

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
GRADUATE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK**

**PRE-AWARD PROTOCOL FOR
SUBMISSION OF GRANT AND CONTRACT PROPOSALS**

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Preamble

The Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW) is involved in a significant transformation of the research environment at the University of Houston (UH). The University as expressed in first in its Capital Campaign and further developed by our new President Dr. Renu Khator, has the goal of moving from a research university of limited resources to a “Tier 1” research university that has a sustained funding stream from Federal, State, private foundation and industry institutions supporting basic and applied research. This ambitious goal is to increase total funding by a factor of 3 to over the \$100 million mark. In order to accomplish this goal the university realizes it needs to change its way of working in research by encouraging and supporting faculty to increase the quantity and quality of the submissions for grants and contracts.

GCSW faculty and administration need to work together with the Office of Contracts and Grants (OCG) of the UH Division of Research with improved efficiency.¹ The OCG is a large office organized into teams. The Pre-award team consists of Gerri Hamlett, Jeanine Giles and Jae Hughes. For each contract and grant submission you should work with one of these persons throughout the process. The PI needs to increase the proactive stance with proposals that will have to be handled and submitted by OCG. This means mindfulness to three key factors by PIs: 1) allow adequate time to thoroughly acquaint oneself with the Sponsor’s requirements, 2) pay attention to detail in preparation, and 3) provide adequate time for review. Keeping these factors in mind will contribute significantly to the probability of funding and likelihood of continuation and renewal.

¹ Any work involving research, training, or public service the Office of Contracts and Grants (OCG) is required to manage in order to ensure project compliance. A transmittal to OCG will be required in the pre-award phase of which this protocol refers. The post-award phase of the grant will also be managed by the OCG. In addition, if the work does not fall under the areas of research, training, or public service, but does involve intellectual property, animals, human subjects, hazardous materials, etc. OCG also needs to review and approve, but not necessarily manage the award. If an RFP is involved, it is most likely the OCG will both review and manage the grant.

This GCSW Protocol is written in the spirit of the new “distributed operations” model that is being developed by the UH Division of Research to create a seamless process in the submission of grants and contracts in the pre-award phase. This translates into an emphasis on **teamwork** and **flexibility** among the Faculty Principle Investigator (PI) submitting the proposal from GCSW, the GCSW administration and OCG. A key operational principle lies in the responsibility of the Faculty PI to initiate action in a timely manner and to be proactive and interactive with the GCSW administration and OGC throughout the **entire** pre-award phase.

The Protocol is also written from the point of view that research at the GCSW is **primarily** organized by “research centers”. Currently, in the GCSW there are 2 multidisciplinary centers under construction – the Center for Drug and Social Policy Research and the Child and Family Innovative Research Center. These centers have been established in order for GCSW Faculty PIs and PIs who are members of the centers and affiliated to other faculties to obtain the intellectual and infrastructural support needed to write truly competitive proposal applications. Faculty PIs may choose to work with other multi-disciplinary centers at UH or at other universities to increase the chances of success of their research ideas, but they need to claim the ownership and intellectual property rights of their work on these projects. Work with projects from other universities without a consortium agreement and substantial sharing of the Indirect Costs (IDC) is considered “sharecropping” and not counted as faculty research time. Consulting with other groups is an exception provided that it provides some benefit for future research development.

Communication is of the essence and a steady flow of information and exchange of scientific and administrative details and thoughts is required to make the process work. This Protocol is consistent with the Division of Research’s policy that research development at UH has to be based on the strengths and initiatives taken by the Faculty. This protocol for the submission of applications for grants and contracts (the pre-award phase of the funding process) is constructed in terms of **preferred** steps of the procedure. These steps are negotiable on a case-by-case basis and serve as guidelines. The protocol has been designed to not only to distribute the operations, but also to reduce the stress of the process. Although the steps are preferred, it is **mandatory** that the GCSW Business Office Manager (BM) and Associate Dean of Research (ADR) along with the Dean review the scientific content, budget and the protection of human subjects section in coordination with the transmittal to the OCG. It is also highly recommended that transmittals be done electronically with the new on-line Research Electronic Form Submission (**REFS**) system. Competence with this system will make the transmittal and the multiple signatures (approvals) required a more efficient process. It will also allow drafts of application documents to be viewed by both the OCG and the BM and ADR (if designated as Editors) to provide a constant flow of feedback.

Step 1- Contact with the Sponsor

Contacts are encouraged between the Faculty PI and the sponsor to explore specific Requests for Proposals (RFP)/ Program Announcement (PA) in order to test its relevance and the eligibility requirements. This includes requirements both for the PI (format, approvals, deadlines, etc.) and the University (compliances, university approvals, etc.). On some applications OCG will have to produce unusual documentation to include with the proposal or have the UH Contracts Officer read agreements the university is making with the sponsor by submitting the application. There are occasions where, by submitting the proposal, the University is agreeing to the terms and conditions of a contract. Often there are fuzzy procedural lines and therefore planning in time in working with OCG and the Sponsor is recommended. For example, the UH is part of the State of Texas and therefore grant and contract governance must be in compliance with general State of Texas requirements.

The ADR, the Research Center Directors in coordination with the Faculty PIs and the UH Division of Research will also explore for relevant RFPs. In this regard, joining of one or more of the UH Division of Research clusters will help the PIs see what opportunities exist each week. Angela Clifton of the Division of Research is a helpful specialist who can be contacted and will keep a PI personally informed of RFPs that fit. Contacts with sponsor Program Officers (PO) are encouraged. The contact should be informal and informative. The contacts should be initiated after the PIs thoroughly acquaint themselves with the sponsor's requirements by closely reading the RFP and preparing specific questions. The PI should note carefully the carefully which section of the Sponsor's organization is to be referred to in the proposal as well as the preferred email and telephone contact information (including cell phone) of the POs. "Preliminary" narratives and budgets may also be discussed but should not be shown in writing to sponsor POs. POs are particularly interested in assisting promising researchers (and research) find initial and continuing funding. Impressions make a big difference because POs talk to their counterparts in other Divisions and sponsoring agencies.

It is important to determine if the proposal will be an electronic submission. In the future almost all proposals will be submitted electronically. At this time in the development of electronic submission, each application will be somewhat different varying with the specific requirements of the sponsor. For example, NIH electronic submissions will require an eCommons username and password. The OCG pre-award team and ADR can help obtain your eCommons identifiers. Remember since OCG will actually electronically submit proposals they will need to know the RFP number as soon as possible in order to get the forms ready in time. They will set up a file for the submission. The PI can start working with the ADR and BM on the submission of files that will be transmitted to OCG. These procedures will be changing and the PI in coordination with the OCG should

decide which format to use to process the electronic submission (e.g. PureEdge, pdf, Cayuse). The sooner the PI can get OCG, ADR and BM the basic information of the submittal, the sooner the system can get moving for the PI.

Step 2 - Notification from Faculty PI

Proposals will be submitted by the PI as either as an individual Faculty member or as a member of a research center. Once the proposal intention is sufficiently developed the first step is to create an “under construction” transmittal in the electronic REFS (system (see webpage http://www.research.uh.edu/Online_Forms)). The PI will need a UH email address to log on to the system. The PI should provide the title of the project, the sponsor, the due date of the proposal and the RFP number in order to construct a project on the REFS site. The PI will need an abstract (scope of work) of the project and a budget.

Upon decision for submitting in response to a specific RFP, the Faculty PI will formally notify the ADR, GCSW BM, Dean and the pre-award team in OCG the intent to submit. E-mail copying and a telephone call to the OCG are preferred to ensure the efficient service in the later steps of the submission procedure. The notification should include the following:

- Funding agency
- Key information on the RFP/PA including title, number, mechanism, due date(s) and web link, funding level/limit and number of years of the award.
- mode of application (electronic or hard copy)

In some cases the sponsor may require a limited submission of a “letter of intent” that an application will be submitted. The due date of this letter of intent should also be provided to OCG so they can work with the PI to respond in a timely manner and to continue on with the full submission. Upon receipt of this information from the faculty team, files will be opened by the ADR, BM and OCG on the submission.

Step 3- Initial Formal Meeting

Shortly after the notification has been sent the Faculty PI should initiate interaction with BM (preliminary budget) and ADR (scientific content). The interaction should be in the form of a meeting attended by the Faculty PI, ADR and BM. If submitted through a center, the Center Director can attend this meeting. It is suggested that the meeting take place **two months** before the submission deadline. A competitive proposal can take six months or more to prepare and therefore the initial formal meeting should not be about ideas, but about draft documents. If electronic submission will be applied electronic procedures will also be checked (e.g. registration of PI in NIH eCommons, etc.).

The Faculty PI should have a **Draft Budget** and proposal **Concept/Abstract** ready to be discussed at the meeting. The draft budget should have an Excel spreadsheet version with detailed line items specified. In some submissions module budgets will be required that summarize the line items and these should also be submitted. The fringe calculators should be included in the preliminary budget to ensure accurate budget numbers. The transmittal forms and fringe benefit worksheets are available on the UH Division of Research website.

Protection of Human Subjects procedures and consent/assent procedures will also be discussed. Depending on the Sponsor, it may be required to get human subjects approval before submission. It is suggested that after the meeting contact be made and information exchanged between the GCSW Faculty member currently serving on the UH Committee on Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) and/or the Research Compliance Specialist, ORPCC, the Division of Research administrator of the CPHS.

The budget discussion will determine what IDC rate will be applied to the project. The UH currently charges a fixed rate of 49%, but this may be reduced with approval of the Vice President of Research. This approval is normally given if the Dean also agrees. The distribution of the IDC will be different depending upon whether the proposal is submitted from a Center or from the GCSW. The PI will negotiate directly with the Director of the Center to obtain how the IDC will be distributed. The specific proportion of the IDC that will go for costs made by the GCSW Business Office in administrating the grant will be discussed and determined in this meeting. During the review of budget, the scope of the administrative work will be outlined and agreed upon.

Questions and disputes arising out of the meeting will be referred to the Dean for resolution if consensus is not reached.

Step 4 – Transmittal of Information to OCG

Within one week's time of the initial meeting the Faculty PI will send preliminary proposal budget and abstract to the ADR and BM for review copying the to the OCG team. The OCG will be informed that the budget is only a draft pending final approval by the GCSW administration. If the REFS is used the budget and abstract can be posted in the transmittal's under construction status and reviewed openly by all parties if deemed necessary. For some electronic submissions PureEdge forms will need to be submitted to OCG as well. The website for submitting grants (grants.gov) is presently transitioning from PureEdge files to Adobe Forms files and this transition should be complete in about a year. Partial reviews of grants.gov electronic files are encouraged as the entire file progresses towards completion. At some point, it is important for all parties working with and reviewing to utilize the same file. This can be safely accomplished by naming the file with the current date and time. The OCG pre-award team member will be glad to help the PI with this file name protocol. To reiterate, these electronic forms will be constructed throughout the grant-writing

period and can be transmitted to OCG piece-by-piece and entered into the project file. The ADR and BM will assist the PI in the preparation of the electronic forms for OCG and it is preferred that they review any form before sending to OCG.

The OCG team will acknowledge receipt of the information to the ADR and BM. Within one week, the OCG team will provide concrete and specific informational feedback on the budget and abstract to the faculty PI copying the ADR and BM. A preliminary approval will be part of the feedback and/or specific recommendations for changes that will be necessary for OCG approval. The feedback communication will be copied to the ADR and PM.

Step 5 – Final Meeting

Prior to submission the faculty PI will schedule a 2nd meeting with the ADR and BM for final review and approval by the new UH Division of Research Transmittal System forms printed from the REFS under construction application. The meeting will take place **two weeks before the submission due date**. The “final” budget has the priority in this meeting. All required materials including the UH Division of Research Transmittal System forms and all final fringe benefits calculator worksheets need to be discussed at the meeting. A “good final draft” of the scientific narrative and protection of human subjects as well as other required sections proposal will also be discussed at the meeting. The review of these parts will be the responsibility of the ADR. Faculty PIs are encouraged to work up the draft with all essential sections of the narrative in place in order to obtain critical feedback from the ADR.

Step 6 –Transmittal to OCG for Final Approval

The Faculty PI will be responsible for submission to OCG team. The PI should communicate with the OCG pre-award contact person to check if the application is complete and acceptable for OCG. The support of the BM and ADR will be available to the Faculty PI to ensure a timely approval by OCG. Any problems that OCG detects will be the responsibility of the PI, BM, ADR and Center Director to fix in interaction with the OGC team. The proposal will be returned to the OCG for final approval.

Step 7 – Final Approval through the REFS System

The Faculty PI is encouraged to integrate the budget and scientific feedback from the final meeting within **three days** and enter all edited and final documents into the REFS system. The OCG pre-award contact person should be notified to help monitor the final approval process. This notification can be done by the PI, ADR or the BM. The PI must first approve the transmittal in the REFS system and then it will automatically go to the ADR or Center Director and the Dean electronically

for final approval. Both the ADR and the BM will work with the Faculty PI to ensure a rapid approval by the Dean of the budget and the narrative.

Step 8 – Final Submission of the Application

OCG will be responsible for the final submission electronically or by paper to the funding agency. The ADR will assist the PI if necessary in the finalizing of the application and getting it “out-the-door” in a timely manner. The PI will notify the ADR of a successful submission. The ADR will inform the BM and Dean of the submission.

Afterword

This protocol has been written in the spirit that the transformation of research at UH will be **faculty-driven** and will therefore require a **proactive faculty stance**. Training and technical assistance to faculty will be needed to build the capacity to generate nationally competitive grant applications. The protocol has been written to provide a guide to the PI of the preferred steps for submission of proposals for both contracts and grants in the new UH Division of Research System. Research is becoming increasingly complex as UH transforms itself to reach its Tier 1 goal in the next 5 years. The protocol highlights the new distributed operations of research at UH. This approach is based upon the flexibility of procedures and an operational system of feedback loops. The PI will be better equipped to adapt to the complex and changing research environment by having the OCG pre-award team as a valuable resource instead of a bureaucratic obstacle. The protocol is meant to give the individual Faculty PI a tool to help negotiate the new research environment at UH. It also sends a signal that will encourage Faculty PIs to assume their leadership role and proactive stance. The protocol encourages faculty researchers to move away from the silos of a dated academic research organization into a contemporary operational matrix of research centers, colleges and administrative teams that will power research for the next five years at UH.