**Steps for Strong Application**

NAU’s Corporate and Foundation Relations (CFR) is pleased to provide some helpful resources on this page that provides basic information to help you search for private funding and develop a compelling proposal that meets the exact specifications of the proposal guidelines. Faculty interested in submitting a grant proposal should also contact the office of Corporate and Foundation relations for opportunities to leverage existing relationships the office currently maintains.

Please contact the Office of Corporate and Foundation Relations at [CFRelations@nau.edu](mailto:CFRelations@nau.edu) or 602-2998-4099.

**Build a Strong Case**

You will need to address a few foundational questions to position your project before beginning your research of potential funders. The answers to these questions will frame your proposal narrative and help you to find the right funding fit.

* Why is there a need for your project?
* How will your response to this need be effective?
* Who will your project impact?
* Is there regional, national, or international significance for this project?
* Are there others addressing this need? If so, how does your contribution add to existing efforts?
* What will your project cost?
* What is the project timeline?
* Does your project include institutional partners or fellow investigators? What is their role, and why are they indispensable to the project?
* How are you and your team well-qualified to manage this effort?

The CFR team can provide additional resources and offer assistance with finding funding prospects and developing your proposal. Please contact the Office of Corporate and Foundation Relations at [CFRelations@nau.edu](mailto:CFRelations@nau.edu) or 602-2998-4099.to discuss your project.

**Find the Right Funder**

After developing your basic project concept, you can begin your funding search.

Take note that there are many types of private funding streams--both foundation and corporate--with very specific guidelines.

Parameters to check include:

* The funder’s goals for their initiative
* The demographic and geographic foci of the initiative
* If there is a pre-proposal step (or steps) to complete before submitting a full proposal
* The grant range and total available funding for the funder’s initiative

If you don’t find a Request for Proposals (RFP) or a foundation with a rolling submission policy that matches your project, you may be able to modify your scope and approach slightly to fit foundation guidelines.

The top reason grant proposals are rejected is because the project does not meet the criteria and format described in the RFP.

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**Submit a Strong Proposal**Private foundations vary widely in their scope, focus, and size, so it’s wise to tailor your grant proposal exactly to a foundation’s specific priorities and proposal requirements. While some foundations prefer to work with project leaders to craft their grant request to be very specific to funding criteria, others are more flexible. The Corporate and Foundation Relations team is quite familiar with the nuances of foundations nationwide and can advise faculty throughout the proposal process, but we’ve listed some considerations for putting your best foot forward.

**Connect with program staff:**

Do your homework and know who you need to speak to in advance of submitting your proposal. When a foundation permits, it’s helpful to connect with a program officer or foundation staff member to talk about your program and how it fits the foundation’s initiative. The CFR team can help to connect you with foundation staff in the event that it makes strategic sense to do so. In some cases, it may also be advantageous for university leadership to meet with foundation executives. You can discuss this with the CFR team during the proposal development process.

**Demonstrate an intersection of priorities:**

The strongest grant proposals show how a project meets your and NAU’s priorities while also speaking to foundation priorities. Understand what the foundation is trying to achieve with their RFP or broader initiative. While your project shouldn’t stray from your original intent or goals, it should also speak to the foundation’s goals. The more information you can gather about foundation priorities and criteria for selection on an RFP, the stronger your proposal is likely to be.

**Know your project's impact:**

With a limited amount of funding to award each year, foundations look to fund proposals that will have a marked impact on their target group and within their predetermined geographical scope, whether focused on a small region or worldwide. Know your impact story: Will your project serve a lot of people or introduce a breakthrough development with global implications? Perhaps you are focused on introducing a scalable model.

For instance, if you are launching a program to introduce interdisciplinary learning modules into first-year biology courses, your proposal should outline the number of students who will benefit from this curriculum, how the curriculum will have a broader departmental and university impact, and how (if applicable) it may have an impact on first-year biology education beyond NAU. It is most important to know the specific impact the foundation had in mind when introducing the funding program and announcing the RFP. A small quantitative impact isn’t necessarily a negative mark on your proposal as long as you can demonstrate why your impact matters.

**Know your project's context and broader purpose:**

Why is your project’s impact important right now? What larger issue does it help solve or what development might it advance? For broader and less specific RFPs, these questions will be important to answer. For very direct RFPs, particularly for scientific or medical research, you may not need to speak to purpose at length as it should be apparent to the technical reviewers of your proposal.

You also should have an idea for local, regional, and national context for your program. Are you the only one doing this particular kind of project, research, or program? How does your project add to the body of work? How is it different? What is the impact of this work? Your proposal should demonstrate your understanding of context for your project and where it fits in.

**Understand project budget needs and restrictions:**

Be sure you know what budget items a foundation is willing to fund, their grant range, and the general items they want to see in your budget.

Know if you must provide cost-share. For instance, some foundations like to see that you have additional financial support for the project, whether from your department or other external funders.

Many foundations do not fund indirect costs, or typically only 10-15 percent of a project budget, so you should talk with CFR staff about whether a particular foundation funds these costs and what rate if this information is not clear in the foundation’s proposal and budget guidelines.

Some foundations require a specific budget format, while others accept a simple Excel document. Be mindful of the format required for your project budget.

Staff in your school's research office will be an important resource as you develop and finalize your grant budget materials.

**Demonstrate institutional buy-in:**

Your proposal may need to demonstrate that you have support from academic and administrative leaders within your school, and for more substantial requests, support may be required at the provost or presidential level. The CFR office can help with securing and demonstrating leadership endorsement for your proposal. Explaining how your project or program ties into overall NAU and school goals will strengthen your proposal and help you to take advantage of NAU’s brand recognition. Whether endorsement of your proposal takes the form of cost-share or another kind of commitment, foundations frequently look for buy-in from partners and leadership. If you have sub-grantees, they may need to demonstrate how their part of the project has buy-in from organization leadership.

**Plan your project's lifespan:**

Are you proposing a finite project or a program that will need to grow or be sustained over time? Many foundations will not continue to fund the same program in perpetuity. Foundations often provide bridge funding--that is, seed funding to either launch a program or move it to its next phase. Your proposal should explain clearly why your project will benefit from the amount of funding you are requesting at this time, and what necessary gap that funding will fill in your program or project. For some proposals, you will need to explain how you plan to sustain the program once the foundation’s grant funds are spent.

**Emphasize team credibility:**

Why are you qualified to take on the work you are proposing? If you have a team of project leaders, why are they a part of the project? Many foundations will require CVs to be submitted for all project leaders, but there are also opportunities within the proposal narrative to explain how your prior work or research positions your project for success.

**Leverage NAU's brand and mission:**

You will be submitting a grant proposal as a principal investigator of Northern Arizona University. The applicant and recipient of funding will be NAU, which means it is to your advantage to leverage NAU’s strengths and brand recognition in your proposal. In positioning your project and team for credibility, you may want to include information about the university and its priorities and mission. For instance, a faculty member with a lab in the Science and Engineering Hall may choose to include information on this state-of-the-art facility and the opportunities it provides for cross-disciplinary collaboration, while also demonstrating NAU’s commitment to science, technology, and engineering.