed Review Procedures

A. Initial High-Level Review of Proposal Package

Review Boston University Proposal Summary form to make sure that all required fields are completed and all required signatures obtained.
Review package to determine that all required documents (see list above) are provided.
Obtain missing signatures and any missing documents necessary for review from the PI or departmental grants administrator.
B. Detailed Review of Sponsor Application Guidelines and any Program-Specific Solicitation

The following is a list of key information to understand and consider when reviewing these guidelines.

- Program purposes.
- Eligibility restrictions.
- Anticipated funding levels and stated limitations on funding.
- Sponsor deadline.
- Earliest start date and allowable period of performance.
- Allowable direct and indirect costs.
- Cost sharing requirements, if any.
- Required budget presentation to support technical review (e.g., by task or government fiscal year).
- Required proposal components (including special, mandatory sections such as data management plans, postdoctoral mentoring plans, detailed plans for the protection of human subjects, and the responsible conduct of research [RCR] plans required for some training grants).
- Formatting standards.
- Anticipated terms and conditions of award (to identify terms which may not be acceptable to the University).
- Required representations and certifications.
- Application procedures--including sponsor and program-specific variations on the standard application forms (e.g. instructions for completing applications to specific agency and programs within the Grants.gov system).

C. Technical Narrative Review

Review technical narrative to understand the scope of the project, implementation details (particularly relevant for budget development), and any University commitments being proposed which may not be evident elsewhere in the proposal.

D. Detailed Budget Review

Review salaries to confirm that they are based upon actual Boston University salaries or applicable standard rates and appropriately increased for inflation during the proposed period of performance (not required for NIH modular grant applications).

Confirm that fringe benefit and indirect cost rates have been appropriately applied and accurately calculated.

Review non-personnel direct costs to determine that they are allowable, accurately calculated, and appropriately categorized by sponsor and Boston University accounting standards.

Review proposed direct and indirect cost sharing to determine whether it is mandated or voluntary and has been accurately calculated. Note: Voluntary indirect cost sharing must be approved by the F&A Reduction/Waiver procedure. The sources of all direct

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cost sharing must be identified and documentation of appropriate internal approvals provided.

Review budget justification notes for accuracy, responsiveness to sponsor requirements, and consistency with proposed budget.

Costs requested must meet standards for allowability, reasonableness, and allocability to the project being proposed.

If administrative and clerical expenses are budgeted, approval of Major Project Status must be documented.

E. Compliance Review

Review technical narrative to determine whether compliance review issues have been appropriately identified and noted on the Boston University Proposal Summary.

Document status of compliance review (including compliance committee approvals if they have already been obtained).

Positive investigator COI disclosures are flagged and forwarded to the Office of Research Compliance.

F. Review of Sponsor-Specific Required Forms

Review proposals to determine that all required forms have been included in the proposal, that they are prepared in the format required by the sponsor, and that the information included is reasonable and accurate.

G. Check for Required Proposal Components: Work with PI or Departmental Grant Administrative Staff to Obtain Missing Documents and Make All Necessary Corrections in Proposal Documents

This task can involve substantial back and forth with investigators and administrative staff. Given the complexity of application guidelines and instructions, it frequently involves calling their attention to specific sections of the instructions which may have gone unnoticed in the proposal development process.

H. Final Check of Proposals Submitted Electronically by OSP

Upon institutional authorization, proposals requiring electronic submission by the institution are returned to the appropriate RA for submission.

Before submitting the proposal, the RA (1) does a final check of the proposal within the electronic system to ensure that all attachments are appropriately uploaded and required fields properly completed, (2) validates the proposal within the electronic system, and (3) confirms with the PI that he or she does not want to make any final changes.

After electronic submission, the RA confirms that the proposal has been accepted by the sponsor.

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I. Paper Submissions

Paper submissions may require the RA to prepare an appropriate transmittal letter and required representations and certifications for institutional signatures.

After institutional authorization, proposals for paper submission are returned to the investigator or department for final compilation and submission to the sponsor.

The investigator or departmental administrator is asked to provide OSP with a complete copy of the final proposal as it was submitted to the sponsor.

The RA will review the final proposal to make sure it is consistent with the proposal as approved by OSP prior to filing.

IV. Roles and Responsibilities

The primary responsibility for OSP review of proposals rests with the Research Administrator assigned to academic unit submitting the application (or with an OSP colleague in coverage). The RA will ensure that the proposal has been successfully submitted and accepted by the sponsor. Investigators and departmental administrators are also responsible for reviewing proposals for completeness and consistency with sponsor requirements before submitting a proposal to OSP for review.

Other institutional signing officials (e.g., department chairs, deans) are expected to satisfy themselves that they understand the commitments required by the proposal and that the proposal is consistent with academic mission of their unit.

The standard expectation is that OSP review will be completed within two business days after the receipt of a complete proposal package.

V. Related SOPs

[Reserved to cross reference related Standard Operating Procedures as developed.]