SPARC GRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT
Application Workshop

CONTACT FOR SPARC QUESTIONS
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SPARC GRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT
Support to Promote Advancement of Research and Creativity

• Designed to support and encourage outstanding students to pursue innovative research directions at USC
• Process of applying provides training for writing competitive research proposals
**SPARC STUDENT ELIGIBILITY**

All PhD-degree seeking students (apply year 2 or later)
MFA students (apply year 1 or later)
MA in Public History students (apply year 1 or later)
MD-PhD students (apply year 1 or later of PhD phase of program)
International students are eligible

Not eligible:
- MD, PharmD, and non-PhD seeking doctoral students
- Masters degree seeking students except as above

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**SPARC STUDENT ELIGIBILITY**

- GPA 3.0 minimum
- Must be current student when applying
- Must be enrolled at least one semester after the grant is awarded
- Recipients of major fellowships not eligible
- Such as NIH F31, NSF GRF, etc.
- May only receive SPARC funding one time

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**FACULTY ADVISOR ELIGIBILITY**

- Must be student’s Faculty Advisor of record (see guidelines for special circumstances)
- Must be current employees - Letters of Recommendation from former faculty members, no longer employed by the university, will not be accepted.
- Faculty mentors may sponsor no more than two student SPARC applications per year
RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND AUTHORSHIP

All SPARC applicants are bound by the
• Responsible Conduct of Research code of ethics,
• Carolinian Creed and
• University’s Honor Code.

The graduate student is the primary author on the proposal and is responsible for writing their own proposal.

SPARC FUNDS AVAILABLE

• Up to $5000 per award
• May be used for a variety of project support costs, including salary, supplies, and other costs essential for project
• Project period up to (maximum of) 15 months
• Grant start date: May 1 of award year
• Grant end date: July 31* of following year
  Example: May 1, 2024 – July 31, 2025
  *or ends upon graduation, whichever is first

SPARC TIMELINE

Proposal due date: *see website for specific date
  Due by 5:00 pm EST on deadline date
Grant awards announced: (mid-late) March
  Please anticipate high competitiveness
Grant start date: May 1st
Grant end date: July 31st of following year
  (or upon graduation, whichever is first)
THE APPLICATION

Yep, finally getting to the good stuff 😊

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

> Follow formatting instructions in Application Guidelines.
> Use language appropriate to non-experts: Reviewers are not from your department!

• Maximum proposal length: 3 pages
  includes all figures, tables, images, etc.
  NO APPENDICES, NO HYPERLINKS

• Proposal Narrative Sections:
  Background and Significance
  Project Description, Design, and Approach
  Significance of Funding to Graduate Experience
  Works Cited – not included in 3-page limitation

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Background and Significance

• Discuss the proposed idea and its context relative to the current state of knowledge in the field.
• Explain to the reviewers why the proposed project is important, novel, and exciting.
• Clearly define the project topic, question or hypothesis
PROPOSAL NARRATIVE
Project Description, Design, & Approach

• Detailed description of:
  • project objectives,
  • proposed methods and activities (detailed, clear, & specific),
  • anticipated outcomes (be specific)

• Timeline of tasks
  ➢ provide as a table or other clear graphic format

• Plan for dissemination of the work
  ➢ be specific; provide names of anticipated publications, conferences, etc.

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE
Significance of Funding to Graduate Experience

Explain how this proposed research or creative activity will:
• advance your graduate education and objectives
• enhance your dissertation or thesis research
• bridge your funding resources
• expand your research or creative direction

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE TIPS

• Feasibility – emphasize and provide evidence of feasibility; proposal must convince the reviewers the project will likely be successful in 15 months and with $5000 (do not be unrealistically ambitious)

• Include preliminary data, if available
• Define all acronyms the first time used
• Limit use of jargon
• Make sure figures, tables, etc. are relevant, captions are large enough to easily read, explained/referenced in proposal text, and cited (if appropriate)

➢ Write for your audience to understand!
PROPOSAL NARRATIVE TIPS

PROOFREAD

and

Follow guidelines!

BIBLIOGRAPHY
aka: Works Cited, References Cited, etc.

• up to 2 pages allowed for this section
• this is not included in the 3-page limit for the proposal narrative
• use the standard convention of your discipline, including the author(s), title or article, journal title, volume, pages and date.

This is a required section for ALL proposals

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

• Budget Form
• Current and Pending Support Form
• Biographical Sketch
• Authorship and GPA Certification Form
• Letter of Support (may not be required)
• Letter of Recommendation
BUDGET FORM

- Use only the Budget Form on the SPARC website
- You must show the calculations made to arrive at each dollar amount in the Budget Justification section
- Example linked to budget form
- Hourly rates for Salary Support varies
  - check with your Departmental Business Manager or Faculty Advisor
- Funds awarded can/may be lower than requested

BUDGET FORM JUSTIFICATION (Bottom of budget form)

A. Student Salary ( Exclude Graduate Assistantships that are paid per term or half-term)

B. Temporary Help Salary ( includes non-student research assistants, post-docs, etc.)

C. Tuition/Lab Fees, Transactional Fees, etc. (Any student fees)

D. Travel to Conduct the Project
   - Must be for travel to the project location
   - Include travel and any associated fees

E. Travel to Professional Conference
   - Must be for conference that is directly related to the project
   - Include travel and any associated fees

F. Materials and Supplies
   - List all materials and supplies needed
   - Include purchase order numbers and dates

G. Database access fees, software, etc.
   - Include details of each item
   - Include dates of purchase

H. Costs for Recruiting Human Subjects/Participant Incentives
   - Only if allowed by Department and letter of support required
   - Include number of participants, item cost, etc.

I. Animal Maintenance Costs
   - Include all costs associated with animal care

J. Sample Processing Costs
   - Include all costs associated with sample processing

K. Tuition
   - Special Enrollment Z-Status students only

L. Materials and Supplies
   - Include all materials and supplies needed

M. Other Costs
   - Specify and itemize

HOW to fill out the table on the budget form:

1) Double click on the table. This will open an excel spreadsheet linked to the word document.

2) Once finished entering information in the spreadsheet, close and save it – just like any standard spreadsheet. All info will transfer to the table in the word document.
BUDGET-ALLOWABLE COSTS

- Review Guidelines

- Student salary and fringe benefits
  - Semesters taking classes vs not taking classes (ex. Summer vs Fall/Spring)
  - Salary not allowed for 12-month GRA appointments

- Temporary help salary and fringe benefits, including undergraduates

- Consultant/Transcriptionist fees

- Student travel – only ONE of the following may be included
  - Travel essential to conduct the project OR
  - Travel to present SPARC research at conference, meeting, performance, exhibition, etc. ($1000 max, regardless of destination or number of conferences; NOT $1000 per conference)

BUDGET-ALLOWABLE COSTS

- Tuition for Special Enrollment Status students

- Project materials, supplies, and/or equipment
  - *electronics or peripherals such as cpu nodes, SBCs, cameras, voice recorders, etc.* may be considered with additional justification – see guidelines
  - Satellite phones if mandated for safety/security for travel in high-risk areas

- Database access fees, software, etc.

- Participant incentives/Recruitment of Human Subjects

- Animal maintenance costs

- Sample processing costs

- Publication costs, if applicant is first author

- Other costs not specified may be considered (must justify!)

BUDGET-UNALLOWABLE COSTS

- Food (per diem is allowed for travel)

- Compensation for faculty members

- Computers/laptops*

- Passport fees, vaccination fees, ID cards, travel visas

- Student health insurance fees

- Salary, incentives, or payments to individuals abroad or otherwise prohibited by USC policy

- Salary for students with 12-month GRA appointments

- Office space rental

- Purchases made prior to project start date
BUDGET-PARTICIPANT INCENTIVES

• Department Pre-Approval Required
• Must include a Letter of Support from Department Business Manager (see guidelines for format)
• Must be specifically justified / explained in budget including amount per participant, number of participants, timing (esp if multiple payments), form of compensation, etc.
• Can be subject to exclusion from budget

CURRENT AND PENDING SUPPORT FORM

• Disclosure and duration of student funding sources required
• Concurrent funding is allowed
• Pending = applied for at time of SPARC submission
• Form requires signature of ONE of the following: your Faculty advisor, Department Chair, Graduate Program Director, or department/program designee – print form, obtain signature, scan, save as PDF
  ➢ electronic signatures are allowed if all pages and forms can be compiled into ONE document for proposal submission
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH (2-PAGE LIMIT)

Name
First and Last Name of Student Applicant

Degree Program (ex. Biological Sciences PhD Program)

University email address

Education (list all 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

Fellowship and Honors
 List major fellowships and awards you have received and the dates(s), at USC and elsewhere

Peer-Reviewed Publications
 List all peer-reviewed publications where you are the author or co-author, at USC and elsewhere

Professional Presentations or Exhibitions or Performances:
 List all professional presentations, symposiums, exhibitions, and/or performances, while at USC and elsewhere

Professional/University Service
 List relevant professional or university service activities, while at USC and elsewhere

28

AUTHORSHIP AND GPA CERTIFICATION FORM

Research Integrity and Authorship:
 All participants are bound by the Research Conduct Code of Ethics, the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, and the University Code of Conduct. Violations of these codes will result in an immediate decision to withdraw or to rescind any continued support from the program. All authors listed on the proposal must also be listed on the submitted proposal. If you have any questions about the eligibility or inclusion of authors, please contact the Program Administrator.

Current USC GPA in Graduate Program
 I confirm that the GPA listed below is the student applicant's most current GPA available for the current degree program.

Current GPA: ________

LETTER(s) OF SUPPORT

• Required if requesting participant incentives
  • Must be from Business Manager following format in guidelines

• Optional but recommended under certain circumstances
  • project needs special access to samples/processing, equipment, resources, archives, space, training, etc.
  • permissions granted for collaborations or access such as schools, partnering institutions, archives, non-profits, etc.
  • receiving donations of material, equipment, instrument time, samples, etc.
COMBINE DOCUMENTS INTO ONE FILE

Complete application by making ONE PDF or Word file in following order:

- Proposal
- Bibliography
- Budget Form
- Current and Pending Support Form (with required signature)
- Biographical Sketch
- Authorship and GPA Certification Form (signed by faculty advisor)
- Letter of Support(s) (if needed)

Name the file: Student Lastname_First name (ex. Smith_Jane)

Provide this one electronic file (Word or PDF) to your Faculty Advisor

FACULTY ADVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Faculty Advisor:

- completes the Faculty Letter of Recommendation on personal or department letterhead (see guidelines)
- one page max
- appends Letter of Recommendation to end of student’s application / proposal file
- submits proposal through USCeRA

FACULTY ADVISOR

It is the student’s responsibility to:

- Communicate early with your advisor regarding your interest and intent to apply
- Ensure that your advisor has sufficient time for completing letters, requirements, submission, etc. – students are encouraged to discuss a timeline to submission and deadlines with Advisor
- Provide your advisor with the SPARC guidelines for faculty mentors which detail the letter of recommendation and submission requirements (many faculty are familiar with this program, but forms and processes are occasionally updated/changed)
- Obtain and/or coordinate form signatures and letters of support (if needed); unless directed otherwise by advisor
SPECIAL SITUATIONS

RESEARCH / TRAVEL ABROAD

• All SPARC travel abroad is subject to approval of USC Education Abroad (for research and/or presentations)
• All SPARC recipients planning to travel abroad must register with USC Education Abroad Office
• Students planning to travel to a country with University Travel Warning must submit Destination of Higher Risk petition
• Contact USC Education Abroad Office for assistance

HUMAN SUBJECTS

• Use of human subjects requires IRB approval (Institutional Review Board) – can apply after SPARC Grant received
• Human Subjects – interviews, surveys, review of personal information, research on pathological specimens, examining medical records, etc. SEE IRB website
• Must provide IRB approval prior to receiving SPARC funds or starting project
• Contact Office of Research Compliance
VERTEBRATE ANIMALS

• Use of live, vertebrate animals requires IACUC approval (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee) – can apply after SPARC Grant received
• Must provide IACUC approval prior to receiving SPARC funds or starting project
• Contact Office of Research Compliance

RESUBMISSIONS

• Must adhere to current year’s SPARC Application Guidelines
• May resubmit up to 2 times
  1) Revise the proposal to address reviewers’ comments
  2) Write a max one-page Resubmission Narrative responding to the reviewer comments.
  3) Attach Resubmission Narrative and Reviewer Comments to the front of the proposal
• REMEMBER - Update ALL supporting documents and remind Faculty Advisor about Letter of Recommendation

REVIEW PROCESS

AWARD REQUIREMENTS
SPARC REVIEW PROCESS

• Scoring rubric available on SPARC website
• All proposals will be read by 2 USC faculty from related areas – NOT your department! Write the proposal accordingly.
• Scores assigned based on review criteria

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND AUTHORSHIP

• The student is the primary author and must write the proposal.
• Plagiarism and other forms of misconduct will result in withdrawal of the proposal without review.
• Must adhere to Responsible Conduct of Research, Carolinian Creed, UofSC Honor Code

REQUIREMENTS IF YOUR GRANT IS FUNDED

• Present poster at Discover USC (end of April, annually)
• Complete yearly online surveys to track student progress, publications, presentations, awards (3 years post-award)
• Any presentations or publications produced as a result of the SPARC Grant must acknowledge support from USC’s Office of the Vice President for Research
• One page summary report and photos submitted at conclusion of project
APPLICATION WORKSHOP REQUIREMENT

After watching this application video:

- complete the SPARC applicant and workshop confirmation form
  This is the only way to confirm that you watched the video

  tinyurl.com/SPARCform OR

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I look forward to your application
Thank you for your time!

Questions? Please contact me:
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