

# **ASPIRE Proposal Preparation Workshop**

31 Oct 2025

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# What is ASPIRE?

## Advanced Support for Innovative Research Excellence

- All USC Campuses
- Emphasis on support for **early-career faculty who intend to pursue subsequent extramural funding**
- \$15,000
- 1 July 2026- 31 Sept 2027 (15 months)

**Why should you apply for ASPIRE?**

# **Previous ASPIRE Awards**

**2025**

- **1 applied**

**2024**

- **2 applied**

**2023**

- **Mary Mills – 4 applied**

**2022**

- **Titan Paul - 1 applied**

# Specifics

- Application Deadline: **5pm Jan 21, 2026**
- Allowable Costs:
  - One month of faculty summer salary
  - Salary for undergraduates, technicians, etc.
  - Consultants/contractors
  - Equipment
  - Supplies, including software and participant incentives
  - Animal maintenance and sample testing
  - Travel essential to the project (not conferences)
  - Graduate student tuition

# Application Components

- Cover Page
- **Proposal Narrative (3 pages max)**
- Bibliography
- CV (2-page max)
- Budget (using the provided template)
- Budget Justification (using the provided template)
- Current and Pending Support (using the provided template)
- Appendix
  - Previous VPR Funding Statement titles and dates of previous RISE/ASPIRE awards, description of the impact of the awards on your research and scholarly activity.
  - Letters of support if needed.

# Three Page Proposal

- Use the specified categories
  - A brief discussion of the **background and significance** of the proposed idea, including its relation to the present state of knowledge in the field.
  - A detailed **narrative of the project** that includes:
    - Significance of the research
    - Objectives
    - Research tasks and expected accomplishments
    - Specific outcomes of the project
    - Discussion of potential external funding sources
    - Timeline
  - A maximum of one page should be devoted to discussing **how the research activity will advance your research career.**

# Writing a Successful ASPIRE Proposal

- Review an example of a previously funded proposal
- Start early
- Write for a broad audience
- Get feedback from colleagues
  - Ask them to point out the flaws so you can address them



# Writing Style

- Persuasive not technical
  - Convince them that this research is worth funding
    - Need a good question
  - Convince them that you have the required skills
    - Tell them why you are the right person to complete this research
  - Convince them that it will produce the desired results
    - Show them that you have a track record of producing these products
- Understandable to a broad audience
  - Will be reviewed by faculty at other USC campuses

# Example Timeline

	July-Sept 26	Oct-Dec 26	Jan-Mar 27	April –Sept 27
Objective 1 (Cloning)				
Objective 2 (Yeast Assays)				
Objective 3 (Write Manuscript)				
Apply for Federal Funding				

# Two Page CV

Include the following categories:

- Education
- Professional experience
- Evidence of scholarship: most significant refereed journal articles, books, book chapters, etc.
- Significant accomplishments and contributions
- Other information as appropriate
  - do not format the CV/Resume as a narrative biographical statement

# Budget and Budget Justification

- Use the provided forms

# Current and Pending

- Include the RISE Proposal

## CURRENT AND PENDING SUPPORT FORM

Failure to provide this information may delay consideration of this proposal.

Investigator:		Other agencies to which this proposal has been/will be submitted*:			
*If this project has previously been funded by another entity, please list and furnish information for immediately preceding funding period.					
Please check HERE <input type="checkbox"/> if no other project support is current, pending, or planned at this time					
Support:	<input type="checkbox"/> Current	<input type="checkbox"/> Pending	<input type="checkbox"/> Submission Planned in Near Future		
Project/Proposal Title:					
Source of Support/Funding agency:					
Total Award Amount: \$			Total Award Period Covered:		
Location of Project:					
Months of Your Time Committed to Project (YY: #mts)		FY <input type="text"/>	FY <input type="text"/>	FY <input type="text"/>	Summer: <input type="text"/>
Support:	<input type="checkbox"/> Current	<input type="checkbox"/> Pending	<input type="checkbox"/> Submission Planned in Near Future		
Project/Proposal Title:					
Source of Support/Funding agency:					
Total Award Amount: \$			Total Award Period Covered:		
Location of Project:					
Months of Your Time Committed to Project (YY: #mts)		FY <input type="text"/>	FY <input type="text"/>	FY <input type="text"/>	Summer: <input type="text"/>
Support:	<input type="checkbox"/> Current	<input type="checkbox"/> Pending	<input type="checkbox"/> Submission Planned in Near Future		
Project/Proposal Title:					
Source of Support:					
Total Award Amount: \$			Total Award Period Covered:		
Location of Project:					
Months of Your Time Committed to Project (YY: #mts)		FY <input type="text"/>	FY <input type="text"/>	FY <input type="text"/>	Summer: <input type="text"/>

# Submission Process

- Combine all documents into a single pdf (in the order specified)
- Submit to USCERA **before** 5 pm on the deadline
  - Login to USCERA
  - Create new Proposal
    - Title
    - Start Date 1 July 2026
    - End Date 31 Sept 2027
    - Internal Request
    - Total cost
    - IRB/IACUC
  - Internal Commit Form
  - Upload Proposal
  - Start Approval Process

# ASPIRE Research Grant Proposal Evaluation Rubric

v. 10/8/2025

Criteria	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
<b>Justification of Need or Scholarly Significance</b>	Presents a compelling, well-substantiated rationale of the proposed work's importance in the field, grounded in disciplinary context; clearly articulates a gap or problem.	Provides a strong, clear justification with good disciplinary grounding and relevance to the field.	Presents a reasonable argument; may lack depth or specificity.	Justification underdeveloped or general; lacks specific relevance.	Justification is weak, unclear, or missing; fails to demonstrate relevance to the field.
<b>Presentation of Research Question, Hypothesis, or Problem Statement including the Aims, Goals, and/or Objectives for this work</b>	Clear, specific, logically structured, and tightly aligned with the overall project rationale.	Clearly stated and well aligned with project rationale; may have minor ambiguities.	Stated in general terms but may lack clarity, specificity, or logical alignment with project rationale.	Vague, overly broad, or does not clearly define project rationale.	Unclear, unrealistic, or absent.
<b>Appropriateness of Approach (Plan of Work or Methods) for proposed project</b>	Approach demonstrates disciplinary rigor; thoroughly appropriate and justified; well-aligned with the proposed project.	Approach is appropriate and aligned, though some details of the approach or justification may be lacking.	Approach is generally suitable; some aspects may be underdeveloped, misaligned, or not fully justified.	Approach is minimally described or justified; lacks depth; weakly connected to proposed project.	Approach is inappropriate, not justified, poorly defined, or missing.
<b>Significance and/or Innovation of Outcomes or Deliverables</b>	Outcomes/deliverables are significant; demonstrate clear innovation or advancement in the field.	Outcomes/deliverables are meaningful with potential of innovation and contribution to the field.	Outcomes/deliverables are reasonable; may be limited in significance or innovation.	Outcomes/deliverables are weakly defined or lack meaningful impact.	Outcomes/deliverables are unclear, insignificant, or poorly developed.
<b>Feasibility of Scope of Work Within Time Period</b>	The scope of work is well-defined, with detailed milestones/deliverables tied to timeframe; appears realistically achievable within the proposed timeframe; clearly demonstrates realistic planning.	Scope appears feasible and well considered in relation to the timeframe, with only minor concerns.	Scope seems reasonable but may require adjustments to fit within the proposed timeframe.	Scope seems overly ambitious for timeline or vague; does not provide sufficient evidence the work can be completed within the timeframe.	Scope appears unrealistic within the proposed timeframe, with significant concerns about feasibility.
<b>Clarity and Accessibility of Writing</b> <i>(Please provide specific guidance for improvement in comments below )</i>	Writing is exceptionally clear, well-organized, focused, accessible, and engaging for readers across disciplines.	Writing is clear, generally well-organized, and mostly accessible with occasional jargon, complexity, or vagueness.	Writing is generally understandable with moderate areas of improvement needed; such as jargon-use, complexity, or vagueness.	Writing overall is somewhat unclear or difficult to follow; may include significant jargon-use, complexity, or vagueness.	Writing is unclear, disorganized, or inaccessible to non-specialists.

*While the following criteria are not rated they will be taken into consideration in final funding decisions*

The proposal justifies this work as a necessary step towards competitive external funding including identifying specific funders and articulating alignment with program priorities

Budget seems appropriate to accomplish the proposed project

# Spending the Funds

- You need a project number
  - Summer Salary
  - Student Hiring
  - Travel Authority (TA)
  - Equipment - Sole Source, Multiple Quotes, Out for Bid
  - Supplies
    - P-Card
    - Special cases – Incentives/Gift Cards, food, plants...