

VANDERBILT DIVINITY SCHOOL

Pre-Award Submission Policy

PURPOSE

As part of its commitment to maximizing support for research, the Vanderbilt Divinity School has adopted a Pre-Award (Proposal) Preparation & Submission Policy for applications to external sponsors.*

GUIDELINES

SCOPE

For the purpose of this policy, the School asks that the Principal Investigator (PI) submit a “notice of intent to submit” to the Office of the Dean no later than six (6) calendar weeks prior to the due date of any external sponsor application.

This policy applies to all Vanderbilt Divinity School faculty (tenured, tenure-track, and continuing track), staff, and graduate students who are eligible to apply for external funding under the applicable sponsor guidelines.

Priority Processing:

To take full advantage of the School’s pre-award services and qualify for priority processing, a PI must follow the timelines listed in this policy. If a PI is unable to meet the processing timeline, every effort will be made by the School’s Grants Manager (GM) to submit a PI’s proposal to the sponsor by the stated deadline. However, our grants manager may not be able to perform all services in a shortened timeframe.

Proposals which follow the expected timeline of this policy will be handled on a first-come first-serve basis and take precedence over proposals that are not within the expected timeline of the policy.

Exceptions:

- (a) An exception to the submission timeline outlined in this policy may be made when a sponsor issues the Funding Opportunity, Program Announcement, or Request for Proposal less than six (6) calendar weeks from the due date for all external funding applications.
- (b) In addition, an exception to the submission timeline may be requested via email to the Dean of the Vanderbilt Divinity School.

POLICY

For all grants, regardless of award amount, applicants must submit their concept to the Dean, via email with copy to the Assistant to the Dean, for review. In collaboration with the Divinity School leadership team, the Dean will analyze the impact on the school’s resources, provide feedback for improving the proposal, keep track of all proposals to make sure that a potential funding source is not receiving more than one proposal per concentration at a time, and offer guidance on potential synergies within the school/university.

- **Prior to applying for any grant awards, the concept must be approved by the Dean in writing.**
- Upon written approval from the Dean to move forward, guidance will be provided on which direction below should be pursued:
 - For any grants from private foundations or agencies, **Research Development and Support (RDS) in the Office of the Vice Provost for Research (OVPR)**

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(rds@vanderbilt.edu) should be notified of the intent to submit a proposal. This team can support the Principal Investigator (PI) with proposal development also.

- For any grant proposals seeking support from family foundations, corporate foundations, or other entities where the request aligns with VDS strategic initiatives or represents a large-scale proposal, Development & Alumni Relations (DAR) (amanda.alibrandi@Vanderbilt.edu) should be notified of the intent to submit.

The Grants Manager (GM) and Chief Business Officer (CBO) are resources to assist in budget development and writing of the budget narrative. They should be involved in the process early, to be sure that proposals meet all HR and financial objectives and policies.

- Because grants are decreasing their overhead rate returns, it is more important than ever that the Divinity School endeavors to cover its administrative costs when applying for a new grant. All grants should strive to achieve a 15% indirect cost recovery rate, which can be achieved either by (a) overheads furnished by the funder or (b) including in the budget an amount for administrative and/or financial support. If the sponsor refuses to pay indirect overheads, PI's are advised to write into the grant an amount to cover the services of administrative support. In small start-up grants, this may not always be feasible, but keep in mind that submitting grant proposals with no overhead support costs the Divinity School money. You should work with the Grants Manager to determine how the support should be included, either directly included in the budget as line items or as an indirect percentage added at the bottom. Any grant proposal with less than a 15% indirect cost recovery rate require pre-approval from the Dean and CBO.
- When appointing staff to your project, approval must be obtained from the staff member's immediate supervisor and CBO prior to submission of the grant. It is important to remember that a different set of compensation rules apply to staff members as opposed to faculty members.
- When adding new headcount to your project, approval must be obtained from the Dean and CBO prior to submission of the grant.
- When private foundation support is awarded, the post-award review process determines whether it should be accounted for as a grant (NA15) or gift (NA40). If the award is a grant, Research Finance will handle the new project setup, grantor reporting, etc., and if the award is a gift, DAR Finance will handle the new project set up, grantor reporting, etc.
- RDS and DAR are only able to support proposals where awards are made directly to Vanderbilt. Support for budget data from the VDS Finance and Administration Team will follow that policy. Basic questions can be asked, but full budgetary support will not be available. When funding is sought that will not come to Vanderbilt, Dean approval is still required prior to application.

* Notice of intent to submit for **internal grant opportunities** must be submitted to the Dean and CBO no later than thirty (30) days prior to the due date of any internal grant applications *if* the budget includes:

- Course release;
- Salary supplement (additional payment) for PI and/or any University employee;
- Appointing staff to project; and/or
- Adding headcount – hiring additional staff, postdocs, research assistants, faculty, etc.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Effective: September 1, 2025

Last Revised: September 2025
