

Research Council Agenda
September 23rd, 2020
3:30 pm – 5:00 pm
WebEx

VOTING:

Jason Carter	Sarah Shannon
Mary Miles	Colin Shaw
Mary Cloninger	Nicole Tuss
Ron June	Blake Wiedenheft
Brent Peyton/Robin Gerlach	Carl Yeoman
Michael Brody/Eric Austin	Nicholas Childs

NON-VOTING:

Craig Ogilvie
Kearns, Chris/ Jim Mitchell
Leist, Terry
Mokwa, Robert/ Singel, David
Schmidt, Leslie
Hilmer, Jonathan
Jayne Morrow

AGENDA:

1. Review and approval of Aug minutes; general announcements
2. Strategic Plan metrics for Grand Challenges (C. Fastnow, guest)
3. Feedback on Research Continuity WebEx and future sessions
4. Federal Relations process and memo (J. Morrow)
5. Update on Animal Resources Center user fee discussions
6. Sub-committee for Spring Convocation awards
7. Other and/or Future Topics

Next Research Council Meeting: October 28th, 2020 3:30 pm

Federal Relations Process Memorandum

To: Research Council
CC: Jason Carter, Ph.D. VPR EDGE
Janelle Booth, Director, Government Relations
From: Jayne Morrow, Ph.D. Assistant VP RED
Dan Miller, Ph.D., ARL Director
Lee Spangler, Ph.D., ERI Director
Date: September 22, 2020

Funding Mechanisms and the Role of Federal Relations Process in Growing Research Opportunities at MSU

The University uses many different approaches, tools and funding mechanisms to support research program development. The VPREDGE Office Federal Relations Process works to identify opportunities to foster collaborations with federal agencies and grow strategic partnerships of high priority for implementing the University strategic plan. We utilize many different strategies to identify and foster collaborations with the federal agencies including with support from our federal legislative delegation on a federal initiative. The effort is led out of the VPREDGE Office where contact with the federal delegation is initiated through Strategic Marketing Innovations (SMI, a contracted lobby firm) and VPREDGE Office to share University-identified research program growth priorities. The process is different for every project, usually building on already strong research programs at the University with multidisciplinary teams at MSU and other collaborating institutions and requires nurturing over the course of the planning year and the funding fiscal year(s). The University submits a sanctioned book of projects to the Montana delegation every year. Securing funded collaborations with the federal agencies may utilize any one of several funding mechanisms including training awards, competitive research grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts (including SBIR/STTR). Use of any given funding mechanism varies according to purpose, target audience and federal agency authorities. As in any competitive funding process, there is no guarantee proposal will get selected or funded.

What makes a good project for the Federal Relations Process?

In order to pursue a federal initiative under the federal relations process at MSU a project must align with some key criteria which, in some respects, differ from standard academic grants. There is a process at the national-level to develop each federal agency's priorities and budget. A successful federal initiative defines a project that supports agency priorities and can be inserted into that budget process in a way strategic for the University and the state of Montana. Here is a good resource to learn more about the process <https://www.aaas.org/programs/r-d-budget-and-policy/understanding-process> and examine budget trends <https://www.aaas.org/programs/r-d-budget-and-policy/federal-rd-budget-dashboard>.

Successful federal initiatives require alignment with (1) University research priorities, (2) the Montana federal delegation, and (3) the relevant federal agency (whose priorities are established in the federal budgeting process). Also, because there are a limited number of actions the delegation will take on behalf of MSU, this is a limited resource opportunity and can be considered similar to a limited submission. Coordination of submissions is handled by the VPREDGE Office to assure all the criteria align and the proposed projects have the greatest impact. Ideas submitted to the process may be appropriate for existing competitive programs, contracting mechanisms or nonfederal funding mechanisms. The VPREDGE Office works to identify and track many different funding routes and may recommend alternatives to a federal initiative.

The process for selection of a federal initiative is iterative and often requires multiple revisions to foster the needed alignment. The following elements are helpful in understanding what makes a successful project in the federal relations process:

1. Potential impact for and growth of the University research enterprise
 - a. Does the project build strengths in University priority areas?
 - b. Can the project contribute to building valuable infrastructure?
 - c. Does the project leverage existing strengths and provide a benefit for the state of Montana?
2. Alignment with the Montana federal delegation priorities
 - a. Does the project align with priorities and agency programs of high interest to the member?

- b. Does the project have the potential for benefit to Montana (economic development, health, or safety)
- 3. Alignment with federal agency identified program, objectives and research needs
 - a. Does the project address an identified program requirement, need or capability gap of the identified agency? Prior coordination and strong support from a federal program manager is preferred and is characteristic of the most successful projects.
 - b. Does the project build on an existing relationship with the identified federal agency?
 - c. Does the project add something new (not redundant to existing agency efforts)?
 - d. Requested funding amount needs to be in alignment with agency program spending levels (i.e., can't ask for ten times typical program grant and contract award amounts)
 - e. Congressional funding is intended as an investment such that projects need to plan for transition to competitive funding or completion within three to five years. Projects should not rely on Congressional support in perpetuity.
- 4. Quality of the technical work
 - a. This is technical merit similar to most federal agency definitions of merit review criteria including competent performance, relevance of research and effect of research on overall infrastructure and capacity. Is the approach based on sound science, is it innovative, do the investigators have demonstrated capability and expertise, etc.
 - b. Is the project technically feasible?

Communication

Advancing through the process requires communication with audiences that have extremely varied interests and technical background including federal delegation staff and agency program management who will focus heavily on benefit to Montana and relevance in their agency, respectively. The VPREDGE Office has experience communicating with these audiences and helping to create proposals that meet the range of criteria above and will lead communications efforts.

Submission Process Overview

1. The first step is submission of a white paper to the VPREDGE Office. In coordination with relevant Deans, Directors and Department Heads, the VPREDGE Office will review white papers in accordance with the above criteria.
2. White papers that remain after this initial screening will be forwarded to MSU's Federal Relations firm (SMI) to solicit additional input on agency relevance and priorities.
3. After these inputs and screenings, remaining white papers will come back to originators for refinement. These interactions are supported by the VPREDGE Office to assure contacts at relevant agencies are created, alignment with the agencies priorities has been established, and routes of collaboration are identified; creating a strong fit with the agency that is aligned with University strengths and priorities.
4. White papers will be submitted to Montana's federal delegation by the MSU President and VPREDGE. The VPREDGE and Office staff meet with delegation to share the federal initiative s.

Faculty **may** be asked to meet with delegation staff or federal agency points of contact throughout the process. It is important to note that there is no guarantee that the ideas or suggestions in the white papers MSU submits will result in any increased funding for the agencies or MSU. Additionally, unlike a grant where when the proposal is accepted there is a defined process for distribution, the Federal Relations Process will yield a unique path for each proposal that moves forward in the budget development and appropriations process and is dependent on the agency funding mechanisms and authorities. Nurturing a federal initiative starts with a submission, the actual funding of a project may take 1-3 years depending on the budget process, funding mechanism and **existing relationship** with the agency. Once a project is established, the project may require unique project management, compliance, and research administration support as well.