

# Applying to NIH AREA grants via Grants.gov

*Prepared by Jennifer Hoff, Office of Grants & Research*

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Below is a general overview of some of the key steps and requirements for applying to the NIH AREA program via Grants.gov. The Grants.gov website also provides useful guidance and tutorials for submitting applications. The process can feel overwhelming and confusing, but hopefully these step-by-step instructions will be useful. Jennifer Hoff of the Office of Grants & Research will be available to assist you throughout the process.

## STEPS TO BEGIN APPLICATION

### Step 1: download the application materials from Grants.gov

- Go to: <http://apply.grants.gov/apply/GetGrantFromFedgrants?cfda=&opportunity=PA-06-042&competitionid=>
- Click on the “download” command in the table. You will be prompted to enter your email address to receive important announcements about the program; it is a good idea to submit your email address in case there are important changes
- Download the application instructions and full application package and save to your computer. As you work on this application, you can email the file to me to review and check.
- **Grants.gov program compatibility:** if you have never used Grants.gov you will have to download the appropriate version of Adobe software.

### Step 2: review the AREA program announcement / instructions

- Review the full program announcement for AREA to ensure that you have a clear idea of the requirements for the program – see: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-06-042.html>
- Review the instructions page grants.gov application guide ([http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/SF424\\_RR\\_Guide\\_General\\_Ver2.pdf](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/SF424_RR_Guide_General_Ver2.pdf))
- If you have questions about the requirements, make a list and follow up with Jennifer

### Step 3: prepare your application components for submission following the SF 424 and AREA program announcement (as outlined below)

## AREA OVERVIEW & PROPOSAL COMPONENTS

Below is an overview of tips and requirements for preparing your AREA application – these tips are pulled from the Grants.gov guidebook (version 2) and the AREA program guidelines

## KEY PROGRAM FEATURES

- **Application Guide:** PIs must use the SF424 Grants.gov guide (Version 2) for application preparation: [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/SF424\\_RR\\_Guide\\_General\\_Ver2.pdf](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/SF424_RR_Guide_General_Ver2.pdf)
- **AREA Program announcement:** The AREA program guidelines have some supplemental instructions to the Grants.gov guide; be sure to review these closely: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-06-042.html>
- **Deadlines:** February 25<sup>th</sup>, June 25<sup>th</sup>, and October 25<sup>th</sup> (5:00 p.m. local time of applicant organization)
- **Funding range:** Maximum \$150,000 direct costs (requested in two \$25,000 modules)
- **Program number:** PAR – 06 – 042
- **CFDA number:** not applicable for grants.gov application
- **Project duration:** 3 years maximum
- **Earliest Project Start Date:** Varies depending on submission date – usually must allow at least 9-12 months for review/award (see program guidelines). If you hold an active NIH award you must set start date to ensure you do not hold more than one active award at the same time
- **Duplicate and/or multiple submissions:** Cannot submit same research proposal to other NIH programs at the same time. Can submit two AREA proposals if they are scientifically distinct.
- **Research areas supported:** NIH encourages applicants to review the research objectives of each institute to determine the appropriate target for the application: [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/area\\_objectives.doc](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/area_objectives.doc)
- **Scientific Review Groups:** An applicant may suggest up to three study sections that are considered appropriate to review the application – the cover letter can also request assignment to a specific institute / review group. To review current study sections, see: <http://www.csr.nih.gov/Committees/rosterindex.asp>
- **Funding rates:** NIH publishes funding rates for AREA by institute; see: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/award/success/sucratearea8504.htm>

## AREA APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

## Format:

(Note: see pg I-18 of grants.gov application guide for additional details on format requirements)

- **Typeface:** Arial, Helvetica, Palatino Linotype, or Georgia typeface must be used
- **Font size:** 11 pt or larger
- **Type density:** including characters and spaces, must be no more than 15 characters per inch AND type may be no more than six lines per inch.
- **Page margins:** use at least 1/2 inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages
- **Page formatting:** Do not include anything in a header or footer of the attachments – a header will be system generated that references the name of the PD/PI. Page numbers for the footer will be system-generated in the complete application, with all pages sequentially numbered. Note: NIH strongly encourages PIs to only use standard, single column format (avoid two-column format).
- **Figures, graphs, diagrams, charts, tables, figure legends, and footnotes:** can use a smaller type size but it must be in black font color, legible, and follow the font typeface requirement.
- **Page limits:** Maximum 25 pages total for research plan narrative (sections 2-5 of research plan narrative: 2. Specific Aims; 3. Background & Significance; 4. Preliminary Studies & Progress Report; and 4. Research Design & Methods). Other sections of Research Plan required via grants.gov do not count against this page limit.
- **PDF attachments:** All files uploaded into the Grants.gov application must be converted to PDF format before being uploaded.

## Required Grants.gov Components of Application:

There are several forms that you are required to complete in the Grants.gov application; see section 4.2 (pg I-33) of the Grants.gov guidebook for full directions for these forms.

- SF 424 (R&R) (Cover component)
- Research & Related Project/Performance Site Locations
- Research & Related Other Project Information
- Research & Related Senior/Key Personnel
- PHS 398 Cover Page Supplement
- PHS 398 Modular Budget, Period 1
- PHS 398 Research Plan
- PHS 398 Checklist
- PHS 398 Cover Letter File (optional)

## Special instructions for each component:

**1. SF 424 – Cover Component (pg. I-33 of application guide):** Below are the numbers you'll need to complete this form:

**Item 5:** Organizational DUNS: 003501095

Person to be contacted on matters involving this application:

Diane Miller  
(423) 425-4431 (phone)  
(423) 425-4052 (fax)  
Diane-Miller@utc.edu

**Item 6:** Employer Identification Number (EIN): 62-600-1636

**Item 10:** not applicable/required – will not allow you to input any number

**Item 19:** Authorized Representative

Diane Miller  
Director  
Office of Grants and Research  
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga  
615 McCallie Avenue  
Chattanooga, TN 37403  
(423) 425-4431 (phone)  
(423) 425-4052 (fax)  
Diane-Miller@utc.edu

**2. Research & Related Other Project Information (pg I-47 of guidebook):** This form asks you to answer questions related to human subjects & vertebrate animals. You'll also upload the following files into this form:

- **Project Summary/Abstract** (see page I-50 of grants.gov guide): Should be a self-contained description of the project and should contain a statement of objectives and methods to be employed. Limited to 30 lines of text and must follow the required font and margin specifications
- **Project Narrative** (a.k.a. short statement of relevance to public health): Using no more than two or three sentences, describe the relevance of this research to public health.
- **Bibliography & Reference Cited – no page limitation**
- **Facilities & Other Resources:** Identify the facilities to be used (Laboratory, Animal, Computer, Office, Clinical, and Other) and, if appropriate, indicate their capacities, pertinent capabilities, relative proximity and extent of availability to the project. See pg. I-51 of the grants.gov application guide for additional guidance. In addition, the AREA guidelines request the following information be included in this file:

- A profile of available students of the applicant school/academic component and any information or estimate of the number who have obtained the baccalaureate degree and gone on to obtain an academic or professional doctoral degree in the health-related sciences during the last five years.
  - A description of the special characteristics of the school/academic component that make it appropriate for an AREA grant, where the goals of the AREA program are to: (1) provide support for meritorious research; (2) strengthen the research environment of schools that have not been major recipients of NIH support; and (3) expose available undergraduate and/or graduate students in such environments to research. Include a description of the likely impact of an AREA grant on the PD/PI and the research environment of the school/academic component.
  - Although it is expected that the majority of the research will be directed by the applicant investigator and conducted at the grantee institution, limited use of special facilities or equipment at another institution is permitted. For any proposed research sites other than the applicant institution, provide a brief description of the resources. Collaborations with other investigators are also permitted if complementary expertise is required to accomplish the proposed specific aims.
  - If relevant, a statement of institutional support for the proposed research project (e.g., special equipment or space, release time, other support, matching funds, etc.).
- **Equipment:** List major items of equipment already available for this project and, if appropriate, identify location and pertinent capabilities.
  - **Other attachments** (i.e. letters of collaboration and support)

### 3. Research and Related Senior/Key Personnel:

**Biographical sketch is limited to 4 pages for each member of the Key Personnel.** Per the AREA guidelines, each bio should include:

The Biographical Sketch provides information used by reviewers in the assessment of each individual's qualifications for a specific role in the proposed project, as well as to evaluate the overall qualifications of the research team. A biographical sketch is required for all key personnel, including collaborators, following the instructions below. A sample biographical sketch may be viewed at: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm>. Attach the Biographical Sketches to the Research and Related Senior/Key Person page.

- List education and training; selected peer-reviewed publications, with full citations; position(s); any honors, and any grant support, with information, including overall goals and responsibilities, on research projects ongoing or completed during the last three years.
- For the PD/PI only, provide information on his or her (a) previous or current experience in supervising students in research, and/or (b) other relationships within the institutional framework (e.g., cross-departmental research collaborations).

**Current & Pending Support:** You do have to upload any files into Grants.gov for Current & Pending support; this is no longer required at time of AREA submission and may be requested at the time of an award.

#### **4. Modular Budget Component, Period 1:**

This funding opportunity uses the modular budget format. In this component, complete only Budget Period 1. Include in budget period 1 the total requested budget for all years of the proposed project.

##### Budget Period 1: Direct Costs

- Direct Costs less Consortium F&A: Select the appropriate dollar amount from the drop-down list. This number may **NOT EXCEED \$150,000**.
- Consortium F&A. If applicable, enter the actual consortium F&A (e.g., \$3,271).
- Total Direct Costs: This field auto calculates so no data entry is required.
- Budget Period 1: Section B - Indirect Costs: If the F&A rate agreement has been established, indicate the type of agreement and the date. All appropriate exclusions must be applied in the calculation of the F&A costs. **UTC's rate is 45.5 percent of salaries and wages.**
- Do not complete the PHS 398 Modular Budget, Periods 2, 3, 4, and 5. They are not required and will not be accepted with the application. **The entire budget MUST be requested under Budget Period 1.**
- **PHS 398 MODULAR BUDGET FORM, CUMULATIVE.** The Cumulative Budget Information will auto-calculate so no additional data entry is required.
- **BUDGET JUSTIFICATIONS** – Please attach the justification for personnel and the justification for any consortium, if applicable. If the requested budget requires any additional justification, attach an Additional Narrative Justification.
- Under the Personnel Justification, list all project personnel, including their names, number of person months devoted to the project (indicate academic, calendar, and/or summer), and roles on the project. No individual salary information should be provided.
- If students are available and will be involved in the research, indicate in what aspects of the proposed research they will participate. If participating students have not yet been individually identified, the number and academic level of those to be involved should be provided. Since a primary objective of the AREA program is to support investigators doing meritorious research at institutions that have not been major recipients of NIH support, PD/PIs are encouraged to include undergraduate (preferably, if available) and graduate students in the proposed research to the extent practicable. If there are any Consultants for the project, provide their names, organizational affiliations, and the services they will perform.

- For the Consortium Justification, provide an estimate of total costs (direct cost plus F&A cost), each rounded to the nearest \$1,000. List the individuals and their organizations with which consortium arrangements have been made, the percent effort of all personnel, and the role on the project. Indicate whether the collaborating institution is foreign or domestic. Include the Letter of Intent to establish a consortium.

## 5. Research Plan

- **Limited to 25 pages for sections 2-5 of research plan narrative:** 2. Specific Aims; 3. Background & Significance; 4. Preliminary Studies & Progress Report; and 4. Research Design & Methods. Other sections of Research Plan required via grants.gov do not count against page limit.
- Though all sections of research plan are uploaded as separate attachments, NIH recommends that applicants construct the research plan as a single document, separating sections into the distinct PDF attachments just before uploading the files. This will allow the applicant to better monitor formatting requirements and page limits. **When validating for page limits, the eRA Commons will not count the white space created by breaking the text into separate files.**
- **Remember:** do not include any information in a header or footer of the attachments; the eRA Commons system will add page numbers, headers, and footers for the full application.
- If Human Subjects or Vertebrate Animals are involved, you will upload additional files to more fully address these aspects of your projects (does not count against page limit)
- **See pages I-92 through I-99 for full guidance on the content of the research plan.**

## 6. Cover Letter File:

The cover letter file is optional, but it is advisable because it allows you to tell NIH which Institute and Scientific Review Group you feel your research best fits with. NIH will consider your recommendations when assigning your review group. **See pg I-76 for guidance on preparing a cover letter.**

## SUBMISSION OF THE APPLICATION

Once you have completed your Grants.gov application file, you can email the file to Jennifer for review and final checking. She will advise you on any issues and schedule a time for you to come to her office to submit the application. **Some important points regarding submission:**

- The Office of Grants and Research has to submit the application (the PI cannot submit it)
- Once submitted, the Grants.gov system will check the application for errors, validate it, and then send it to the NIH for processing
- Once the NIH eRA Commons system receives the application, **applicants have two days to review the application in eRA Commons to ensure it is acceptable** (i.e. that all files transferred appropriately and clearly). If the application is acceptable, no further action is needed and the application will automatically move forward in the assignment/review process. If applicants feel the application is not acceptable, the applicant organization can reject the proposal, make changes, and then resubmit the application. **It is important for the PIs to be available for 2-4 days after submission in case any errors arise.**

## REVIEW CRITERIA

Be sure to review the criteria that will be used to evaluate your proposal. The following are considered in making funding decisions:

- Scientific merit of the proposed project as determined by peer review
- Availability of funds
- Relevance to program priorities

The goals of NIH supported research are to advance our understanding of biological systems, to improve the control of disease, and to enhance health. In their written critiques, reviewers will be asked to comment on each of the following criteria in order to judge the likelihood that the proposed research will have a substantial impact on the pursuit of these goals. Each of these criteria will be addressed and considered in assigning the overall score, weighting them as appropriate for each application. Note that an application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major scientific impact and thus deserve a high priority score. For example, an investigator may propose to carry out important work that by its nature is not innovative but is essential to move a field forward.

- **Significance:** Does this study address an important problem? If the aims of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge or clinical practice be advanced? What will be the effect of these studies on the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?
- **Approach:** Are the conceptual or clinical framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, well reasoned, and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?
- **Innovation:** Is the project original and innovative? For example: Does the project challenge existing paradigms or clinical practice; address an innovative hypothesis or critical barrier to progress in the field? Does the project develop or employ novel concepts, approaches, methodologies, tools, or technologies for this area?
- **Investigators:** Are the investigators appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the PD/PI and other researchers? Does the investigative team bring complementary and integrated expertise to the project (if applicable)?
- **Environment:** Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed studies benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, or subject populations, or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support?
- **Overall Evaluation:** Summarize the major factors from the five review criteria above that contribute to or detract from scientific merit. In addition, evaluate whether the proposed project addresses the objectives of the AREA grant program which are to (1) provide support for meritorious research, (2) strengthen the research environment of schools that have not been

major recipients of NIH support, and (3) expose available undergraduate and graduate students in such environments to meritorious research.

**Additional review criteria:**

In addition to the above criteria, the following items will be considered in the determination of scientific merit and the priority score:

- **Protection of Human Subjects from Research Risk:** The involvement of human subjects and protections from research risk relating to their participation in the proposed research will be assessed. See item 6 of the Research Plan component of the SF424 (R&R).
- **Inclusion of Women, Minorities and Children in Research:** The adequacy of plans to include subjects from both genders, all racial and ethnic groups (and subgroups), and children as appropriate for the scientific goals of the research will be assessed. Plans for the recruitment and retention of subjects will also be evaluated. See item 7 of the Research Plan component of the SF424 (R&R).
- **Care and Use of Vertebrate Animals in Research:** If vertebrate animals are to be used in the project, the five items described under item 11 of the Research Plan component of the SF424 (R&R) will be assessed.
- **Biohazards:** If materials or procedures are proposed that are potentially hazardous to research personnel and/or the environment, determine if the proposed protection is adequate.

**Other considerations:**

- **Budget:** The reasonableness of the proposed budget and the requested period of support in relation to the proposed research may be assessed by the reviewers. Is the percent effort listed for the PD/PI appropriate for the work proposed? Is each budget category realistic and justified in terms of the aims and methods?