

Office of the Vice President for Research

**To:** Deans of CEFNS, CEIAS, SBS, CHHS, CAL, COE, W.A. Franke COB  
**From:** David R. Schultz, Vice President for Research   
**Date:** May 26, 2020  
**Subject:** Proposal Submission Timelines

### Quick Read Summary – How Does this Affect Me?

- Research growth, and our efforts to improve research administrative services, continue at NAU
- The Office of Sponsored Projects remains committed to supporting faculty pursuit of sponsored research opportunities through timely and successful proposal submissions
- This memorandum affirms our requirement that all complete proposal elements arrive to OSP at least 4 business days in advance of the sponsor deadline; and that final edits to the proposal “narrative” (not impacting budget or institutional commitments) can continue up to noon on the day before the sponsor submission deadline

Research, scholarship, creative activity, and public service supported through sponsored projects continue to grow significantly at NAU. For example, for FY 2018, NAU’s expenditures on research (as reported to the National Science Foundation for the annual survey of Higher Education Research and Development) reached approximately \$60M, while total sponsored projects expenditures reached \$79M.

In response to this growth, and to support its continuation, we continue to take steps to bolster professional skills and customer service to help prepare and submit proposals for funding and to administer grants and contracts awarded. In addition, we will be implementing soon a new Research Service Delivery model that emphasizes support for your team, and overall research efforts, stemming from the recent Operational Growth and Effectiveness Initiative.

All these steps have been necessary to improve service and to handle the increased volume of proposals submitted, which has reached about 600 per year, and the number of awards being administered that is approaching 1,000 per year. We expect that growing faculty interest and success in seeking sponsored projects will continue, increasing these numbers further. However, with this volume of submissions and awards, handling proposals to be submitted close to the sponsor deadline has caused difficulties, not only for OSP staff, but most importantly for faculty investigators, external partners, and sponsors.

These difficulties take several forms. To begin with, submission of a proposal transmitted to OSP close to the sponsor deadline is increasingly likely to be unsuccessful owing to sponsor grant systems being unable to cope with the volume of last-minute submissions. That is, last-minute submissions jeopardize the chance of even being able to successfully upload the required documents to sponsor submission websites, which often become slow or unresponsive during the days and hours approaching deadlines.

Also, without sufficient time to check for compliance with sponsor requirements (checking that all required elements of the proposal are in place, that the form and contents of human or animal subjects research managements plans comply with sponsor requirements, and that budgets conform to sponsor requirements, etc.) proposals are increasingly likely to be rejected by the sponsor without review.

Transmission of a proposal to OSP for review and submission to a sponsor without sufficient time also impedes or abrogates checks for fulfillment of NAU requirements such as approval of commitments and budgets by the Colleges and academic or research units, which are also seeking to cope with handling the present and anticipated future increase in submissions volume. Furthermore, submissions near the sponsor deadline actually impede review and submission of other proposals that are received by OSP well before sponsor deadlines, jeopardizing success not only of the last-minute proposal itself but of submission of proposals received by OSP earlier before sponsor deadlines from other faculty members.

To mitigate all these difficulties, the best practices of our peer research universities is to require submission of proposals to the sponsored projects office sufficiently in advance of sponsor deadlines. Imposition of these internal deadlines balances the requirement of sufficient time for university and unit review and approval with the need for faculty members to produce the best proposal possible given their other wide-ranging commitments.

To this end, universities typically require completed proposals be transmitted to the sponsored projects office between 3 and 5 business days before the sponsor's deadline. Past surveys of institutions designated by the Arizona Board of Regents as NAU peers, revealed that 13 of the 15 peers have stated internal deadlines that range from 2 to 10 days before the sponsor's deadline as documented on their sponsored projects websites.

Therefore, today we are affirming our requirement that proposals be completed with the following timeline:

- (1) **At least fourteen days before the sponsor deadline** – The principal investigator must contact OSP regarding the intent to submit a proposal to an identified sponsor and program announcement if applicable. If the proposal will be complex (e.g., multi-institutional) additional time should be allocated at each stage of the proposal preparation and submission process. In cases where NAU is the proposed sub-recipient, additional time may be required depending on the prime recipient's institutional deadlines for transmission of the proposal package to their office of sponsored projects.
- (2) **At least four days before the sponsor deadline** – A complete program package (proposal summary or abstract, project budget, budget justification, project narrative, statement of work, forms required by the sponsor, subcontract forms and budgets if applicable, and commitment letters from external parties) should be transmitted to OSP via Cayuse. Final review of the proposal package will occur during this time window by OSP, other applicable institutional offices such as technology transfer, and the faculty member's unit and College. The technical narrative should be a complete version for format and compliance review; the principal investigator may make only final edits during the review period, and such changes should not impact the budget or institutional commitments; this means final edits of the narrative may continue up to noon on the day before the sponsor submission deadline.
- (3) **Proposal packages received with less than the required four-day lead time** will require an explanation of the extenuating circumstances that resulted in the late proposal to be emailed to the Director of Sponsored Projects who will work closely and promptly with the Assistant Vice President for Sponsored Projects, and me, to review your circumstance. If approved, best efforts will be made to complete the

review and finalize your submission by the sponsor deadline, but late proposals will not receive priority over those complying with the required lead times. Further, if an award is made based on a late submission, the PI and the College will be responsible for covering costs incurred as a result of proposal errors such as unapproved cost sharing commitments, inaccurate rate calculations for indirect costs, or unallowable commitments of resources. Because of all these factors, requests for late submission should be rare.

OSP will continue to adopt best practices that have been established by our peer institutions and to deliver continuous attention to and improvement of a proper balance of customer service and professional sponsored projects administration. We clearly recognize the importance of maintaining a close partnership with faculty members and their Colleges and units in order to provide the service required for success of sponsor project activity and NAU's research enterprise.