

SPARC Graduate Research Grant

Support to Promote Advancement of Research and Creativity

2020-2021 SPARC Application Guidelines

Application Due Date:

Wednesday, October 14, 2020 by 5:00 pm

OVERVIEW

Sponsored by the Office of the Vice President for Research, the SPARC Graduate Research Grant is a merit-based award designed to ignite research and creative excellence across all disciplines at USC. Students are required to write a grant proposal which describes a project to advance their dissertation or thesis research. Those found meritorious will receive up to \$5000 to fund innovative research and creative projects. The grant may be used to support the student in a variety of ways, including salary, supplies and other costs essential to promote research, creative and scholarly activity.

The overall objectives of the SPARC Graduate Research Grant are to provide research support and to encourage outstanding students to develop proposals to enhance their dissertation or thesis research during their graduate career at the University of South Carolina. Importantly, the process of applying for a SPARC Graduate Research Grant will train students to write competitive research proposals, which will lead to more students with the skills and background necessary to seek national fellowship awards from the federal government and private foundations.

Please note two major changes for 2020-2021 SPARC Grant Program:

- **No domestic or international travel is allowed in the budget.** This includes travel to conduct the project as well as conference travel.
If circumstances change during the project period, and the university allows travel, then 2020-2021 SPARC grant awardees will be allowed to submit a modified budget, which may include travel, for approval.
 - **Cost share is not allowed.**
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ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

- All Doctoral students in their second year (or later) are eligible to apply (second year students should have **completed** two full-time academic year semesters in their degree program at the time of application). In other words, first year doctoral students are not eligible to apply for the SPARC Graduate Research Grant. There are no exceptions to this guideline.
 - MD-PhD students are eligible to apply for SPARC during the first year (or later) of the PhD phase of the program (if following plan of 2 years of MD program, 3 years of PhD program, then 2 years of MD to complete the program).
 - Master's students in terminal degree programs with a thesis requirement are also eligible to apply (those degree programs include the Master of Fine Arts and the Master of Arts in Public History). MFA and MA in Public History students may apply in their first year (or later) of graduate study at USC.
 - MD and PharmD students are not eligible to apply for SPARC grants.
 - Applicants must be current students at the time of application.
 - Students must be enrolled for a minimum of one semester post-award date.
 - Applicants must have minimum graduate GPA of 3.00.
 - International students are eligible to apply.
 - Students may receive one SPARC Graduate Research Grant during their graduate career at USC.
 - Students who have previously received a major federal or foundation grant or fellowship (such as NIH F31 Fellowship, NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, etc.) are not eligible to apply for SPARC funding.
 - Each faculty mentor can sponsor only two student SPARC applications each year (i.e. only two students per faculty mentor may apply for SPARC each year).
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FUNDS AVAILABLE

Applicants may request up to \$5000 with a project period of up to 15 months. Applicants should provide a detailed justification for the requested funds and are encouraged to request less than the maximum amount. The project start date is May 1, 2021 with a project period of 15 months; the project end date is July 31, 2022.

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND AUTHORSHIP

All participants are bound by the Responsible Conduct of Research code of ethics, the Carolinian Creed and the University's Honor Code. Violations of these codes will result in an immediate decline or withdrawal of funding and referral to the appropriate office for disciplinary measures.

The graduate student is the primary author on the proposal and is responsible for writing their own SPARC proposal. Violations related to plagiarism include, but are not limited to, copying text from previous or same round proposals without proper citations, failure to include references or to cite said references, and any other forms of misconduct or misrepresentation.

REQUIRED SPARC APPLICATION VIDEO

SPARC application workshops are offered in an online format this year.

A SPARC application video will be posted on the SPARC website. You are required to watch this video prior to applying for a SPARC grant. After watching the video, you must complete a brief SPARC application video confirmation form which is available on the website. Applications received from students who did not complete the SPARC application video confirmation form will be automatically rejected.

- If you attended a SPARC Application Workshop in previous years, you are not required to watch the application video (although you are encouraged to do so). Regardless of the year in which the workshop was attended, you are still responsible for adhering to the current year's guidelines.

Three SPARC Live Q&A sessions will be offered online. Session dates and times will be listed on the SPARC website. Although you are not required to join these sessions, you are encouraged to join and ask questions about the SPARC application process. It will be assumed that you have already watched the application video before joining one of the Q&A sessions.

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

The 2020-2021 SPARC Graduate Research Grant application due date is **Wednesday, October 14, 2020 by 5:00pm.**

Proposals submitted after 5:00 pm on the due date will be returned without review. Incomplete proposals will also be returned without review.

For the SPARC internal research grant program, proposals may be submitted up to 5:00 pm on the due date, and the internal routing can occur afterwards. (This is different from the external proposal submission process, where the Sponsored Awards Management Office has a requirement that proposals must be submitted 3 business days prior to the due date.)

Formatting Guidelines

- Do not include a cover page.
 - Center title at top of first page.
 - Under the title, write student's full name, degree program, advisor's name and anticipated defense date.
 - **The proposal may not exceed three (3) single-spaced pages.** Proposals which exceed this page limit will not be accepted. All figures and tables must be included in the three page limit. No appendices are allowed in any form. Failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in rejection of the proposal.
 - **Two** additional pages are allowed for references; they are not included in the three page limit.
 - Use Arial font and a font size of 11 points with at least 0.5 inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages.
 - No hyperlinks are allowed.
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Proposal Narrative – Use Subheadings to Help Reviewers

The proposal narrative should include the following sections (**3 page maximum**):

Background and Significance

- Project topic, research question (or hypothesis) should be clearly defined.
- Briefly discuss the proposed idea and its context relative to the current state of knowledge in the field.
- This section should explain to the reviewers why the proposed project is novel and exciting.

Project Description, Design and Approach

- Provide a detailed description of the project objectives, the proposed methods and activities and the specific anticipated outcomes. The methods and activities proposed should link directly back to the research question/project topic.
- Include a **timeline** for expected accomplishments, which should be presented as a table or other clear graphic format.
- Include a **plan for dissemination of the work**, which should mention Discover UofSC, as well as any online conferences or exhibitions where you plan to present your work. Targeted journals for publication should be included.
- If you are working with **humans or vertebrate animals**, include a statement within your project description/timeline that you will seek approval from the appropriate compliance office and will comply with all rules, regulations and training requirements. See Additional Requirements for Human/Vertebrate Animal Research for more information.

Significance of this funding to graduate experience

- Explain how this proposed research or creative activity will advance your graduate education and objectives, bridge your funding resources, or expand your research or creative direction. Explain how this project will directly contribute to your dissertation or thesis.

Bibliography (or Works cited, References Cited, etc.)

- This is not included in the proposal page limit; up to two additional pages are allowed.
- Use the standard convention of your discipline, including the author(s), title or article, journal title, volume, pages and date.
- Bibliographies are a required component of your proposal. Proposals which do not contain a bibliography will be considered incomplete.

When writing your proposal narrative, keep in mind that each proposal will be reviewed by two USC faculty members. Proposals will most likely be reviewed by faculty members **outside** of the student's home department, but in a related field. Thus, all proposals are reviewed by experienced researchers, but the reviewers are not necessarily experts in your specific field of study. Make sure that you write your proposal for the appropriate audience.

Your proposed SPARC research project should directly support your dissertation or thesis research. The connection between the proposed research and your dissertation or thesis should be clearly explained in the proposal.

Supporting Documentation

The Budget Form, the Current and Pending Support Form and the Authorship Statement are online at <http://www.sc.edu/research/sparc.shtml>. These forms should be downloaded, completed and saved as a PDF or MS Word File.

All of the following forms and documents **must be included and completed or the proposal will be rejected.**

Budget Form

An itemized budget and justification for anticipated expenditures (you **MUST** use budget form provided on the SPARC webpage); the budget form comes after three page proposal and bibliography. Please see below for Additional Budget Information.

Current and Pending Support Form

On this form, students are required to report any funding they currently have to support their graduate education (= Current Support), as well as any funding applied for at the time of application (= Pending Support). Funding may be in the form of an assistantship, a fellowship or a scholarship. The duration of the funding should also be reported. .

Once completed, this form must be signed by the Department Chair or designee (**signatures are required**). When the form is complete with a signature, the form should be scanned and saved as a PDF or MS Word file. This form is not complete until an appropriate signature is obtained.

Biographical Sketch

The Biographical Sketch **cannot exceed two pages**. Select the most relevant and significant awards, publications, etc. to ensure that your Biographical Sketch falls within the allowed 2 page limit. Do not include a narrative statement. Provide the information that is requested. The Biographical Sketch must include the following information **in this order and in this format** (use the bold subheadings to aid reviewers):

Name

PhD Student (or MFA Student or MA in Public History Student)
Degree Program Name
Email address

Education (list degrees in the following format)

Institution and Location	Field of Study	Degree	Year
Include current degree program, field of study and anticipated graduation date.			

Professional Experience (in reverse chronological order)

List positions held which are relevant to your degree program, at USC and elsewhere, with dates

Fellowships and Honors

List major fellowships and awards you have received and the date(s), both at USC and elsewhere

Peer-Reviewed Publications

List all peer-reviewed publications where you are the author or a co-author, both from USC and elsewhere

Professional Presentations or Exhibitions or Performances:

List all professional presentations, abstracts, exhibitions and/or performances, both associated with USC and elsewhere

Professional/University Service

Authorship and GPA Certification Form

The Authorship and GPA Certification Form serves to verify 1) that the graduate student was the primary author of the proposal submitted to the SPARC Graduate Research Grant Program, and 2) the student's current GPA in their graduate degree program.

This Authorship and CPA Certification Form must be signed by both the student submitting the proposal and the faculty advisor. The Authorship and GPA Certification Form follows the Biographical Sketch and comes before the Letter of Recommendation. Because signatures are required for this form, the form should be completed, printed, signed, scanned and saved as a PDF or MS Word file.

Letter of Support (required if requesting participant incentives – otherwise optional)

If you request funds which involve participant support, you **must** attach a letter of approval to your proposal written by your Faculty Advisor's department business manager (see page 9, Department Pre-Approval Required).

A Letter of Support may be appropriate to include if your work requires a special arrangement for your project to be successful. Such arrangements may include collaboration with a faculty member with needed expertise, access to a certain lab or facility, access to archives, etc. Although it is optional, you are strongly encouraged to include a one page Letter of Support if you feel that it would strengthen your proposal and demonstrate feasibility. You may include more than one Letter of Support if needed.

Faculty Letter of Recommendation

Faculty mentors may only sponsor two SPARC applications each year.

Only **one** Letter of Recommendation is allowed for each SPARC proposal. Faculty Letters of Recommendation are limited to **one page**. Letter must be written on Faculty's Letterhead and signed by the faculty member.

The letter should include the following:

- How long you have known the student
- Estimate student's anticipated graduation date
- Evaluate the student's degree of independence, generally and specifically in the preparation of this proposal
- Assess student's intellectual ability, creativity and critical thinking skills
- Assess feasibility of project completion based on student's degree of preparation and motivation
- Discuss the significance of this funding for the student's dissertation or thesis, i.e. how would this project impact the student's progress towards degree completion
- Any other information that the committee should be aware of
- Please give **one** of the following overall ratings of the student for a SPARC Graduate Research Grant:
 - Very Strongly Recommend
 - Recommend with Confidence
 - Recommend with Reservations
 - Do Not Recommend

Faculty Advisor Eligibility

The faculty advisor must be a current USC faculty member. If a faculty member is planning to go on sabbatical during the SPARC project, a Co-PI must be appointed to help oversee the project.

Former USC faculty members who are no longer employed by the university are not eligible to be a PI on a SPARC grant and are not eligible to oversee SPARC projects. Letters of recommendation written by former USC faculty members will not be accepted.

Complete and Provide Proposal to Faculty Advisor

Student creates **one** PDF or Word file of proposal and supporting materials. **File must be named after the student, as follows: "Last Name_First Initial". For example, "Smith_J"**

- The proposal PDF or MS Word file should contain the documents in the following order: (if applicable Resubmission Narrative and reviewer comments first) Proposal Narrative and Bibliography, Budget Form, Current and Pending Support Form, Biographical Sketch, Authorship and GPA Certification Form, Letter of Support (optional or required if requesting participant incentives).
- Provide electronic file to Faculty Advisor.

Faculty Advisor Submits Proposal through USCeRA

- Faculty Advisor completes the Faculty Letter of Recommendation and saves as a PDF or Word file.
- Faculty Advisor appends the Faculty Letter of Recommendation as the last item in the student's completed proposal and saves the entire document as one PDF or Word file.
- **Faculty Advisor gives the proposal a title in USCeRA that follows this format:**
SPARC: Student Name: Title
Ex. SPARC: Sue Smith: Nutrient cycling in Charleston Harbor
It is very important that the title in USCeRA follows this format exactly.
- Faculty Advisor (**not the student**) submits proposal through USCeRA.
- For more details, see **2020-2021 SPARC Application: Guidelines for Faculty Mentors.**

Designation of the Faculty Advisor

The Faculty Advisor on the proposal should be the student's primary Advisor for their dissertation or thesis. If a student wishes to have a USC faculty member other than their primary Advisor as the Faculty Advisor (and PI in USCeRA) for this grant, then the student must either

- 1) Submit a letter of support from their primary Advisor stating their approval for another faculty member to serve as the PI/Faculty Advisor for the grant (this is in addition to the letter of recommendation from the faculty member serving as the SPARC faculty advisor), or
- 2) Alternatively, the student's dissertation or thesis committee may approve the appointment of a USC faculty member who is not the primary Advisor as the Faculty Advisor for this grant. In this case, the student must produce a letter of support from the Chair of the Dissertation or Thesis Committee stating the committee's approval for a faculty member other than the primary Advisor to serve as Faculty Advisor (and PI in USCeRA) for this grant. When submitting the SPARC Graduate Research Grant proposal, this letter of support should be appended to the proposal and should appear after the Faculty Letter of Recommendation.

Special Situation Requiring Additional Documentation in the Letter of Recommendation

Student Requests Funds to Attend a Short Course

The student may request funds to cover the expenses related to a virtual short course; HOWEVER, the Faculty Advisor must state in the Letter of Recommendation that the course is essential to the student's research and that the course will help advance the PhD dissertation.

BUDGET INFORMATION

SPARC Graduate Research Grant awards are set up as individual "N" accounts through the Controller's Office. SPARC grants are processed as "E" funds, and all expenditures must be compliant with E fund procurement requirements. **Food is not an allowable item on SPARC grants.** All budgets should be reviewed by your advisor and department business manager prior to submission.

- Maximum budget request is \$5000. You do not have to request the full amount – request the amount appropriate for your project.
- General budget categories are found in the Budget Form available at http://www.sc.edu/vpresearch/sparc_details.shtml
You must use this Budget Form. Detailed justification is required for each line item. The budget will include your list of budget items; the calculations you have made to arrive at a dollar figure for each item must also be summarized on the Budget Form in the Budget Justification section.
- If a student has a 12 month Graduate Research Assistantship, the student cannot request salary support, including summer salary. Grant funds cannot be used to increase your current salary.
- A note about hourly rates for Salary Support: **when calculating salary support, you must use the rate established by your department.** Please see your departmental Business Manager for salary guidance.
- Although the review committee intends to fund projects as closely as possible to the requested amount, it reserves the right to recommend a reduction in the amount funded depending on the budget justification provided in the application.
- Funds may only be used for the awarded student and project.
- Unexpended SPARC funds in your account (more than \$100) must be returned to the Office of Research at the end of the project period, when you graduate or when you leave USC (whichever is first).
- Materials and supplies purchased through this award remain the property of USC (not the student's property).
- Students may receive concurrent funding (SPARC Graduate Research Grants may be awarded in addition to Presidential Fellowships, Departmental Fellowships or Graduate Assistantships, etc.). However, disclosure of student funding sources is required on the Current and Pending Support Form.

USC Graduate School Policies Regarding Summer Employment for Graduate Students

If you are requesting summer salary from the SPARC Graduate Research Grant, please see Summer Employment on the [Funding Processes](#) webpage of the Graduate School website for options pertaining to how you can be paid. Summer hiring regulations are subject to change.

USC Fringe Benefit Rates

Fringe benefits are various non-wage compensations provided to employees in addition to their normal wages or salaries. Fringe benefits include FICA (Social Security and Medicare), unemployment insurance, worker's

compensation insurance, etc. When you are taking classes, the only cost is worker's compensation. Thus, fringe benefits are calculated differently depending on whether or not you are taking classes. You may find the current fringe benefit rates for USC students [here](#).

Allowable Costs

- Student Salary and fringe benefits
- Temporary Help Salary and fringe benefits
- Transcriptionist fees (these are considered pay for service; no fringe benefits required)
- Project supplies, materials and/or equipment, including computer software
- Sample processing costs
- Animal maintenance costs
- Publication costs
- USC Tuition for Special Enrollment Status students (no other tuition costs are allowed)
Click [here](#) for more information on the Graduate School's Special Enrollment Status Policies (also known as Z Status).
- Registration fees to attend a virtual conference to present SPARC research (only virtual conferences are allowed)
- Other costs not specified (if you are not sure if a possible cost is allowable, ask before you submit!)

Unallowable Costs

- Food
- Compensation for faculty members
- Computers and computer components, cpu nodes, cameras, voice recorders, cell phones, tablets, digital drawing devices
- Salary for students with 12 month GRA appointments
- Yearly student health insurance fees
- Incentives to participants abroad
- Salary or payment to individuals abroad
- Purchases made prior to start date
- Office space rental
- Travel of any type

Departmental Pre-Approval Required

(Policies vary by Department – these requests may not be allowed)

- **Participant incentives** These requests are very complex and may not be allowed. To determine if participant incentives are allowable in a certain department, the student must consult with their department business manager. Support is unlikely for non-US citizen/permanent resident participants. **The SPARC Graduate Research Grant program does not allow participant incentives for participants abroad.**
- **If a student plans to request funds which involve participant support, the students must attach a letter of approval to the proposal written by their department's business manager** (this should appear immediately before the Faculty Advisor Letter of Support). The letter must include:
 - Confirmation of approval from the department/program business manager to include/manage participant support

- The name of the designated custodian or manager of the funds (A USC faculty or staff employee MUST be designated as the custodian. Graduate students are NOT permitted as custodians.)
- Statement of whether or not the designated custodian has received training in cash advances and/or has managed participant support previously

ORDER OF DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR SUBMISSION

- Resubmission Narrative (if applicable – only if resubmitting)
- Reviewer Comments from Previous Submission (if applicable – only if resubmitting)
- Proposal Narrative
- Bibliography
- Budget Form
- Current and Pending Support Form
- Biographical Sketch
- Authorship and GPA Certification Form
- Letter of Support (required if requesting participant incentives)
- Optional Letter of Support from other lab, facility, faculty member, etc.
- Letter of Recommendation from Faculty Advisor

REQUIREMENTS FOR SPARC GRANT RECIPIENTS

- 1) Present research or creative project at Discover UofSC the year following the project start date.
- 2) Complete yearly online surveys to track student's progress and document any publications, presentations and/or awards (for three years after award).
- 3) Any publications or presentations produced as a result of this grant must contain an acknowledgement of USC's support, such as "This work was partially supported by a SPARC Graduate Research Grant from the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of South Carolina."
- 4) At the conclusion of your project or within 30 days of the end of the project period, submit a one page description of the completed research project, including an explanation of how the SPARC funding enhanced your graduate research experience. In addition, submit two photographs of yourself, including a headshot and a photograph of you engaged in your research or creative work. These photographs may be used for promotional materials for the SPARC Graduate Research Grant program. Submit these items to Lauren Clark (lauren.clark@sc.edu) at the conclusion of your project period or when the project is completed, whichever comes first.
- 5) If requested, provide detailed report of grant expenditures. At any time, the SPARC program may request documentation of the use of the SPARC funds.

SPARC Graduate Research Grant recipients are strongly encouraged to present their work at a national or international conference or exhibition.

PROJECTS INVOLVING VERTEBRATE ANIMALS OR HUMAN SUBJECTS

Vertebrate Animals or Human Subjects (<http://orc.research.sc.edu>)

General Guidelines

- If the student's research involves Vertebrate Animals or Human Subjects (including interviews, surveys, or review of personal/private information), they can apply for IACUC or IRB approval *after* a SPARC Graduate Research Grant award notification is received. **However, the student must produce IACUC or IRB approval prior to receiving any SPARC funds and before starting the proposed research project.**
- If the IRB or IACUC approval has been granted prior to submission, then the number should be entered into USCeRA during the application process. If approval has not yet been granted, then write "Pending" when asked for the approval number.
- **NEW POLICY:** If the IRB or IACUC approval is pending at the time of application and the proposal is funded, then the student must email the approval numbers to Lauren Clark (lauren.clark@sc.edu) once approval has been granted.
- If these protocols have been approved for the mentor, they can produce those documents after the award notification with a letter from the mentor indicating the previous approval of protocols; this should be emailed to Lauren Clark (lauren.clark@sc.edu).

For research projects involving live, vertebrate animals:

- SPARC Graduate Research Grant proposals may be submitted prior to approval by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). It is preferable to wait until you have funding before applying for IACUC approval (unless you will conduct the project regardless of SPARC Graduate Research Grant funding).
- In the SPARC proposal, students should include a statement (within the project description/timeline) that the students will apply for IACUC approval and will comply with all rules, regulations and training requirements
- NOTE: the grant account will not be established and work on the project may not begin until approval has been received.
- Projects involving vertebrate animals must maintain compliance with regulations at all times or funding will be revoked
- For more information and forms, go to <http://sam.research.sc.edu/animalcare/index.html> You may also call Animal Resource Facilities at 777-8106.

For research projects involving human participants: USC is required by the federal government to follow strict guidelines when human subjects are involved in research projects requiring Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

- Human subjects research includes studies that use:
 - data collected through interventions, interactions, or observations with human participants (e.g., surveys, interviews, testing, or observational procedures); and/or
 - existing data sets containing any personal information (e.g., medical records, educational records, voting records).
- If the student's research involves human subjects, the SPARC proposal should include a statement (within the project description/timeline) that the student will apply for IRB approval and will comply with all rules, regulations and training requirements
- Projects involving human subjects must maintain compliance with regulations at all times or funding will be revoked

- NOTE: the grant account will not be established and work on the project may not begin until approval has been received.
- For more information and applications process: <http://orc.research.sc.edu/humansubject.shtml>
- For Human Subject FAQs: http://orc.research.sc.edu/hs_faq.shtml

For **ALL Human subjects questions**: contact the Office of Research Compliance (<http://orc.research.sc.edu/contact.shtml>; 803-777-7095)

RESUBMISSIONS

An important part of the grant writing process is revising and resubmitting proposals that were not previously funded. Students are strongly encouraged to revise and resubmit proposals that were not funded in previous funding cycles. Students may revise and resubmit a proposal up to two times. Students who are resubmitting proposals are not required to attend another SPARC Application Workshop. However, please note that there are changes to the guidelines each year, and **students are responsible for adhering to the 2020-2021 SPARC Graduate Research Grant Application Guidelines** regardless of whether or not they attend a current workshop. While not required, students who are resubmitting SPARC proposals are strongly encouraged to view the 2020-2021 SPARC Application workshop video to make sure that the student fully understands the current guidelines. Previously submitted SPARC proposals which are submitted as new proposals will be rejected. To be considered a new proposal, the research focus and methods must differ significantly from the prior submission.

In addition to meeting all other proposal requirements, students preparing a proposal for resubmission should:

1. Revise the proposal to address reviewers' comments. Proposals which do not undergo significant revision will not be accepted.
2. Clearly indicate that this is a revised proposal by writing a **Resubmission Narrative** which responds to the reviewer's comments and details the changes made in the proposal. This Resubmission Narrative should be no longer than one page. This Resubmission Narrative should appear before the revised proposal – i.e. should be the first page the reviewers see.
3. The reviewer feedback must also be attached to the proposal and should follow the Resubmission Narrative. The first page of the revised SPARC proposal will immediately follow the reviewer feedback page.

Resubmissions must include BOTH the one page Resubmission Narrative and the reviewer feedback or the proposal will not be reviewed.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Dr. Lauren Clark, Research Program Manager
Office of the Vice President for Research
lauren.clark@sc.edu or (803) 777-3929