USC's Partnership for Sponsored Research and Other Scholarly Activities

The University of Southern California is committed to helping its faculty secure financial resources in support of their research. Doing this requires a partnership among faculty investigators, schools (and their departments, research centers and institutes), and central administration on extramurally sponsored projects. This document describes the roles and responsibilities of these groups.

1. Principal Investigator Responsibilities

Each sponsored project at USC is led by a principal investigator (PI, or in some cases multiple PIs), who is normally a faculty member of the university. The university empowers its investigators by providing them with the authority to lead and manage these projects. The PI has primary responsibility for the technical and administrative success of the project, including the ideas and methods that underlie the research or scholarly activity, creation and execution of the research plan, and academic integrity in all aspects of the work. The PI is also responsible for assuring that the work conducted under the project adheres to the terms of the award or agreement, and also to the policies of the sponsor and those of USC.

Examples of the PI's post-award responsibilities include:

- Execution of the project as outlined in the funded proposal.
- Carrying out the project's financial plan as presented in the proposal, or making changes to the plan following the sponsor's and USC's policies and procedures.
- Reporting project progress and submitting deliverables to the sponsor as outlined in the terms of award.
- Responding promptly to staff requests for approvals, information or decisions, particularly for the establishment of accounts
- Ensuring that an accurate record is maintained of project related expenses.
- Selecting, training, and evaluating project staff and students.
- Complying with all USC policies and procedures, maintaining high standards of research integrity, and protecting the welfare of research subjects.
- Complying with all applicable sponsor rules, regulations and/or terms and conditions of the award.

Although the PI is usually assisted by administrative staff for the creation of budgets, protocols, the Cayuse SP proposal submission, and the management of project funds, the ultimate responsibility for the financial and administrative management of the project rests with the PI. By approving a proposal submission, protocol, Medicare Coverage Analysis (for clinical trials), certification or the like, the PI signifies that he or she has read and agrees to these responsibilities and the contained information.

2. Schools, Departments and Center Responsibilities

Schools are responsible for protecting the university and ensuring that administrative support is provided to investigators for the preparation of budgets and forms and support in the fiscal and administrative management of sponsored projects. In some schools, this support is provided centrally by the school as a service for all of the school's PIs; in other schools, departments, centers or institutes provide this service locally, possibly in combination with central services. No matter which approach is followed, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that no PI is left without administrative support, that all PIs are aware of where to obtain support and that sufficient resources are available to meet reasonable PI needs.

Research administrators within schools, departments and centers offer a valuable service to PIs by providing a bridge to central administration. Because they often provide a direct personal interface to the PI, these local administrators can assist in finding and securing assistance from central administration. Although ultimate responsibility for compliance with rules, policies and regulations rests with the PI, research administrators should be knowledgeable in these areas and should be prepared to advise and support PIs to avoid mistakes.

Toward this end, research administrators should not approval proposals, protocols or the like on behalf of PIs, and should strive to ensure that PIs have read and understand the contained information. Because information on outside financial interests is confidential, research administrators should not answer conflict of interest questions, and should not complete conflict of interest disclosure forms.

3. Central Administrative Responsibilities

Central administration provides quality assurance with respect to the awards and agreements that the university negotiates and executes. This includes:

Research Integrity and Ethics with respect to protecting animal and human subjects, managing conflicts of interest, preventing scientific misconduct, and ensuring safety.
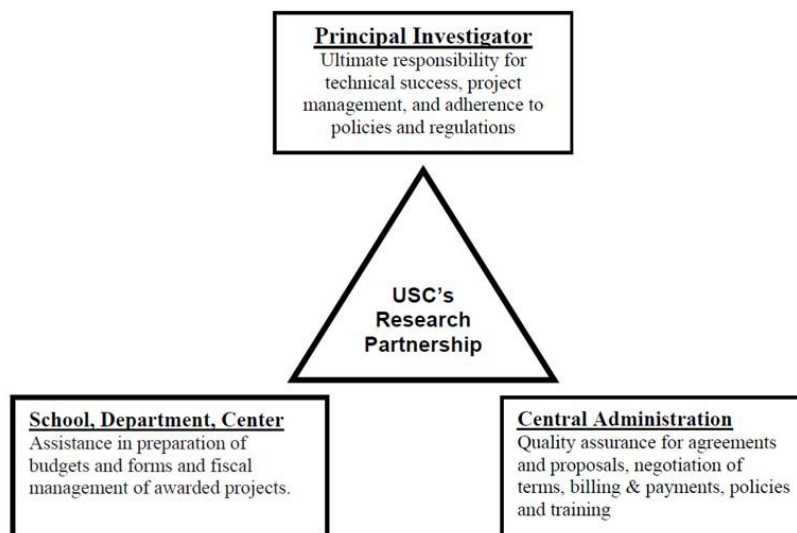
Academic Principles, ensuring that academic freedom is protected, students are not restricted from participation in research, work can be independently and openly disseminated, and work is not designed to serve an overtly proprietary purpose (such as product endorsement or advertising).

Fiscal Responsibility, ensuring that the university is capable of meeting contractual obligations and that agreements do not expose USC to unwarranted risk or liability. Central administration's responsibilities include negotiating agreement terms, billing and financial reporting to sponsors, and payments to vendors and employees.

To meet these responsibilities, central administration oversees the creation and execution of research policies, in cooperation with the Academic Senate. Central administration

also provides training for research administrators, investigators and students in all of the above areas.

These quality assurance functions are coordinated by the Office of Research, among the various administrative units described in the *Guide to Research*. The Office of Research also supports the PIs by assisting in the creation of multi-investigator proposals, particularly large proposals that span multiple schools. Through the Center for Excellence in Research, the Office of Research also provides education and mentoring on proposal preparation, research strategy and innovation in research.

Principal Investigator
Ultimate responsibility for technical success, project management, and adherence to policies and regulations

USC's Research Partnership

School, Department, Center
Assistance in preparation of budgets and forms and fiscal management of awarded projects.

Central Administration
Quality assurance for agreements and proposals, negotiation of terms, billing & payments, policies and training

4. Detailed Responsibilities

Primary responsibilities are defined in the following pages by unit of the university, according to these categories: (1) identification of funding opportunities, (2) proposal preparation, (3) proposal review and approval, (4) proposal submissions, (5) award acceptance, (6) award set-up, (7) conducting the project – financial, (8) invoicing and financial reporting, (9) personnel and effort certification, (10) data and intellectual property management, (11) prior approvals, (12) subcontracts and subawards, (13) project end and closeout, and (14) audits. **Additional secondary and assistance obligations are denoted in a separate spreadsheet titled "Research Roles and Responsibilities."**