Grant Development Guidelines

College of DuPage Grants Office

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Welcome

Welcome to the College of DuPage grant development process!

Taking an idea for a program or project and turning it into reality through the development of a competitive grant proposal is an exciting but daunting process, requiring commitment and hard work from everyone on the project team.

To help the process be successful, certain steps should be followed to ensure that the project is fully supported by the administration and that COD would be capable of fulfilling its obligations should the proposal be funded.

The Grant Development Guidelines will assist you as you begin to consider the development of a grant proposal. Read carefully and if you have questions at any point along the process, please contact the Grants Office right away.

The Grants Office must be involved in the project development process, but we are here, first and foremost, to help you succeed!

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Idea Stage

Finding a great program idea

New ideas for improved academic and professional programming are everywhere – based on perceived and documented departmental needs, student and faculty feedback, recent research on teaching and learning, and of course, COD’s institutional priorities.

Often the process works in reverse, though. Funding opportunities are released and programs are developed in response to the funders’ priorities. Ideally the process becomes a blending of current needs and wants on the part of the college, meshed with the priorities of a funding opportunity.

Because funding opportunities often have a quick turnaround time, it is a good idea to always be thinking about the ways in which external funding could assist in making program or project advancement a reality.

Developing an idea into a viable program

Program ideas may take the form of numerous small activities, or services to provide, but without a strong focus and an ultimate outcome in mind, these separate ideas will not make a strong proposal.

The Grants Office can help faculty, staff, or administrators define the outcomes they seek for students and the department or division, establish viable program goals, and weave smaller activities and services into a program format as either measurable objectives or activities related to the goals and objectives. Developing a structure for the program helps turn ideas into something that could be funded by an outside agency.

Please contact the Grants Office to meet and talk through possible structures for the program ideas. Once the ideas begin to take shape, it is time to begin a proposal.

Finding a funding source

The Grants Office searches daily for new funding opportunities across all government agencies and through several databases of private funding sources. A newsletter is released twice a month that summarizes new opportunities. In
addition to the newsletter, if an opportunity becomes available that seems a particular fit or like something that would be of special interest to a particular administrator, staff or faculty member, the information will be sent in a separate email directly to that person.

Professional organizations or associations, area corporations, and other small funding agencies may make their opportunities known directly to their members or to the college through other avenues. If a funding opportunity seems viable, please call the Grants Office right away to set up a meeting to explore the opportunity further.

**Time is of the essence when preparing a proposal.** The sooner the Grants Office is involved, and the project team put together, the more time everyone has to develop a strong and competitive proposal.

This list of external funding databases can help you begin your search for project support:  http://www.cod.edu/grants

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*Details to consider before developing the idea into a proposal*

External funding can enhance programs and provide resources not available in the college’s operating budget. However, it is important to consider:

Does the program or project compatible with the goals and objectives of COD?

Does the program or project align with the goals and objectives of the COD Department/Division?

How will the project impact COD faculty, staff, facilities and budget?

It is important to consider the fiscal and personnel costs of running the project if it is funded. While assistance can be built into the grant budget, it is the Project Director (most often the faculty member, staff, or administrator who initiates the project) who will be responsible for data collection and meeting all reporting requirements, in addition to the day-to-day operation of the program.

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*Moving from the idea to the development stage*

Once personnel have thought through possible program ideas, considered one or more ways they may be structured or prioritized, and possibly found a funding source, it is time to begin proposal development.
If it hasn’t already been done, contact the Grants Office and set up a preliminary meeting. Complete a Project Development Form and Possible Budget Items Form to flesh out any ideas that should be included and bring these to the initial meeting. Don’t worry if all the pieces aren’t there, but think through as much as possible.

Make sure that the corresponding administrators are aware of the intent to request external funding, that the program does meet a departmental or division need, and that it is in line with institutional priorities.
Project Development Form

Ask yourself these questions as you develop your project or program idea:

What is the problem I would like to address? Is there data to support this need?

Ideally, what will the project or program accomplish? What are the anticipated outcomes?

Who among the COD community (students, faculty, staff, administrators, businesses, or community members) will be served by the project or program?

What are some activities that I envision happening as a part of this project or program? What are people doing differently?

What kind of data could I collect to show the results of the project or program?

Have you discussed this idea with your Dean, Associate Dean, or other immediate supervisor?
Possible Budget Items Form

*Ask yourself these questions as you think about what you’d like the grant funds to purchase:*

Will anyone need to be hired to run this project or program?

Will you need to purchase additional equipment of any kind?

What types of contractual services will the project or program need from the grant?

Anything else you will need to be successful?

If the grant requires in-kind contributions, or matching funds, what is available at the departmental level? Where will it come from?
Development Stage

Initial project meetings

The Project Director (faculty, staff, or administrator who initiates or will be taking responsibility for the project) should read the RFP carefully before the initial meeting with the Director of Grants. The first meeting should also include anyone else whose expertise will contribute to the planning of a viable and competitive program.

Typically, the Director of Grants will listen to the needs and wants expressed by the Project Director and other stakeholders, and put together a preliminary work plan that categorizes all the ideas into goals, objectives, related activities, a possible timeframe, responsible personnel, and possible evaluative data to be collected.

It is the responsibility of everyone involved to read over the work plan carefully and to either agree that this is what the team wants to propose or to suggest changes or revisions to the group. Once the work plan is approved by everyone, it will be used as the basis for the budget and the proposal narrative.

Initial project approvals

The administrator in charge of the department or division (or institution if the proposal is on that level) must approve of the proposal development and planned submission before the proposal is developed.

All grants submitted on behalf of COD, its faculty, staff, or administration must be submitted through the Grants Office. No grants should be submitted by individuals or departments without the approval and involvement of the Grants Office.

Working with the Grant Accountants

Immediately after the initial meeting, the Grants Office will contact the Grant Accountants and one will be assigned to the project. From this point forward, the Grant Accountant will be included in every meeting and will have equal approval of all pieces of the proposal. Budgets are to be developed based on the work plan and in close collaboration with the accountant. At no time should the Project
Director or anyone else on the project team release a budget to anyone inside or outside the institution without the approval of the Grant Accountant.

Once the budget is finalized, the Grant Accountant is responsible for having it approved by the Finance Office. The Grant Accountant also takes responsibility for completing the federal (or other) budget forms and budget narrative prior to its submission. Once the budget and budget narrative are approved by the Finance Office, no changes will be made.

The budget serves as a foundation for a binding contract if the grant proposal is approved. Therefore, the approved budget (along with the rest of the proposal) is sent to the President’s Office for signature before submission.

Drafting the proposal

The preliminary draft of the proposal will be written by the Director of Grants, Grant Writer, Project Director, or a combination of these people, depending on the content expertise needed and the timeframe for completion. The initial draft will then be reviewed by everyone on the project team, including the Grant Accountant, to determine whether the content is meeting the guidelines specified in the RFP and that everything mentioned and agreed upon in the proposal is represented in the budget.

It is the responsibility of everyone on the project team to carefully review a preliminary draft and to raise questions or make suggestions for improvements. Without this input, it is probable that the proposed program will not be exactly what the team wants and the team could be required to perform tasks for which they are not prepared or in which they are not interested. Feedback on the preliminary proposal may be requested electronically, or especially in the case of very large or complicated proposals, may be discussed in another face-to-face meeting.

Revising the proposal

Once all feedback is collected, a second draft will be written by the Director of Grants, again for the approval of the team. When the content is approved, one final edit will take place and the proposal will be sent to the team for a final read-through. At this point, it is expected that changes will be minor and that no major adjustments to the program will be needed. Again, the Grant Accountant will work
with the Director of Grants to ensure that everything mentioned in the proposal is represented in the budget and budget narrative.

Finalizing the proposal and budget

While the narrative is being completed, the Grants Office will work with the team to compile any additional attachments, such as an abstract, letters of support, or other requested materials. The Director of Grants and Grants Coordinator will assemble the proposal, save it in its final form as a PDF file, and send it the entire project team for one last look. It is the responsibility of everyone on the team to review the proposal one last time before submission.

Submission Stage

Submission process

Grants are submitted most frequently through electronic portals such as grants.gov. The Grants Office strives to submit all proposals at least two days before the due date in case there are issues with the electronic submissions, which can and do occur, or in case there are multiple grants due at the same time.

Please do not consider the due date in the RFP as the internal deadline by which all materials are needed or even as the date when the grant proposal will be submitted. The Grants Office utilizes a special software system to issue reminders to the project team when information is needed, and will adhere to its internal deadlines unless the project team is notified otherwise.

What happens if the project is declined

Grant competitions are highly competitive and often, even with a quality proposal, a project will be declined. When notification is received that the funding request has been denied, the Grants Office will inform the team. At the same time, the Grants Office will contact the funding agency and request reviewers’ comments. Once comments are received, a decision will be made about whether or not the
proposal is a good candidate for revision and resubmission, or if the idea should be presented in a completely different way or to a different funder for consideration.

What happens if the project is funded

When notification is received that the funding request has been approved, the Grants Office will inform the team and everyone can take a moment to celebrate! Once the fully executed contract is received in the Grants Office, the Director of Grants will announce the award to the greater COD community. Shortly after, the Director of Grants, Grants Coordinator, and Grant Accountant will meet with the Project Director and other project personnel to clarify the requirements of the program and the agreed upon scope of work, as well as the appropriate processes for expenditure of grant funds. Depending on the complexity of the project and the needs of the Project Director and other project personnel, the Director of Grants will determine the frequency of meetings for this team to determine progress toward grant objectives, solve any problems that arise, and ensure that all reporting requirements are being met.
College of DuPage Grants Process

IDEA

When faculty, staff, or administrators have an idea for a program requiring external funding, the Grants Office will assist to further develop the idea and to find a funding source.

OR

The Grants Office identifies a funding source and approaches the appropriate administrator to determine interest and possible program/project ideas.

In both cases, approval by the appropriate Dean or Administrator must occur before continuing with the proposal.

DEVELOP

At the initial meeting, program ideas are developed, grant requirements are outlined, and deadlines are established. Determination is made as to who will write the proposal (Grants Office, Project Director, or a combination of people).

A Grant Accountant joins the project team to provide the budget based on the activities of the program or project. The team and the Finance Office will provide approval of the final budget.

As the proposal is developed, it will be edited and reviewed as needed until consensus is reached that it is ready for submission.

SUBMIT

The final proposal is compiled, approved by the President, and submitted to the funding agency by the Grants Office.

The Grants Office will follow up with funders if necessary or announce the outcome to the proposal team. If funded, a formal announcement is made to the campus community once the contract is received.

If declined, the Grants Office will request the reviewer’s comments. The team will then decide if the proposal should be revised and resubmitted for funding.
Glossary of Terms

**Compliance** – Following the requirements of the grant contract once it is awarded. All grant projects at COD are expected to be in full compliance at all times. Any deviation from the grant contract must first be discussed with the Grants Office and approved by the funding agency, who will be contacted by the Grants Office prior to any change in action taken by the project team.

**Contract** – A legal document specifying the scope of work, budget, and timeframe for the grant project. When a grant is funded, a contract is issued and COD is bound by the terms of that contract.

**Cost Sharing** – Financial contribution by the grantee. For a grant proposal at COD, it is imperative that approval is received to provide cost sharing before the grant is developed or submitted.

**Data Collection** – The ongoing collection of documentation that will be used to determine whether and the extent to which project objectives have been met. When a grant is funded, data collection should be ongoing and will be used to meet reporting requirements established by the funding agency.

**Direct Costs** – Expenses which can be itemized and for which payment will be made through the grant, often including salaries and wages, fringe benefits, supplies, travel, communication, equipment, computers, rentals, printing, copies, etc. As a grant is developed, the project team will work closely with the Grant Accountant to determine appropriate and allowable direct costs.

**Evaluation** – A formative and summative look at project data to determine whether and the extent to which project objectives have been met. Formative data is used to inform subsequent programming decisions, and summative data is used as a definitive snapshot of performance for reporting to the funding agency or to the college.

**In-Kind Contribution** – A service or item donated in lieu of cash to the operation of a funded project. As a proposal is developed, the project team will work with the Grant Accountants to determine allowable in-kind contributions and their value for inclusion in the proposal.

**Indirect Costs** – The expenses indirectly associated with the funded project, including administrative expenses, utilities, maintenance, library facilities, etc., usually expressed as a percentage of the total costs. Allowable indirect costs are
often prescribed in the guidelines and will be ultimately determined by the Grant Accountant.

**Letter of Intent/Inquiry (LOI)** – A brief letter containing a description of a proposed project, an estimated budget, and information on the applicant, typically used to screen out ineligible or inappropriate projects before the full proposal is developed. Letters of Intent will be developed and submitted by the Grants Office in collaboration with the project team.

**Priorities** – Annual program plans developed by funding sources that include objectives and areas of emphasis. Priorities may be “absolute”, meaning if the project does not include these elements in a significant way, it will not be considered; or “competitive”, meaning that extra points will be awarded to those proposals that include these elements in a significant way. The Grants Office will work with project teams to ensure that proposals with specified priorities have the required elements to be most competitive.

**Restricted Funds** – Funds for operation that are restricted for use by the grant, contract or agreement to a specified purpose or timeframe. The Grant Accountant will determine whether activities proposed for restricted funds meet the criteria, and no funds will be expended without approval from the Grant Accountant.

**RFP/RFA** – Request for Proposals or Request for Applications. RFPs are released regularly and the Grants Office will ensure that each division is made aware when relevant funding opportunities become available.

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**Remember…**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Required Offices</strong></th>
<th><strong>Required Personnel</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department/Division (Approval)</td>
<td>Director of Grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants Office</td>
<td>Grant Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance Office</td>
<td>Grants Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>President’s Office</td>
<td>Project Director</td>
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