

Collaborative Grant-writing

Advice and guidance on
fundraising with
non-university partners

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About this resource

The **goal** of these slides is to help university folks (faculty, researchers, others) with the process of writing grant proposals in collaboration with non-university partners.

The **starting assumption** is that you have already established a trusting relationship with your partner(s), and identified shared goals/interests.

(The topic of how to build such relationships is for another time...)

Many stages of a partnership

Developing Partnerships

Exploring shared interests, mutual benefit, and collaborative opportunities.

Collaborative grant-writing

Applying to for funds that support the work of your partnership.

Finding Funding Opportunities

The search for funders, calls for proposals, etc.

Community-engaged work

Working together on projects!

Each of these stages demands time, effort, and skill, and you can find resources to support that process.

Why should we do this kind of work?

- Many funders are opening up to, getting more sophisticated about, and even requiring collaborative research with non-academic partners.
- Doing this work is exciting, is worthwhile, improves and hastens the impact of the university on the world, creates unique opportunities for students, and is part of the broad systemic change that we need in academia.

Our background



UCDAVIS

**Center for Community
and Citizen Science**

At the School of Education

Information here is based on experience at the [UC Davis Center for Community and Citizen Science](#). For more than eight years, we have engaged in collaborative projects with partners such as community-based non-profit organizations, schools, and museums – all of varying size, and varying familiarity with universities, and with academic research projects.

We are focused here on federal grants, though many of these ideas apply to other kinds of funding as well.

Topics covered

1. The **process** of collaborative grant-writing.
2. Partnership **structure**.
3. How you can **support partners** during the process.



1. PROCESS



So you've ID'ed a relevant funding opportunity to pursue with your partner..

GREAT

Collaborative grant-writing is exciting because...

It's a chance to crystallize the enthusiasm embedded in your partnership.

The writing process can deepen your partnership.

Collaborative grant-writing can be challenging because of...

Inevitable compromise.

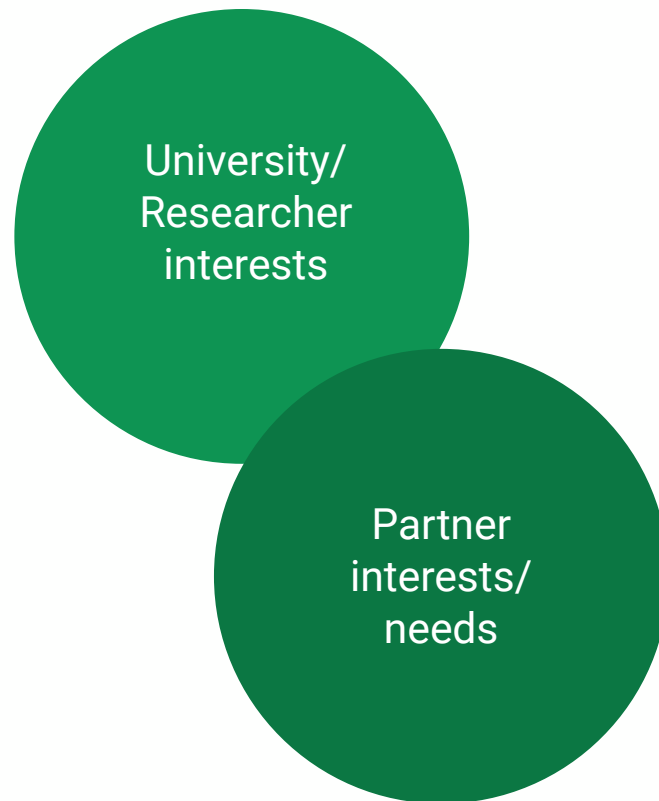
Difficult conversations about budgets, capacity, needs, expectations, etc.

Institutional differences and requirements will emerge.

A grant = new opportunity, but also new parameters

A committed partnership
hopefully means:

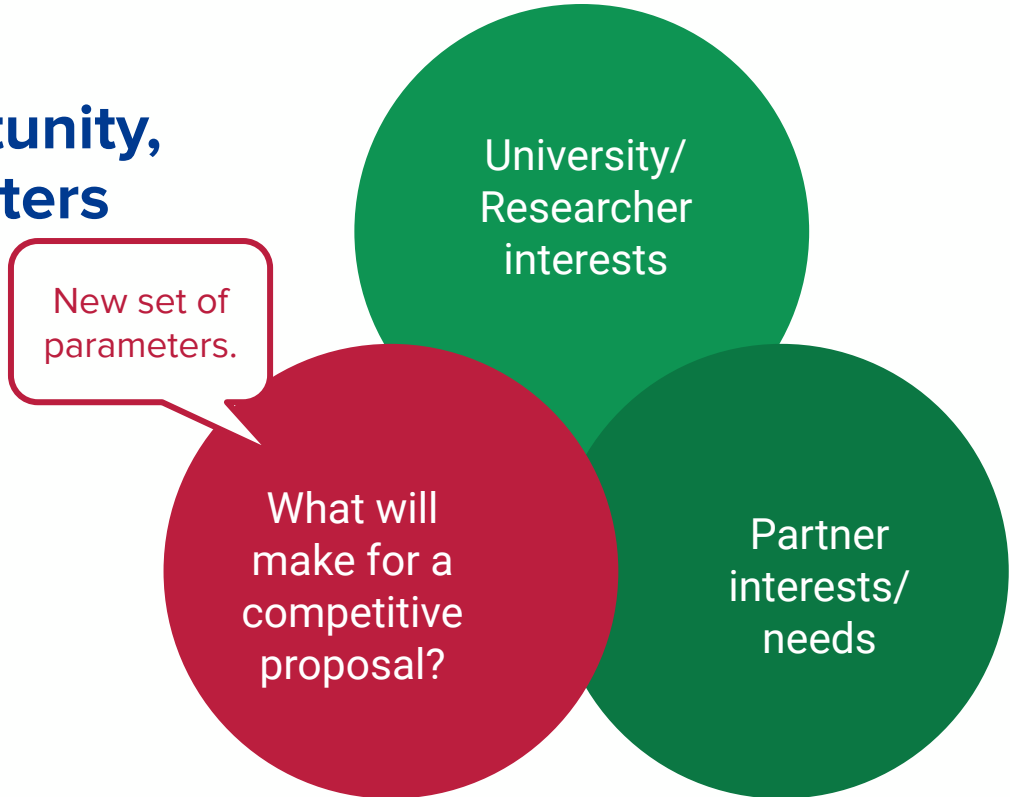
- An already established mutual understanding.
- Patience and discernment: ability to recognize when an opportunity is **not** quite right.
- Flexibility and support of each other in the fundraising process.



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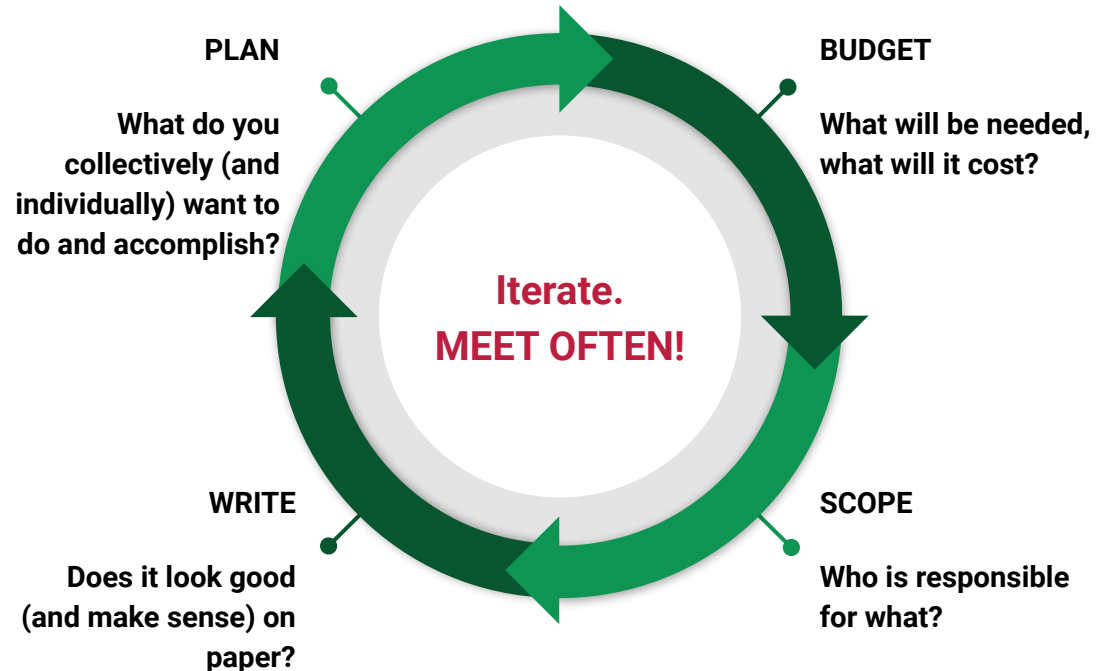


Collaborative grant-writing takes extra time, and is nonlinear

Each of these four items relies on the others.

Meet regularly to address these items. In these meetings check for:

- Mutual understanding.
- Hidden assumptions.



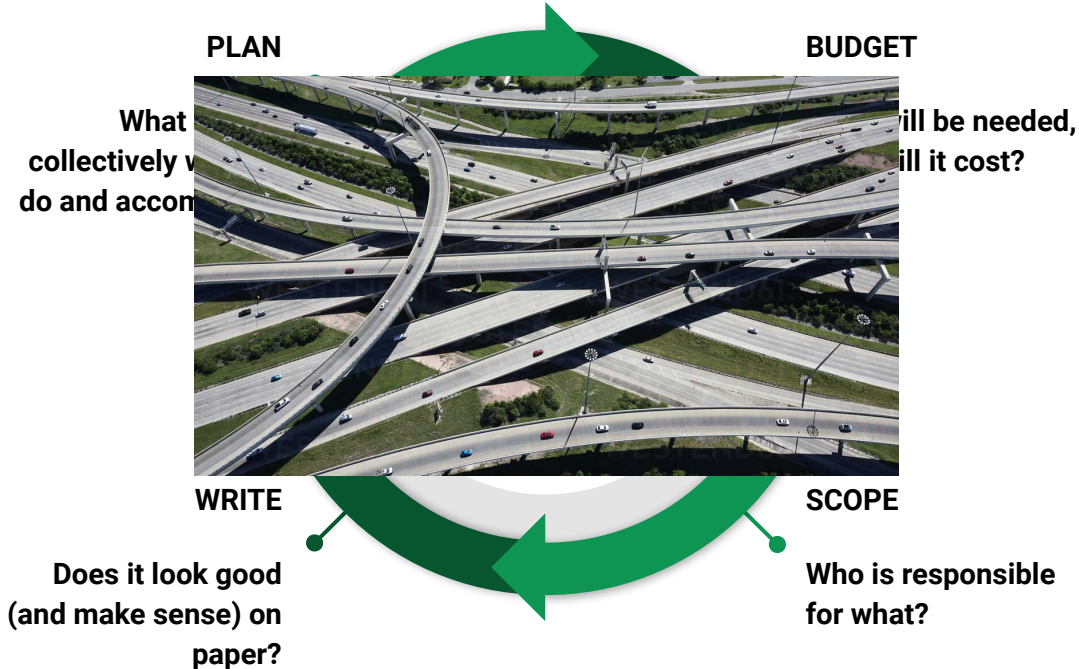
Process

Each of these items relies on the others.

Plan to meet regularly to address these items. In these meetings check for:

- Mutual understanding.
- Hidden assumptions.

In reality, it will not be a clean, clear cycle of activity – it will be complicated! Plan to make lots of space.



Tips for making space

- Don't just meet when there's an urgent need – meet regularly, and make extra time for discussion in those meetings.
- Use shared notes, and shared files, that everyone can access.
- Sometimes a quick informal phone call check-in can move things along efficiently.

Some prompts to use in partner meetings...

“What are you most excited to learn about through this project?”

“What opportunities would this grant bring to your organization, beyond the specific outputs?”

“What are some good ways to crystallize and communicate that learning for your organization, and constituents?”

Some prompts to use in partner meetings...

“So, what do you think it will look like to actually do [project element], day to day, or week to week?”

“Which parts of this scope are exciting to you, and which are feeling irrelevant or burdensome?”

“What uncertainties about our proposed project are you most worried about?”

“What budget realities in your organization are important for me to know about, as we plan this?”

Some prompts to use in partner meetings...

“If [project element] ends up being too expensive for the grant limits, what could/should we let go of?”

“Do you have any questions for me about our budget, or our scope, on the university side?”

“How is the balance of academic research and other programming feeling to you?”

Budget conversations

Possibly the most awkward part of the process.

- Budgets should match the scope of work for each partner.
- **HOWEVER**, perhaps the scope can be tailored to bring about a more equitable/appropriate balance in the budget.



Budget conversations

Fairness/equity in budgeting can mean different things:

- Similar benefits in terms of capacity building?
- Sharing of administrative burden?
- Split down the middle?
- Split *direct costs* down the middle?

What is fair? Reasonable? Possible?

There is no single right answer here. The key is transparency, and mutual understanding.

Budget conversations

Important things to discuss early on:

- Understanding of indirect cost policies on all sides (does your partner understand how the university takes “overhead” costs from the budget? Do you understand your partner’s approach?).
- How does compensation work in each organization?
- How does project management work in each organization?
- Implications of different budget mechanisms (e.g., subaward vs contract – see below)

2. PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

What you're balancing in this decision

Optics and positioning:

- What will look good to the funder, and other key audiences?
- Who should be positioned as (co)leading this work? (individuals and organizations)

Capacity: What is your partner “up for” in terms of organizational responsibilities and administrative burden?

Policies/procedures: What will work for the funder, for the university, and the partner?

Your partner's relationship to you, and to the university...

Partner Role	(potential) Pros	(potential) Cons
Contractor	<p>Less paperwork Familiar mechanism, less admin</p>	<p>Equity: Partner considered a “vendor,” and potentially less involved in leadership of the project Money: University takes more indirects Flexibility: If things change, can the contract be adjusted?</p>
Subawardee	<p>Equity: partner can serve as co-PI, and appear more legitimate in eyes of funder. Competitiveness: Many funders are starting to look for strong university-community partnerships</p>	<p>Policy requirements. Partner takes greater responsibility, in the eyes of the university. Increased paperwork burden.</p>
Collaborative Grant (Same proposal, separate budgets)	<p>Equity: partner serves as PI on own grant – increased legitimacy, visibility. Independence: Partner is not directly accountable to the University.</p>	<p>Decreased flexibility: limited ability to shift funds between partners. Administrative burden: Partner may have to develop new policies, capacities to take on federal grant.</p>

Your partner's relationship to you, and to the university...

	(potential) Pros	(potential) Cons
Lead (university subawardee)	Positioning: partner as the leader for key audiences, with university in a supporting role.	Administrative burden: Partner may have to develop new policies, capacities to take on federal grant.
Lead (university contractor)	Positioning: University – on paper – is serving the partner, and their community(ies)	Administrative burden: Partner may have to develop new policies, capacities to take on federal grant.

For these last two, your partner would transfer funds to you, through a contract or sub-award (as opposed to the other way around)

Example: Budget Implications of Contract vs Subaward

Contractor arrangement is MUCH more expensive.

In both arrangements, the partner will also be taking some measure of indirects.

UCD Office of Research guidance on when to use a subaward:
<https://research.ucdavis.edu/proposals-grants-contracts/spo/subawards/>

(NOTE: Some aspects of this guidance are antithetical to community-engaged research)

Award ceiling	\$2,000,000		
Subawardee Arrangement		Contractor Arrangement	
UC Davis Budget	\$760,000	UC Davis Budget	\$620,000
Partner Budget	\$760,000	Partner Budget	\$620,000
Indirects	\$478,850	Indirects	\$756,400
Total	\$1,998,850	Total	\$1,996,400
Assuming a roughly equal split of direct costs.			

Based on the assumption of a federal grant, with indirect cost rates of roughly 61% (per [UC Davis policy for "Organized Research"](#))

3. SUPPORTING PARTNERS

How you (and the university) can support partners during the process of grant-writing.

Important issues to deal with up front

Shared expectations about responsibilities for **writing** the grant proposal itself. Will the partner:

- Advise, discuss and review?
- Actively co-write?
- Require final approval of all text?

Think about skills, knowledges, capacities, and appropriate expectations.

Important issues to deal with up front

Provide as much clarity/guidance as possible about **other requirements** outside of the writing, e.g.:

- Budget and budget narrative
- Personnel documents
- University-required forms (see next slide)

Example: Subawardee checklist

This [Google Doc](#) can be adapted and shared with your partner to walk them through all of the required documents and steps for serving as a **subawardee*** on an NSF grant.

*If your partner will be a contractor, the process and paperwork will be different.

Checklist of grant documents needed from _____, with notes about each one

This document was created by the UC Davis Center for Community and Citizen Science as a template/guide for non-university partners that will serve as subawardees on NSF (or other federal) grants. Feel free to copy and modify as needed and share with your partners as part of your grant-writing process. Make sure to check that links are up to date.

All of these are due by _____ unless otherwise noted.

Working folder for these documents is here.

NSF ID – Due as soon as we have decided on who will serve as Senior Personnel

- Any senior personnel should go to [research.gov](#) and create an account (if you don't already have one) by clicking "register"
- Once registered – send [PI] a note including your NSF ID

subrecipient commitment form

- Form provided by UCD for internal use at the university (not submitted to NSF). You can download a fillable PDF [here](#).

Budget

- [PI] created a [budget worksheet here](#), but feel free to use whatever form that works best for IGP.
- Make sure the bottom line total reflects all costs, including any indirect costs.

budget justification

- High-level summary/explanation of each cost.
- We can provide an example/template if needed.

statement of work

- [PI] started a draft [here](#).

letter of commitment

- For internal us by the university (not submitted to NSF).
- On institutional letterhead, addressed to UC Davis Sponsored Programs Office, and signed by authorized official of [\[subawardee\]](#)

Personnel Documents for any senior personnel– due by _____

Where can YOU find support?

Office of Research can advise, but typically has university interests in mind, and may hesitate to advise your partner.

New UC Davis policies (as of 2024) are making it harder to position partners appropriately as co-equal leaders in a collaborative process (i.e., restrictions on subawards).

Find colleagues who have tried doing this in different ways, and may have insights/resources.

Encourage your unit to develop expertise within administrative functions, such as contracts and grants analysts.

Closing thoughts...

There are many forces pushing against authentic equitable research partnerships with non-university partners; they are on full display during the grant-writing process.

- University policies that demote partners who aren't "real researchers..
- Increased process and time for PIs getting grants submitted.
- Lack of experience and proactive support from university personnel who deal with grant-writing support.
- Decreased budget and capacity for traditional academic output.

To reiterate

This is worth it! You are not alone!

- Many funders are opening up to, getting more sophisticated about, and even requiring collaborative research with non-academic partners.
- Doing this work is exciting, is worthwhile, improves and hastens the impact of the university on the world, creates unique opportunities for students, and is part of the broad systemic change that we need in academia.