

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

[Policy AO 46, Gifts that Support Projects](#)

1. **What is the Office of Sponsored Programs?** A central unit under the Senior Vice Chancellor for Research, the [Office of Sponsored Programs \(OSP\)](#) reviews, negotiates, endorses, and provides administrative oversight related to proposals and awards in accordance with all applicable laws, policies, and regulations. The Vice Chancellor for Sponsored Programs and Research Operations serves as the designated University Officer empowered for all sponsored research activities.
2. **What is PAE?** The Division of Philanthropic & Alumni Engagement (PAE) cultivates relationships with contributors, alumni, and other constituents on behalf of the University of Pittsburgh, generating support for teaching, education, and research.
3. **What is Corporate and Foundation Relations?** Part of PAE, [Corporate and Foundation Relations](#) (CFR) is the designated University resource to help with foundation and corporate fundraising. Definitions of the types of entities CFR works with are provided [here](#).
4. **What are “gifts that support projects”?** Gifts that support projects come from foundations, trusts, corporate foundations, and corporations with charitable intentions (i.e., no expectation of potential commercial or private benefits from research, no rights to resulting intellectual property, and no rights of first refusal to any research outcomes). The gift includes an agreement with the University and may require periodic progress reports and financial reports. For more information, please see [Policy AO 46, Gifts that Support Projects](#).
5. **What is a private foundation?** Private foundations are non-governmental entities established as non-profits or charitable trusts for the primary purpose of making charitable awards.
6. **What is CFR’s role with gifts that support projects?** CFR is the designated University resource to advance fundraising success by supporting faculty and staff concept development, funder meetings, and requests to funders. CFR and OSP jointly coordinate grant agreement signatures, payment receipt, acknowledgments, updates, and reporting requirements.
7. **When do I work with Corporate and Foundations Relations?** CFR can help to identify prospective philanthropic funders, develop concepts, edit proposals, communicate with funders to refine concepts, submit proposals, coordinate processing award agreements, depositing funder checks, and facilitate timely stewardship reporting.

8. **When do I work with the Office of Sponsored Programs?** Faculty should work with their departmental research administrators and the Office of Sponsored Programs for proposals that can result in a sponsored project as described in [Policy AO 46](#). Visit the [OSP website](#) for more information on what OSP processes.
9. **I have been in conversation with a private funder about my research. What should I do next?** Please contact your departmental research administrator and the [CFR officer assigned to your school/unit](#) so they can assist you in identifying and/or implementing any next steps with the foundation.
10. **What is the University's "Select Funders" list? Why were these funders selected?** The University has identified a list of [Select Funders](#) chosen due to their strategic priority to the University. To strengthen relationships and maximize the funding secured by Pitt with these organizations, all communications to Select Funders are coordinated through CFR, and faculty should contact the [CFR staff member](#) responsible for their area prior to engaging these foundations.
11. **Who communicates with the Select Funders?** CFR staff and University leadership. Faculty and awarded PIs also communicate with Select Funders in coordination with CFR and OSP staff.
12. **Will CFR assist with other types of proposals?** CFR does not manage nor assist with local, state, or federal government grants and contracts (NIH, NSF, NEA, etc.). Those proposal submissions and awards are processed by the [Office of Sponsored Programs](#). The CFR team does not typically assist faculty with proposals to non-profits that are publicly funded and/or connected with professional societies, such as the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society.
13. **What process should I follow if I am working on a project with a sponsor included on the Select Funder list?** Contact your departmental research administrator and the CFR staff member assigned to your department, center, or school at all possible stages: concept generation, letter of intent, meeting, application, award, agreement, no-cost extension, any grant leadership change, and grant reporting.
14. **When should I notify CFR that I am working with a Select Funder?** Notify your departmental research administrator and the CFR staff assigned to your department, center, or school for any of the following tasks: concept generation, letter of intent, meeting, application, award, agreement, no-cost extension, any grant leadership change, and grant reporting.
15. **Can I work independently of CFR when I am meeting with a Select Funder about my research, program, or other projects?** No, you should always notify your CFR staff of conversations which lead to next steps with the Select Funder.
16. **What is a "limited submission" opportunity?** A limited submission is a funding opportunity in which the sponsor limits the number of applications an institution may submit. Typically, these funding opportunities restrict an institution to submit 1 or 2 applications. Please see the Office of Sponsored Program's [Competition Space](#) for a list of opportunities.
17. **Who do I contact for submission of a pre-proposal or Letter of Intent/Inquiry (LOI)?** To approach philanthropic funders, contact your departmental research administrator and the CFR staff assigned to your department, center, or school. Depending on what the funder requires, the pre-proposal or LOI may need to be processed by OSP. Please click [here](#) for details.

18. **Does Corporate and Foundation Relations write proposals for all private foundations?** Most foundations prefer that projects and grant proposals, especially for research, are guided by subject matter experts. After you develop the first conceptual draft, CFR staff can work with you closely to ensure that the proposal aligns with the foundation's guidelines and is written with the reviewers (scientific, lay, professional) in mind. CFR will assemble supporting documentation and edit/review as needed. We often support grant seekers by helping to refine lay summaries, edit internal letters of support, coordinate site visits, liaise with the OSP, and by editing and proofreading the final submission.
19. **Can CFR help with a proposal budget?** The budget can reflect the heart of a concept. Departmental research administrators can assist faculty with budget development. CFR helps ensure that the budget, budget narrative, justification, and rationale are aligned, and that the budget supports the funding concept rationale in terms appropriate to the funding source.
20. **Who can help me understand internal Pitt requirements for my proposal?** The CFR staff member assigned to your department and your departmental research administrator can assist in navigating internal requirements and processes.
21. **Who can help me understand and complete external funder requirements for my proposal?** CFR will contact a potential private funder on behalf of a faculty member to understand external funding requirements and answer any PI questions. CFR staff and departmental research administrators will help to gather necessary materials to complete a submission.
22. **Am I allowed to negotiate indirect cost rates or terms of an award with a potential funder?** The faculty PI is not allowed to negotiate indirect costs with a funder, nor terms of an award. Faculty with questions should contact OSP and CFR.
23. **If the funding for my project is not a gift, what should I do?** If the project you are considering is not a gift, please work directly with your department research administrator and OSP.
24. **What is the internal timing for required reviews prior to submission?** Allow five days for CFR to review proposals, and four days for the required OSP review and approval prior to submission. Importantly, application documents and budget must be finalized before the OSP review to ensure that its endorsement is consistent with the funding application. CFR can develop a schedule of tasks and assignments with the PI to meet School and Department reviews and the required OSP review and approval. For more details about procedures and pre-submission deadlines, please see the [OSP-CFR Workflow description](#) and [Matrix](#).
25. **What if the funder requires an institutional signature?** If the funder requires an institutional signature for submission (endorsement), CFR will work with OSP to ensure that the proposal is completed for internal and institutional review. Applicants are required to follow internal submission deadlines. Please see the Workflow [Matrix](#) as a guide. Regardless of whether an institutional endorsement is required or not, all proposal and award documents require OSP review and approval.
26. **What if a private foundation requires an institutional match of support?** Any requirement of institutional support (i.e., cost sharing) must be discussed with the faculty member's department chair *prior* to beginning an application to the funder.

27. **Many foundations/funders require grant seekers to set up an account to access an online web platform. Should I set up my own account?** To avoid duplication of effort, please do not set up a web portal account on your own. In many cases, CFR or OSP have already established University accounts to ensure that the type and allowable number of proposals can be tracked. Final proposal submission through a web portal must only occur after the proposal has been internally processed, reviewed, and approved by OSP through MyFunding.
28. **Can I submit my proposal directly to the funder without going through OSP for approval?** No. At no time should a proposal be submitted to a funder, regardless of funding source, without OSP review and approval for submission. Please work with your departmental research administrator for completing the OSP review and approval.
29. **Who submits a proposal?** The funder requirements guide who submits. If the funder does not specify, then CFR staff will offer to submit a proposal. At no time should a proposal be submitted to a funder without OSP review and approval for submission.
30. **How do I address Indirect Costs (IDCs)? What should I do if a funder does not want to pay the University's required indirect/overhead costs?** Please review this [listing of many published foundation IDC rates](#). If the foundation does not have a published IDC rate or provide IDCs, a faculty member's department will need to request -- before submission of the proposal to the funder -- an IDC waiver. Please visit this page for more information about the University's [IDC Waiver Process](#).
31. **How long does it take for a funder to make a funding decision?** While the review period varies, most private funders make decisions on a quarterly or semi-annual basis. Foundations often need to receive submissions and other information well in advance of their board meeting dates.
32. **What should I do if I receive an award letter from a non-governmental funder?** Please send the award letter immediately to OSP for review and to organize next steps for formal acknowledgement of receipt to the funder.
33. **What if I receive a paper check from a funder?** PI or department directly receiving a physical check should contact CFR immediately at pae-cfr@pitt.edu for instructions on where to send the check.
34. **Who signs agreements?** OSP and CFR will work together to secure University signatures and formal acceptance to the funder. OSP and CFR together will determine who will sign an agreement. Faculty are not permitted or authorized to sign agreements or awards on behalf of the University. Awards are to the University of Pittsburgh and not to individual faculty members or units.
35. **Who activates my account for spending once I receive funding from a foundation?** Sponsored Projects Accounting activates accounts that receive funds for gifts that support projects, described in the policy as "specific gift grants", once OSP initiates the account request. Projects with scope of work, salary lines, budget, and reports are managed by the University.
36. **How does the University publicize a grant award?** Grant agreements often stipulate terms of publicity about awards for projects, and publicity at Pitt varies depending on the award. Please follow the terms of your award and reach out to your CFR contact, who can coordinate publicity with the foundation and Pitt communications staff.

37. **If the agreement letter says that I must submit a report(s), what steps should I take?** CFR and the faculty's department will track the due dates of reports to the funder. Report formats vary (interim progress, year-end, or final) and budget expenditures are typically required. CFR staff can assist faculty in editing their reports and helping to submit to funders as needed. Departmental administrators can assist if the report needs to be routed to OSP before submission. A PI submitting a stewardship/progress report directly to the funder should send a copy to CFR at pae-cfr@pitt.edu and, if institutional endorsement is needed, to your department research administrator for entry into MyFunding.
38. **What should I do if I need to make significant changes to my project or there is a change of Principal Investigator (PI)?** Please contact CFR and your departmental research administrator, who can submit a modification within OSP's MyFunding. In most cases, CFR will reach out to the funder to seek clearance for these changes. Any award modification must be processed in OSP.
39. **What should I do if I need to extend the duration of my project with the funder?** We encourage faculty to closely track their spending over the life of an award. Should you need a no-cost extension, please have your departmental research administrator submit an NCE request to OSP as a modification request and then contact CFR. CFR works closely with foundations, especially regional foundations, corporate foundations, and corporations to request NCEs and provide a rationale for why the project needs to be extended.
40. **What should I do if I finished my project and have funds remaining?** Please contact your research administrator and CFR. Some foundations may approve the use of unspent funds for an activity related to the current award.