

# USC Office of Research

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS PRESIDENT'S SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH AWARD

### **APPLICATION DEADLINE** 5 pm, Monday, January 16, 2023 (PST)

Proposals submitted after this deadline will be rejected without review. It is anticipated that award decisions will be announced by end of February, 2023.

### **BACKGROUND**

Integrating sustainability as a core value in USC's strategic planning is a critically important institutional commitment. In addition to implementing impactful sustainability initiatives across USC's campuses, great opportunities exist to expand and enhance USC's research strengths and capabilities in sustainability.

### **OPPORTUNITY**

The President's Sustainability Research Award will provide seed funding to enable researchers to submit highly competitive applications for federal funding, including large center and related programs, early career awards, and individual research projects. The goal of using these funds is to maximize the probability of obtaining federal research support for the proposed effort. This is a one-time solicitation. While this program may be repeated, currently there are no plans to do so.

### **AWARD TYPE**

There are two types of awards under this program:

- Large Research Awards: \$1,000,000 in funding is available to fund between 2-3 awards.
- Small Research Awards: \$250,000 in funding is available to fund between 5-7 awards.

The project period for awards made under this program will be one year. The number of awards is contingent upon the receipt of a sufficient number of meritorious applications. The Office of Research (OOR) aims to fund projects that have a high probability of being submitted to and successfully funded by a federal agency that will yield a return of investment of 10x or higher. For example, proposals requesting \$500,000 in funding would need to provide a commitment (see below) to target a federal funding opportunity for \$5M or more. Additionally, awards can be in furtherance of any external funding sources, inclusive of corporations, foundations, or other potential funders in addition to the federal government.

### **TOPICS**

Topics for this Request for Proposals are listed below in bold. Suitable projects within each topic include but are not limited to the following examples:

- **Human Health and Well-Being:** Health approaches to promote general well-being and wellness, community health, health equity, equitable and environmentally just infrastructure, promoting and creating healthier environments, and disease determinants spanning environmental, nutritional, social, psychosocial, genetic, and epigenetic factors.
- **Infrastructure and Built Environment:** Decarbonization, transportation operations and logistics, system design, integrated capacity planning, forecasting, and public health intervention for improved delivery.

- **Natural Environment/Ecosystem Services:** Natural environment resilience and ecosystem preservation, natural environments in the context of the green and blue economy, and holistic research across the natural and social sciences and humanities focused on understanding the environment.
- **Communications, Policy, & Institutions:** Policy improvement for the environment and sustainability, sustainability policies and planning, and analytic and methodological studies focused on the environment and communities impacted by the current environment.
- **Risk Analysis and Economic Impacts:** Economic impact modeling focused on the environment and sustainability, sustainable business solutions research, and planning for climate change and sustainability with an economics focus.

## PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must follow instructions carefully. Information that is uploaded beyond what is requested will not be included in the proposal package provided to reviewers.

- Award Program:** Specify the program to which you are applying (Large Research Award or Small Research Award).
- Brief description:** (not to exceed 60 words) A brief description of the proposed work.
- Abstract:** (not to exceed 20 lines of text): Provide a stand-alone succinct description of the proposed work.
- Narrative:** (not to exceed 5 pages): Page limits are inclusive of figures and tables and include 1” margins of single-spaced text in Arial font. The following headers should be included:
  - Background/Significance/Broader Impact:** Describe the societal relevance and benefit of the proposed project. Describe the area of research to be supported from the following perspectives: What is the goal of the research in terms of advancing fundamental knowledge in sustainability? In general, what is the importance of the project to USC, the research community, and society? What is the state of the research activity at USC and elsewhere, and what are the important research questions for the topic?
  - Approach:** Describe the scientific hypotheses and specific activities to be supported by the research award, and how these will contribute to the submission of a successful proposal to a federal agency.
  - Funding Target:** Describe the specific federal funding opportunity to be pursued (including URL) to which you commit to apply.
  - Project Team:** Clearly identify a USC PI (or Co-PIs) and any USC Co-Is. Proposals should include a detailed description of the proposal team, including a discussion of each team member’s past and current research that is relevant to this effort. Discuss why the proposal team would be successful in pursuing this opportunity, and how the research expertise of the PI/Co-PIs and any Co-Is will be integrated through the proposed project.
  - Timeline:** Provide a detailed timeline of activities and milestones to be completed, including a targeted submission date to the opportunity identified as the Funding Target.
- Commitment Statement:** The proposal must include a statement in which the applicant commits to submit a proposal to the opportunity identified as the Funding Target.
- Budget and Budget Justification** (not to exceed two pages): Specify a project start and end date. Utilize standard budget categories, e.g., senior/key personnel (including percentage effort and fringe), equipment, travel, materials & supplies. Describe the role of all key personnel for whom salary support is requested. Justify any request for salary support in terms of the objectives of the project.

- g) **Return on Investment:** Confirm that the Funding Target total multi-year award would be at least 10x the funds being requested under this RFP. For example, proposals requesting \$500,000 in funding from this opportunity would need to identify a Funding Target of \$5M or more.
- h) **Current Funding:** List all sources of internal and external support awarded during the past five years, current or pending, for the PI/Co-PIs and Co-Is. For each source, specify who on this proposal was involved, their role on the project, title of the award, period, award amount, and sponsor (including subagency). Clearly demarcate for the PI/Co-PIs and Co-Is in a separate section what funding was obtained from the subagency that sponsors the Funding Target. For example, if you identify a Funding Target that is sponsored by one NSF Directorate, clearly indicate funding history for that specific Directorate; if you identify a target sponsored by one NIH institute, clearly indicate funding history for that institute.
- i) **Letter(s) of Support** (Small Research Awards only): Provide letter(s) of support from department chair/program director.
- j) **Scientific References** (not to exceed one page): This includes citations listed in the narrative.
- k) **Curriculum Vitae:** (not to exceed 5 pages/ per PI/Co-PI/Co-I): Applicants may use any standardized CV format, or institutional ones (e.g., NIH Biographical Sketch, NSF Biographical Sketch, etc.).

## ELIGIBILITY

PIs/Co-PIs must be permanent, full-time faculty at USC. Tenure track and non-tenure track faculty are eligible; visiting and adjunct faculty are not eligible to apply.

## GRANT CONDITIONS:

- Awardees commit to submitting in the future an application to a funding opportunity (Funding Target) sponsored by a federal funding agency. Failure to pursue submission will lead to loss of eligibility for the PI to submit to future ORIF funding opportunities.
- Failure to spend at least half of the awarded funds within six months of the project start date may result in suspension of remaining funds.
- It is expected that PIs/co-PIs commit appropriate effort to the proposed project. PIs/co-PIs should request salary support based on the investigator's institutional base salary prorated for their commitment on the project. Salary costs charged cannot exceed a salary cap of \$203,700. If using the [salary cap](#), do not include a cost-of-living increase in the years after the salary cap of \$203,700 is reached. In addition to salary costs, fringe benefits should be requested at a rate of 33.5%. Investigators may elect to cost share some or all of this effort. This is acceptable, however, investigators must include a letter from their home department or school validating this support.
- This award will not provide financial support beyond the duration of the award and does not carry the opportunity for renewal.
- Funds not spent by the end of the project period will be returned to the Office of Research.
- Sub-contracts are not permitted under this program.
- Awardees have discretion in the budgeting and re-budgeting of funds to meet their research needs within the guidelines of the fund and the terms of the proposal. However, funds may not be transferred to another project or to other researchers or institutions.
- Awards include fringe benefits but are not assessed facilities & administration costs (i.e., indirect costs).
- Salary support for postdocs, graduate student RAs, undergraduate researchers, and other student wages are eligible however, do not fund student tuition and other student fees (such as health insurance).

- Awards do not pay for consultants.
- All USC rules, with respect to conflict of interest, human subject research, animal research, etc., apply to projects funded under this program. Funding will only be provided following confirmation that all pertinent reviews have been submitted for approval by relevant committees (e.g.: IRB, IACUC).
- Faculty funded by the NSF are required to complete the Responsible Conduct of Research. Funding will only be provided following confirmation of course completion. Click [here](#) for more information prior to transfer of award funds.

Please contact the Office of Research Initiatives & Facilities (ORIF) at [orif@usc.edu](mailto:orif@usc.edu) should you have additional questions regarding allowable expenses.

## REVIEW CRITERIA

Application review criteria will be based on the following: (1) Scientific Approach: Rigor and technical merit; (2) Significance/Broader Impacts: Impact on knowledge, practice, outcomes, or policy; societal benefit; contribution to scientific inquiry and discovery; (3) Feasibility: Ability of the project to be completed within the designated project period; (4) Potential of Future Funding: A Funding Target expecting to yield a return on investment of at least 10x the funding requested has been specified, and this is an appropriate and realistic Funding Target based on the PI/Co-PI/Co-I's expertise and funding history with the specific subagency sponsoring the Funding Target; (5) Budget: Cost-effectiveness and availability of any support/match funding from a USC school or program. Reviewers will consider whether the budget and the requested period of support are fully justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed activities.

In addition to a peer review, applications will be evaluated programmatically in terms of this program's and the university's strategic research priorities. Funding decisions will be made on the basis of both the peer and programmatic reviews.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** The Office of Research supports a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Proposals should incorporate meaningful DEI practices across the project team and proposed activities. This will be a consideration during programmatic review.

## NOTIFICATION AND TERM OF AWARD

In the event of a favorable panel recommendation, and approval by the Vice President of Research, applicants will be notified of the amount and conditions of the award. It is anticipated that award decisions will be announced by end of February, 2023.

## REPORTING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SUPPORT

Awardees of the President's Sustainability Research Award are required to submit a brief 1-page mid-term report by March, 2024 as well as a final report (including an accounting of expenditures and any external support received). A formal request for the report will be sent to awardees. Portions of the report may be reprinted to build support for the fund among the university community and to make decisions about how best to use the fund to promote productivity in the future.

Any publication or creative endeavor arising from work supported by the fund must acknowledge the *President's Sustainability Research Award*.

## PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Submit your proposal application utilizing the Office of Research Initiatives & Facilities application submission and reporting portal.

Go to <https://orif.usc.edu/funding/oor-portal/> to log in (or create an account for yourself), using your USC email address.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION AND PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION**

We encourage inquiries concerning this funding opportunity and welcome the opportunity to answer questions from potential applicants. For additional information or inquiries, please send an email to [orif@usc.edu](mailto:orif@usc.edu) with “President’s Sustainability Research Award” in the subject line.