Proposal Readiness and Enhancement Program (PREP)
Spring 2026 Request for Proposals (RFP)

Principal investigators (PIs) are rarely able to access funding to support costs associated with preparing a grant application or responding to reviewer comments. However, activities such as working with graphic designers and external reviewers are increasingly required to make proposals nationally competitive. Given that there are limited opportunities to access financial support for the specific purpose of proposal development, ISU's Office for Research is pleased to announce a new internal funding opportunity, the Proposal Readiness and Enhancement Program (PREP) Grant. This internal grant is designed to help PIs develop and submit highly competitive external research proposals by providing funding for a variety of pre-award expenses. Allowable expenses can include classes or workshops for the PI that are designed to enhance grantsmanship, graphic design support for proposals, obtaining external peer reviewers for proposals, addressing reviewer comments, and more; a complete list of allowable expenses is available below.

Purpose

PREP supports activities that strengthen <u>external</u> proposal submissions through revision, resubmission, or new proposal development. The goal is to secure external grants by addressing reviewer concerns, enhancing proposal presentation, and/or leveraging external expertise.

Amount

PREP will provide up to $3,500 to support eligible projects. There is no minimum request, although the total request amount will be considered during review. If the cost of services exceeds $3,500, applicants are required to work with the Office of Research Development to access additional funding.

Eligible Activities

Funding may support new grant proposals, grant renewals, and the revision and resubmission of unsuccessful grant applications. PREP funding may be used to support the following:

- Soliciting external peer reviews before submitting a new or revised proposal. These reviews must focus on a scholarly commentary; copy-edits and writing support are non-compliant uses of funds.
- Consulting with technical experts (e.g., biostatisticians) off campus.
- Collaborating with graphic designers or artists to improve proposal visualizations.

- Enrolling in specialized proposal preparation courses for complex proposals (e.g., NIH R01, R15, NSF CAREER, NEH Fellowships, etc.). Applicants must include course details and a plan for proposal submission with their application package.
- Other necessary investments are designed to address reviewer comments from previously submitted proposals.

PIs are welcome to submit applications for other proposal enhancement activities. When considering applying for funds for other services, applicants are strongly encouraged to connect with the Office of Research Development and/or the Office of Sponsored Programs to ensure their application does not duplicate existing support services. Furthermore, junior faculty are especially encouraged to connect with these offices to obtain feedback on application drafts before submitting proposals to PREP.

Applicants seeking preliminary data, novel method development, and/or course buy-outs should apply to the Support Program for Advancing Research and Creativity (SPARC).

Application Requirements

Applications must include:

- A two-page proposal narrative describing the project, proposal enhancement plan, and timeline for submission. In the case of resubmissions, specific improvement strategies should also be included.
    - The proposal development timeline should detail when and how the PI will ensure that they will submit their grant to the targeted funding opportunity and how they will address potential pitfalls.
    - A link to the notice of funding opportunity (NOFO).
    - If the PI requests funding for a proposal preparation course, then a course description should be provided.
- A one-page budget narrative with a description of the item/services to be procured. Faculty are welcome to secure their own vendor, but they may also work with the Office of Research Development to identify service costs. Specific vendors and costs for services are required for applications to be considered complete.
- A CV in the form of the targeted grant (e.g., a biosketch for awards targeting grants from the National Institutes of Health). No page limits.
- If applicable, proposals must include reviewer feedback if the external submission has been previously denied. Reviewer feedback will only be used to evaluate the quality of the proposal enhancement plan and will not be shared beyond the review committee. No page limits.

- Service quotes and other documentation should be included as needed for each proposal. No page limits.

All proposal elements will be routed through Cayuse for signatures. Applicants are *strongly* encouraged to coordinate with their department chair and dean prior to submission. Applicants may receive only one PREP award every three years.

Review Process

Applicants must demonstrate that the proposed enhancement activities will substantially improve proposal competitiveness. Funded projects are expected to follow the proposed timeline for submission. Applications will be evaluated by reviewers from the Office for Research and the Research Council using the rubric provided in Appendix A. Funding recommendations will be made to the Vice President for Research, who is responsible for all final decisions.

Deadlines

Given the nature of this grant, PREP applications will be accepted three times a year. **The first PREP deadline is March 1st, 2026**. The next deadline will be in early Fall, 2026. A third deadline is expected in early 2027. These deadlines may be amended to better align with grant development needs.

Post-Award Grant Management

To limit the amount of time needed by PIs to manage this award, all PREP expenditures and budgets will be managed by the Office of Research Development. This will allow faculty to begin working on their projects as soon as funding decisions are made.

Note about the Future of PREP

While PREP will continue to be offered into the future, aspects of the program may be adapted in response to faculty needs and university priorities.

Appendix A: PREP Rubric

Criteria	Needs Improvement	Average	Exceptional
Project Description	The project is vague, and the central research question is unclear. Goals are not clearly stated, and outcomes are not described.	The project and goals are clearly stated. Outcomes are not specific, and success will be difficult to measure.	The description is exceptionally clear and is well-motivated. The goals are clearly stated, and measurable outcomes are described.
Proposal Enhancement Plan	The proposal enhancement plan is vague; it does not clearly address reviewer comments or outline a clear plan for proposal development.	The plan is clearly written, but lacks some important details. Reviewers have questions about how the proposed activities will increase competitiveness.	The proposal development plan details a specific improvement strategy. The strategy comprehensively addresses challenges.
Timeline and Feasibility	The timeline of the project is poorly described, and/or the project benchmarks are unreasonable.	The project timeline is reasonable and aligns with the targeted funding opportunity.	The project timeline considers both the funding opportunity and the PI's professional obligations.
Alignment with NOFO	The project is not clearly related to the NOFO.	The project shows alignment with the NOFO.	The project is aligned with the NOFO and addresses known challenges associated with it.
Priority	Moderately competitive opportunity.	Competitive grant opportunity.	Highly competitive national grant opportunity.
Additional Comments and Funding Recommendation			