

# Reading and Evaluating Solicitations

OSR-Evanston  
Proposal Development Series

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# Solicitation

- Sponsors make known their intentions to award funding in a general or specific area, typically as a result of a competition
- Referred to in a variety of ways
  - Program Announcement (PA)
  - Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)
  - Request for Applications (RFA)
  - Request for Proposals (RFP)
- Contains vital information for successful administration of proposals



## Importance of Solicitation

- Represents the roadmap for the proposal
- Solicitation will (usually) guide you in all aspects of sponsor expectations and guidelines for proposal development
- Tempting to only read applicable sections, but reading through the entire document thoroughly is beneficial
- Use search function to quickly find “buzz words”



# Understanding the Sponsor

- Federal approach
  - Generally friendly to University
  - Department of Defense, Department of Energy
- Industry approach
  - Different mission than the University
  - Tends to view sponsored research as purchase of goods and services
- Foundation/associations/societies approach
  - Generally in-line with mission of the University
  - Increased accountability with emphasis on impact



# Understanding the Scope of Work

- Technical areas of focus
- Solicitation may flag the structure of the technical content
- Understanding the scope of work is relevant in every area of administrative proposal development –
  - Evaluating solicitation requirements
  - Required documents
  - Budget
  - Certifications



## Technical Elements vs. Administrative Elements

- Solicitation review is critical to begin evaluating what items are technical vs. administrative
- Allows the research administrator to clearly identify items what items they can drive, and what items they need to bring to the investigator(s)' attention
- Administrative shell – some items are almost always consistent, others are solicitation-specific



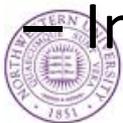
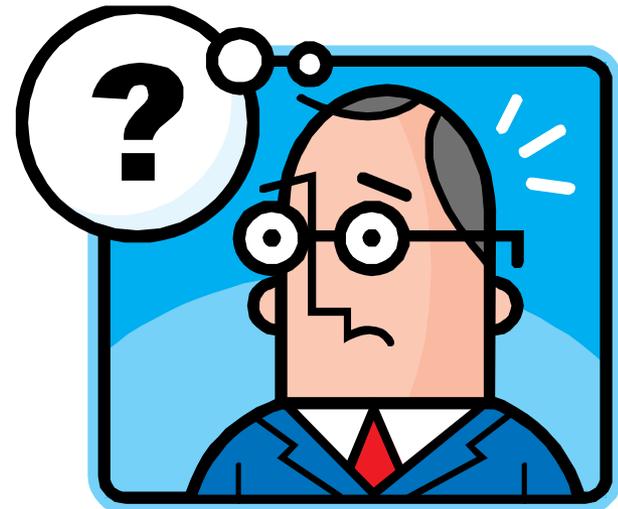
# General Application Structure & Submission Information

- The “how” of the submission process
- Guidance in terms of what system sponsor expects applications through (e.g., Grants.Gov, FastLane)
- Internal - InfoEd (S2S vs. Non S2S)
- Structure of the application package – i.e., what goes where
- Deadline (including hour!)
- Required documents
  - Page limitations
  - Font & margins



# Eligibility

- Eligible entities
  - Individuals
  - Educational institutions, non-profit entities
  - For-profit entities
  - National laboratories
  - Foreign entities
- Ineligible Entities
- Limited Submissions
  - Institution
  - Investigator



# Type of Award Instrument

- Importance of understanding the planned award mechanism
  - Grant
    - Award mechanism associated with financial assistance
    - Hypothesis-driven activity
    - Generally most flexible
  - Cooperative Agreement
    - Similar to grant in many ways
    - Sponsor is significantly involved with scientific or programmatic activities
  - Contract
    - Award mechanism associated with procurement and acquisition
    - Generally least flexible



# Budget

- Project period
- Estimated funding, award ceiling
- Different sponsors have different requirements for structure of cost proposal
- Requirement to include (or exclude) certain line items
- Base and option periods
- Justification of costs
  - F&A rate



# Payment Schedule/Structure

- Sometimes requested at proposal stage
- Cost-Reimbursable (preferred)
  - Best suited for open-ended, hypothesis-driven research
  - Northwestern is paid on the basis of invoices representing financial information (expenditures)
  - Least risky
- Fixed-Price
  - More like commercial transaction
  - Northwestern is paid on the basis of invoices representing technical information (deliverables)
  - 50% up front, 40% upon milestone, remainder when we complete
  - Risk of exceeding budget to provide deliverables (such as re-performance obligations, etc.)



# Cost Sharing

- Mandatory vs. voluntary
- Percentage of
  - Total Sponsor Costs
  - Total Project Costs
- Cost sharing vs. cost matching
- Institutional support



## Conflict of Interest

- Due to the uniform approach of certain sponsors (e.g., PHS), there are certain instances where it's clear that COI disclosures are required at the proposal stage
- In other situations, sponsor may require that COI be addressed
- If language is specifically related to organizational conflict of interest, it may not be appropriate to have proposal pulled into "COI workflow"



## Conflict of Interest

- In unusual situations, an early catch of language allows sufficient time to flag to OSR and NUCOI
- May be situations where a disclosure by the investigator is not sufficient at proposal stage
- Example language:

*At the time of submission, the applicant shall include information identifying potential, apparent, or actual organizational and individual conflicts of interest and proposed mitigation. This shall include the applicant, their team members, and senior/key personnel named in the application. Negative responses are also required.*



# Intellectual Property

- Northwestern is the sole owner of the inventions Northwestern personnel solely create
- Sponsor is the sole owner of the inventions sponsor personnel solely create
- Northwestern and Sponsor are joint owners of the inventions jointly created by Northwestern and Sponsor personnel
- Each party presumed to own its own background IP
- If anything that doesn't represent the above is required by the solicitation, we'll want to understand this *at the proposal stage*



# Export Controls

- US laws and regulations that regulate the distribution of technology, services, and information to foreign nationals and foreign countries for reasons including foreign policy and national security
- Any oral, written, electronic or visual disclosure, shipment, transfer or transmission outside of the United States to anyone, including a U.S. citizen, of any commodity, technology (information, technical data, or assistance) or software/codes
- In solicitations, may see limitations appear as it connects to
  - Publication restrictions
  - Involvement of foreign nationals



## Fundamental Research Exclusion

- It is the policy of Northwestern University that instruction, research, and services will be accomplished openly and will lead to the publication and dissemination of the results of academic and research activities
- Northwestern is not in a position to accept controls on foreign national access to the university research project or its results
- This fundamental research exclusion applies to basic and applied research in science as long as the research is carried out openly and without restrictions on publication or access to or dissemination of the research results
- By not accepting any restriction on publication or foreign nationals, Northwestern protects the fundamental research exclusion



# Certifications

- Depending on sponsor and/or program, additional certifications may be requested
- These are not always clear in the application guidelines/submission sections of solicitations – importance
- Examples can include
  - Conflict of Interest
  - Debarment & Suspension
  - Tax Delinquency



## Animals & Humans

- Research involving animals or human subjects research may require additional documents in the proposal submission
  - E.g., NIH “Protection of Human Subjects” or “Vertebrate Animals” sections
- This may be a flag related to other items in the administrative shell as well
- Scope of work can give an early indication of the involvement of animals and/or humans



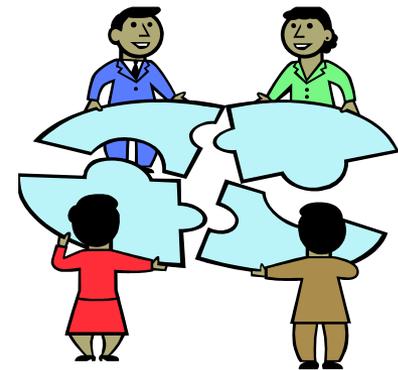
## Engaging Subcontractors

- Working with a third-party organization for their programmatic involvement in a portion of research
- Subrecipient typically performs work at their site using their personnel and resources
- Subrecipient takes full responsibility for their portion of the research, captured in a scope of work
- Important to understand all requirements of the solicitation – typically flow-down of same requirements to sub
  - Specific solicitation requirements regarding subs/teaming or consortium arrangements



## Other Offices

- At proposal stage, Grant Officer may need to engage with contracting team within OSR
- In certain instances, OSR may need to coordinate with other central offices at the proposal stage as well
  - Conflict of Interest (COI)
  - Innovation and New Ventures Office (INVO)
  - Risk Management
  - Office of General Counsel (OGC)



## When to Get OSR Involved

- ***As soon as you know that you'll be submitting a proposal!***
- Contradictory language in the solicitation
- Eligibility issues/considerations
- Questions regarding what Northwestern can – and cannot – accept
- Any potential issues that have been identified
- The earlier a flag for issues is made, the more likely it is that we will be able to work to resolve the situation
  - Keep in mind that problematic language in a solicitation will not necessarily stop a proposal from moving forward entirely



## Summary

- Solicitation is your roadmap to preparing the proposal
- Understanding the approach and mission of the sponsor as well as the scope of work is important when seeking funding and evaluating elements of the solicitation
- Crucial to evaluate solicitation as a whole
- Importance of searching for buzz words and flagging potential issues
- Command of the solicitation enables a research administrator to be
  - More informed
  - More effective
  - Better resource for faculty, subrecipients, and other administrators



# Proposal Development Series

- Focused on the pre-award process for research administrators
- Covers topics relevant to successful proposal development and submission from the administrative point of view
- Introduction to Sponsors & Award Mechanisms (7/18)
  - Reading and Evaluating Solicitations (8/18)
  - **Anatomy of the Administrative Shell (8/25)**
    - **Developing Budgets (9/12)**
    - **Effective Communication (9/30)**



# Questions?

Thank you!



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