

THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

THE PRESIDENTIAL INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SEED GRANT PROGRAM (PIRS)

Researchers in all areas of academic endeavor continue to face an increasingly competitive environment. Federal research funding is tight, and many funding agencies are now investing more of their research dollars in programs that facilitate multi-investigator, multidisciplinary, large budget projects. Individual proposals with strong preliminary work also fare better in reviews, and team proposals that demonstrate integrated collaboration among a team of researchers with a history of working together are better able to compete for research dollars.

To address these challenges, **the Presidential Interdisciplinary Research Seed Grant Program (PIRS)**, administered by the Office of the Vice President, supports the initial stages of innovative, high-risk and high-reward projects that have an interdisciplinary focus and have strong potential for external (competitive) funding. The program is supported by funds from the Office of the President and an endowment established by Mary G. Miller to honor her mother, Mary N. Miller, with the aim of supporting scientific research.

PIRS projects are expected to build new or expand existing teams to pursue innovative, ambitious, interdisciplinary research programs that have the potential to obtain sponsored funding from government agencies, corporations, and/or foundations. Activities typically focus on performing preliminary work, facilitating collaboration, and connecting with funding agencies. A competitive proposal for a sizable project is expected to be submitted to an external funding agency within a year of the completion of project period.

Funded Research Activities

Projects funded by the Presidential Interdisciplinary Research Seed Grants program may take a variety of forms. Project activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Collection of preliminary data needed for external proposal submission
- Workshops on emerging multidisciplinary research areas or high-level seminar series to help establish interdisciplinary teams and research partnerships
- Identification and recruitment of industrial, academic and/or government partnerships and/or promote research collaborations with these institutions
- Travel to establish partnerships and to interact with program officers
- Creation and support of resources such as websites, research collaboration sites or social networking tools to facilitate large-scale research programs

Eligibility

Tenure eligible faculty and senior lecturers/clinicians from all disciplines and at every career stage may apply for the Interdisciplinary Research Seed Program. Applicants must be full-time faculty members. Faculty may not be on more than one proposal in a given funding cycle.

Evaluation Criteria

The goal of PIRS is to support the initial stages of innovative, high-risk projects that have an interdisciplinary focus. The program will place priority on high-risk, high-return projects, including work that develops new theories, identifies new areas of methodological innovation, or that bridges different substantive domains.

Projects may be domestic or international. Proposals seeking funds for grant preparation would be considered to be too advanced for the VPR Seed Program.

Interdisciplinary Research Seed Grant proposals should identify the program and agency to which a future proposal will be submitted, describe the research project in language understandable to faculty reviewers, delineate how the Research Seed Grant activity will result in a more competitive proposal, and include a budget for the grant and a timeline for submission to an external funding agency.

The following criteria will be used when evaluating proposals:

1. Are the significance and intellectual merit of the research clearly documented?
2. Does the PI provide information necessary to determine if this is a new direction and that the research does not overlap with existing funded projects?
3. Have potential barriers or technical difficulties been identified?
4. Does the PI (and collaborators) have the experience necessary to carry out the project?
5. Are the goals, objectives and expected results stated clearly and are they reasonable, given the funds and time provided?
6. Are the methods outlined and do they reflect the goals and objectives stated in the proposal?
7. Have extramural opportunities been identified and are they reasonable?

Funding Priorities

Priorities of the PIRS program include:

- Rapidly emerging federal opportunities (e.g., OSTP priorities for federal agencies)
- Pilot research for increasing engagement with federal agencies that present specific opportunities and challenges for Iowa State (e.g., NIH, DoD)
- Cross-institutional collaborations that extend Iowa State's research strengths (e.g., with medical schools)
- Building bridges between STEM (Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), arts and humanities, and ELSI (ethical, legal, and societal impact, including economic impact) research
- Other forms of study in a second discipline, where the second discipline is far afield from the training for the primary discipline of the applicant and where the applicant will be embedded in a strong research group in the 'second' discipline
- Exceptionally promising new ideas from any area

This list of priorities will be periodically assessed and updated in relation to opportunities for funding and Iowa State's Grand Challenges in Research.

Budgets

The Interdisciplinary Research Seed Program funding is typically \$30,000 (maximum \$50,000) over a project period of two years.

Applications

Applications (completed in 12-point Calibri or Times New Roman font with one-inch margins on all sides) should include the following:

1. **Applicant Information:** The proposal should include a title page that lists the proposal title and the senior participating investigators, along with their organizational or departmental affiliation and a brief, 300 word abstract/summary of the proposal.

- 2. Project Information:** Proposal narrative of no more than 5 single space pages of text that provides the technical details of the project including methodology and approach.
The narrative should (i) highlight the innovative, novel, and intellectual merits of the proposed work; (ii) the anticipated barriers or technical difficulties that makes it a high-risk, but high pay-off project, and (iii) how the seed funds would mitigate these challenges and well position the team to seek external funds.
The proposal should summarize the relevant background literature and research that puts the proposed project into the appropriate context and explains how it will significantly extend or contribute to the field. The applicant should describe the proposed research project in terms that do not require reviewers to be experts in the sub-area of the research. The applicant should clearly describe the goals of the research, the activities to be carried out to achieve those goals, a timetable for completing these activities, and an assessment of the potential for subsequent external funding. A short (2 page maximum) list of references/bibliography may be appended and is not included in the 5 page proposal limit.
- 3. Strategy for Seeking Subsequent External Support:** A description (not to exceed one page) of the strategy for seeking subsequent external support. The description should include a statement of intent to submit a proposal as one of the outcomes of the project. The sponsor(s) to which the proposal will be submitted should be identified along with the intended date(s) of submission and the amount(s) that will be requested.
- 4. Current and Pending Funding:** As pertains to this research project, a list of the applicant's current and pending funding for external research support, as well as any current or pending funding for grants internal to the University.
- 5. Curriculum Vita:** A current curriculum vitae (2 pages maximum) for each collaborator (NIH or NSF biographical sketch is appropriate).
- 6. Budget and Budget Justification:** A budget that itemizes general categories of expenses for which award funds will be used and a brief justification for these expenses. Note that as these are internal funds, and IDCs are not allowed. [Budget template here.](#)

Award Conditions

Awards may be used to support reasonable and necessary costs for the collection of pilot research data or for proposal development. Some, but not all, allowable expenses include: support for travel and supplies; postdoctoral candidate stipends; full or partial stipends and tuition for advanced graduate students who have completed their course work; and research stipends for undergraduate research assistants. Expenditures for faculty salaries (either summer or academic year) are not permitted. Please refer to Iowa State's IP policy for questions regarding intellectual property.

Reporting Requirements

During the last month of the first year of funding, the PI must submit an interim report that provides the basis for a continuing funding decision. Within 60 days of the end of the approved award period, the recipient must provide to the Vice President for Research a final report. The report should outline the work that was accomplished and describe the proposal(s) submitted to external sponsor(s) as a result of this award. The report should also describe any significant deviations from or extensions to the project described in the original proposal.

Reports should be submitted as a single PDF with the PI name in the title via email to vprfunding@iastate.edu.

Application Process

Please submit your application as a single, complete PDF file at the link below. The deadlines for applications are **March 15** and **October 31**.

[Submit here](#)

The VPR office will appoint, in consultation with the colleges, an Evaluation Committee with a member from each of the seven academic colleges. Committee members are appointed for two years, on a rotating schedule. The Committee makes funding recommendations to the VPR.

In urgent funding situations, the VPR and the committee may discuss specific proposals outside of the specified semester rhythm.

Announcement of awards will be made on or around December 7 and April 15. Funding will start January 5 and May 1.

If you have any questions about this program, please contact vprfunding@iastate.edu, or Guru Rao, Office of the Vice President for Research, gururao@iastate.edu.