



# USC University of Southern California

## OFFICE OF RESEARCH & INNOVATION

### Request For Proposals Student Empowerment Award

#### **FUNDING ORGANIZATION APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**USC Office of Research & Innovation (OORI)  
5 PM Pacific Time on March 4, Annually.** Proposals submitted after this deadline will be rejected without review. When a due date falls on a weekend, federal holiday, or when USC offices are closed due to weather or other circumstances, the application deadline is automatically extended to the next business day.

#### **MERIT REVIEW**

**April-May**

#### **PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW**

**June**

#### **NOTIFICATION**

**June**

#### **EARLIEST AWARD DATE**

**August**

#### **AWARD PROJECT PERIOD**

**Maximum project period is one year.**

#### **FUNDING PER AWARD**

**\$15,000**

All awards are subject to the yearly availability of funds, terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations.

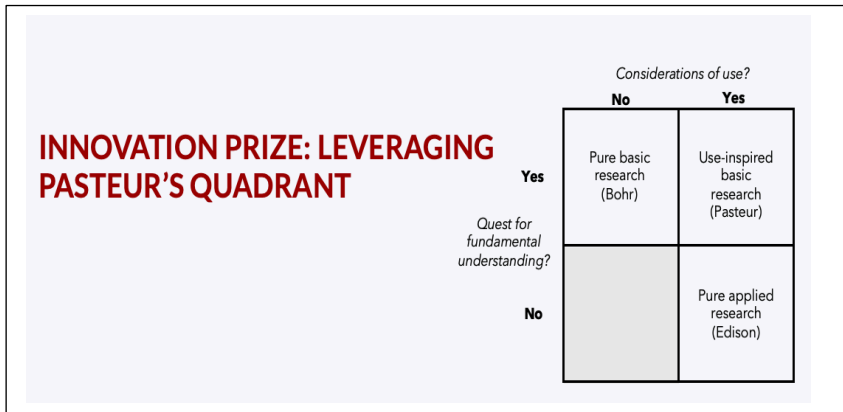
#### **BACKGROUND**

The University of Southern California (USC) Office of Research & Innovation (OORI) has established a competitive program to support USC undergraduate or graduate students and their faculty mentors to pursue groundbreaking use-inspired research and early-stage entrepreneurship that translates student intellectual property for social and economic good. Faculty mentors are responsible for submitting the proposal for teams that must include student researchers who represent multiple disciplinary domains. Teams may also include postdoctoral researchers and high school students.

#### **OPPORTUNITY**

The Student Empowerment Award has two programs:

(1) **Innovation Prize.** The Innovation Prize track funds multiple \$15,000 awards. Innovation Prize projects must promote use-inspired research. Pasteur's Quadrant (first Figure) shows that research can be classified by whether it advances human knowledge by seeking a fundamental understanding of nature, or whether it is primarily motivated by the need to solve immediate problems. The Quadrant argues that one-dimensional research endeavors (i.e., those primarily focused on achieving basic research goals, or solely focused on creating applied research outcomes), will result in no real traction towards achieving both discovery and invention. Funded Innovation Prize awards track must focus on use-inspired research that also promotes greater fundamental understanding of an underlying domain.



(2) **Entrepreneurship Prize.** The Entrepreneurship Prize track funds multiple \$15,000 awards. Entrepreneurship Prize projects must pursue the commercialization of intellectual property (IP) created by student inventors (second Figure). These efforts include, but are not limited to idea generation, business plan development, market data gathering, product development, and proof-of-concept validation. In accordance with USC's Intellectual Property Policy (4/3/2001), if the student



work contains software, patentable subject matter, inventions or other IP and the student uses a significant amount of USC facilities, funds, resources and supplies in those works, the University owns the underlying IP in the student works. However, support under an Entrepreneurship Prize award is not sufficient to claim USC ownership of the IP or form the basis of a claim for University equity in a resulting student-founded company.

## FOCUS

The goal of the Student Empowerment Awards is to facilitate faculty mentorship that supports the involvement of USC students in innovative research and entrepreneurship. Incentives for students to collaborate across disciplines can be sparse with limited resources available for student-initiated research and commercialization. This Award addresses these limitations by engaging students across all USC schools and disciplines to develop projects and activities with meaningful, long-lasting societal impact.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Return on Investment for this internal funding program will be measured by the success of student teams and mentors in obtaining external support from government agencies and private sources, or the number of student-led companies that are successful at obtaining investment from incubators, accelerators, venture capital firms and other external sources. Entrepreneurship Prize mentors are encouraged to apply for support

under the OORI SBIR/STTR Planning Award program as appropriate (<https://rii.usc.edu/funding/small-business-innovation-research-sbir-small-business-technology-transfer-sttr-award/>).

## INNOVATION RESOURCES

Proposals selected for an Entrepreneurship Prize are required to contact the USC Stevens Center for Innovation (USC Stevens). USC Stevens is the university's technology licensing office responsible for the translation of USC research into products for public benefit through licenses, collaborations, and the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation. USC Stevens staff can provide critical guidance related to the invention disclosure and technology licensing processes, as well as an overview of USC's policies related to intellectual property, researcher IP rights and responsibilities. Applicants should contact USC Stevens by email to [stvinfo@usc.edu](mailto:stvinfo@usc.edu).

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Each proposal must consist of a student-faculty research team, with at least one USC faculty member serving as the mentor and proposal lead responsible for submitting the application, and a three or more member USC undergraduate or graduate student team. Teams may also include postdoctoral researchers and high school students. Student teams must demonstrate a multidisciplinary focus by including students majoring in more than a single discipline.

## PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must carefully follow instructions. Information uploaded beyond what is requested will not be included in the proposal package provided to reviewers; proposal documents must be converted to PDFs prior to uploading to the application portal.

- a) **Award Program:** Specify the type of Student Empowerment Award you are applying for (*Innovation Prize* or *Entrepreneurship Prize*).
- b) **Brief Description** (not to exceed 60 words): A succinct description of the proposed work.
- c) **Abstract** (not to exceed 20 lines of text): Provide a stand-alone succinct description.
- d) **Program Plan** (not to exceed 1 page): Page limits are inclusive of figures and tables and include 1" margins of single-spaced text in 11-point Arial font. The following headers should be included:
  - a. **Significance:** Provide a brief background and the specific aims of the project. Explain the project's specific innovations and significance.
  - b. **Expertise:** Identify a USC PI (or Co-PIs) to serve as the faculty mentor for the proposed effort and the student team.
  - c. **Innovation:** Discuss the innovation of the proposed effort, whether it be research-based or invention-based. Present concepts, approaches/methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions that are novel.
  - d. **Approach:** Present the approach that will be followed, including any aspects of experimental design. If applicable, describe how the proposed project can follow a path to commercialization.
  - e. **Outcomes:** Describe the anticipated outcomes of the project and how the project results will be disseminated. Provide a clear timeline and the specific milestones to be achieved, and anticipated next steps. Describe the timeline and approach for taking the proposed research into translation, or the proposed IP to commercialization.
- e) **Mentoring Plan** (not to exceed 1 page): A Mentoring Plan should discuss specific approaches to be utilized by the faculty mentor(s) explaining how they will mentor research or promote commercialization, business partnerships, and start-up creation. The plan must clarify how student

involvement does not simply support ongoing faculty activities but empowers students to launch and engage in research or entrepreneurship activities that would not have been possible without a Student Empowerment Award.

- f) **Budget and Budget Justification** (not to exceed 2 pages): Specify a project start and end date. Utilize standard budget categories, including only allowable budget cost categories detailed in the **Grant Conditions** section below.
- g) **Innovation Ecosystem Commitment** (not to exceed 1 page): USC OORI is committed to establishing a thriving innovation ecosystem at USC that will build collaborations between USC researchers and venture capital firms, accelerators, incubators, small and large businesses, and foundations. OORI works closely with USC University Advancement to develop these partnerships. The proposal must include a statement in which the applicant commits to contacting USC University Advancement at [hpourman@usc.edu](mailto:hpourman@usc.edu) to discuss the potential for obtaining funding for research directions that may arise from the activities through this award, e.g., from venture capital firms, accelerators, incubators, small and large businesses, and foundations that are part of USC's developing innovation ecosystem. It is expected that such funding ultimately will lead to the commercial licensing of IP.
- h) **References** (not to exceed 1 page): This includes citations listed in the narrative.
- i) **Curriculum Vitae** (not to exceed 5 pages per mentor and per student): Applicants may use any standardized CV format (e.g., NIH Biographical Sketch, NSF Biographical Sketch, etc.).

## GRANT CONDITIONS

OORI's awards and grant programs are administered by the Research Initiatives and Infrastructure (RII) office.

- At the time of being notified by RII that an award will be made and as a condition of funding, awardees will provide to RII the name, title, and email address of a USC senior business official who will establish an internal funding account in which RII funds for the award will be transferred. The account must be unique to this award with no additional funds added.
- Within one month of being notified by RII that an award will be made and as a condition of funding, awardees will provide RII with an account number and enable view access for the account, such that RII staff will be able to view the account balance. If this information is not provided to RII within this timeframe, RII may elect to rescind the award and use the funds to make an award to another applicant.
- Awardees commit to attend an in-person ceremony with OORI leadership at a date and time to be determined.
- Failure to spend at least half of the awarded funds within six months of the project start date may result in the suspension of the remaining funds.
- Awardees have 12 months from the date funds are received to complete projects. Funds not expended by that time are returned to OORI to support other awards.
- This award will not provide financial support beyond the duration of the award and does not carry the opportunity for renewal.
- Awards are not transferable to other researchers or institutions. Recipients must be faculty of USC during the award period.
- 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 other researchers or institutions.
- All USC rules, concerning conflict of interest, human subject research, animal research, etc., apply to projects funded under this program. Funding only will be provided following confirmation that all pertinent reviews have been submitted for approval by relevant committees (e.g., IRB, IACUC).
- Allowable budget expenses:
  - Graduate/undergraduate student RAs/administrative personnel salary & fringe, excluding funding student tuition and other student-related fees.

- Materials & supplies
- Travel
- Consultants
- Subcontracts
- Other expenses (equipment purchases require pre-approval)
- Non-allowable budget expenses:
  - Faculty and postdoctoral researcher salary & fringe
  - Student tuition and other student fees (such as health insurance).

## REVIEW CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed by a standing committee of researchers with expertise relevant to the areas of proposed research. Review criteria will be based on the following:

1. *Research Focus (Innovation Award only)*: The research focus is on new and creative approaches and breakthrough interdisciplinary ideas that turn research advances into societal benefit.
2. *Commercial Potential (Entrepreneurship Prize only)*: The probability that an application will result in a commercial product, and the viability of the partnership in USC the student team.
3. *Significance/Broader Impacts*: Innovation Prize: Impact on knowledge, practice, outcomes, or policy; societal benefit; contribution to fundamental understanding; potential for use-translation and use-inspired application; Entrepreneurship Prize: potential for IP commercialization; societal benefit.
4. *Mentoring Plan*: Well-described ability to mentor and oversee a student group of researchers or early-stage inventors. Mentoring can focus on a broad range of activities that includes, but is not limited to, method and research design (Innovation Prize) and development of products, prototypes, and business plan (Entrepreneurship Prize).
5. *Budget*: Reviewers will consider whether the budget and the requested period of support are fully justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed activities.

## PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW

OORI will incorporate aspects of existing policies and procedures regarding funding decisions that are utilized by major Federal funding agencies like NIH and NSF, i.e., proposals will be subject to peer review and programmatic review. Programmatic review assures efficacy and strategic alignment with the University's strategic priorities. Funding decisions will be based on both peer and programmatic reviews.

## REPORTING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SUPPORT

Awardees will be required to submit a one-page progress report, which will be due six months after initiation of the project and at project completion. This report must detail, financial, and research performance over the preceding months. All publications arising from work supported under this program must acknowledge the Student Empowerment Award provided by the USC Office of Research and Innovation.

## PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Submit your proposal application utilizing the RII application submission and reporting portal. Go to <https://rii.usc.edu/funding/oor-portal/> to log in or create an account using your USC email address.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

We encourage inquiries to RII concerning this funding opportunity and welcome the opportunity to answer questions from potential applicants. For additional information or inquiries, please send an email to [rii@usc.edu](mailto:rii@usc.edu) with “Early Entrepreneurship Student Empowerment Award” in the subject line.

## APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- Award Program
- Brief Description

- Abstract
- Program Plan
  - Significance
  - Expertise
  - Innovation
  - Approach
  - Outcomes
- Mentoring Plan
- Innovation Ecosystem Commitment
- Budget and Budget Justification
- References
- Curriculum Vitae

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Q1: Can I request all the available funding, or should I ask for an averaged amount based upon the number of anticipated awards and the funding? Could you fund more or less than the anticipated awards?**

A1: The budget you submit will be subject to both a peer and programmatic review. You are expected to provide a justification for whatever you request. We have deliberately avoided giving more specific advice or guidelines to promote maximum flexibility, creativity, and innovation in submitted proposals. Hence, the number of anticipated awards is a general estimate to give applicants some sense of the scope of work. It is certainly the case that we could receive more (or less) applications than anticipated. Funding may be increased (or decreased) depending on the availability of funds and other programmatic factors.

**Q2: If my proposal is selected for funding, will I automatically receive my requested amount?**

A2: Not necessarily. The budget is subject to peer and programmatic review, and a recommended award may lower than what was requested.

**Q3: I am dissatisfied with my review. Can I rebut the review and get a new one?**

A3: RII goes to considerable effort to ensure that the peer review is fair and impartial. Constituting review committees and organizing reviews takes considerable time and effort. Thus, RII does not have the resources or a mechanism to re-review proposals.