

Navigating the Graduate Funding Landscape

As a graduate student, it is important to understand the funding landscape so that you can make informed decisions when applying for the financial support needed to pursue your graduate and research studies. Every graduate student will be navigating their own specific funding landscape and planning for this process is key. This workbook is designed to assist you in assessing your funding needs, getting familiar with the types of funding opportunities that meet your needs, building a plan for incorporating grant and fellowship applications into your graduate study, and understanding the logistics and best practices for applying to competitive funding programs.

The first step in starting the process is taking stock of what funding sources you currently have and what funding you will need in the future.

STEP 1: Assessing Your Funding Needs

The first question many graduate students have is “What can I apply for?” This question is best answered after you have assessed your individual funding needs. You may need financial support as a means to pay for graduate school, or you may be in the position where you already have a funding package, but external funding will provide you more flexibility and/or the ability to conduct your research in a more robust way.

Graduate Training: Begin your assessment by outlining your funding plan for graduate study. Use the *Funding Plan for Graduate Study* template at the end of this workbook to plot out the number of years you will need to work on your degree, the type of activities that you will engage in year by year, and the types of expenses you will have associated with each stage of study, such as tuition, fees, and living and/or research expenses. Next, include any funding sources you currently have as a graduate student. This may include a funding package provided by your graduate program, funding provided by your employer or government, external grants and fellowships, need-based financial aid, and personal resources.

While this plan may change over time, it is helpful to capture your current vision for your funding needs across your course of study. After completing this assessment activity, begin thinking about your research goals.

Research Goals: Grants and fellowships are a source of empowerment for scholars. Rather than scaling back the scope of your research goals due to limited resources, these external funding sources can provide important opportunities to undertake robust research projects.

It can be helpful to break down your research project plan into a timeline detailing activities, goals, and desired outcomes. This will provide you a framework for identifying any additional resources needed to accomplish your research goals, such as travel expenses or lab fees. Once you've outlined your research goals, you can map them to your funding needs and update your *Funding Plan for Graduate Study* template accordingly.

At this point, you should have a clearer picture of your funding needs and can begin to think about ways to best integrate applying for funding into your graduate career.

STEP 2: Identifying Your Graduate Funding Landscape

Letting your project interests and needs guide your search for funding will assist you in finding the best programs matched to your unique funding goals. It is never too early to start building a list of grant and fellowship opportunities that you can apply for across the various stages of your graduate study. Use the *Key Funders and Awards List* template at the end of this workbook to create your personal list.

Key Funders: Begin by identifying some key funders who have the potential to support you over the next 5 to 10 years of your research career. This can include your graduate work, postdoctoral work, and your transition into the professoriate or industry. Focus on the big picture and consider the major funders who support the kind of research that you will be pursuing, regardless of whether or not they have an award to support you right now at your current stage of study. For example, the National Institutes of Health supports biomedical research and the National Science Foundation supports basic science research, while the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supports research in the humanities.

Here are some tips for getting started:

- Talk to your faculty advisors or mentors about who funds their research
- Engage other graduate students in discussions about who they are applying to for support
- Review the funders listed in the acknowledgments section of the books and articles that influence and align with your research interests
- Join and investigate the professional societies in your chosen field of research as these organizations may offer small awards

- If your work is based in an archive, reach out to the archivist to ask who funds their grant program and inquire about any opportunities for funding support
- Use a grant and fellowship database to search for funders who list awards in your area of research

Relevant Grant & Fellowship Awards: There are many grant and fellowship databases available for use by graduate students to help identify potential funders and specific award programs. These databases allow you to search for funding opportunities in a variety of ways, such as stage of study, disciplinary focus, and keyword searches.

Here are a few databases to explore:

- Rutgers GradFund [Fellowships and Grants](#), which focuses specifically on graduate-level awards
- [Pivot](#), through Rutgers University's subscription
- Additional university-affiliated databases:
 - University of Chicago [Fellowship Database](#)
 - UCLA [GRAPES](#)
 - University of Illinois [Fellowship Finder](#)

Just like your *Funding Plan for Graduate Study*, this *Key Funders and Awards List* will evolve over time but it is particularly useful now as you begin to research specific, relevant grant and fellowship awards for which you are eligible to apply.

STEP 3: Building Your Application Development Plan

Establishing a submissions deadline calendar and scheduling time for your application writing are important considerations to incorporate into your overall graduate career. After you have established a solid list of potential funders and awards, it's time to research each and finalize a list of awards that you will apply for this season. Use the *Application Development Plan* template at the end of this workbook to develop a plan for your proposal writing and overall application development.

Application Deadlines: The application deadlines for each competition will guide your planning. For each competition, it will be important to confirm if you will be submitting the application directly to the funder or if you will need to process it through the graduate school or the Rutgers–Camden Office of Sponsored Research. This will determine the final due date for completing your application and these final due dates can be used to organize your proposal writing schedule.

Application Guidelines: Next, you should review the guidelines for each application to understand the required application components. Importantly, application guidelines are not optional suggestions. They are requirements. If you do not follow the specific guidelines for an award competition, you will most likely be eliminated from that competition before the review process even begins.

You should begin to familiarize yourself with the documents you will be required to collect and assemble for each application, such as graduate and undergraduate transcripts and letters of recommendation. If you are applying for funding to support work at a research site, you may also need a letter from your research host, confirming that they will be able to accommodate you for the duration of your research project.

While each application will be unique, there are some core components that you will need to write, such as research proposals and personal statements. In some cases, the funder will also request a budget or other supporting information. The details of these different components will vary, including the focus of the essays, the length, and the formatting requirements. It is important to carefully consider the individual requirements for each competition in order to be sure what you are collecting and writing meets the application guidelines for each funder.

Application Plan: Once you have compiled this inventory of application components for each application, you can begin to develop an overall timeline for writing application essays and compiling all of the other required documentation. The table below provides some general planning guidelines and timelines for a typical grant or fellowship application.

Application Development Process	
Application Component & Estimated Timeframe	When to Begin
Review Application Guidelines: This will require approximately 1-2 work hours for review and note-taking for each competition.	4-6 months before the deadline
Inform Your Institutional Office: Depending on the funder's requirements, you may need to process your application through an institutional office which will add an additional internal deadline to your application development process. This may require approximately 1-2 work hours to notify the appropriate institutional office of your intent to apply.	As soon as you decide to apply for the award (no later than 4 to 6 weeks before the deadline)
Set Up Your Application Portal: Grant and fellowship applications are typically submitted through an application portal provided by the funder. These portals can have great variation in process and user interface. This will require approximately 1-2 work hours to set up your portal account and to gain familiarity with the platform.	As soon as the application portal opens
Check In with the Program Officer: Early in the application process, it can be helpful to reach out to the program officer to confirm that you are a good fit for the award program. At any point in the process, contact the program officer if you have a question that you can not find the answer to in the guidelines. Most program officers prefer to be contacted first by email but in your message, you may offer to be available for a phone call.	3-4 months before the deadline
Write Your Application Essays: This will require approximately 100-120 work hours per essay.	3-4 months before the deadline
Request Your Letters of Recommendation: This will require approximately 30-40 work hours to develop a plan for speaking with your letter writers about your plans to apply for funding and the support you are requesting. For example, in addition to a letter of recommendation, you may also ask if they will review and provide	3-4 months before the deadline

feedback on your application materials. It can be helpful to assemble a packet of information for your letter writers that includes details on the award and its application process. Finally, plan to remind your letter writers of approaching submission deadlines, as appropriate.	
Develop Your Budget: This will require approximately 20-30 work hours to develop your project budget.	2 months before the deadline
Request Your Transcripts: This will require no more than 1 work hour to formally request your official transcript; however, it may take 2-3 weeks for your request to be processed.	2 months before the deadline

These timelines are suggestions and may need to be adjusted based on the details of your specific funding application, the status of your project development, your individual work/writing style, and your level of experience and/or comfort with applying for funding as a graduate student. If you are new to this process of applying for graduate funding, you should plan to invest some time into drafting this *Application Development Plan*. There will be weeks when you will want to spend a lot of time on your application and there may be other weeks when you will need to spend less time.

Reflect on the approaches that best facilitate your writing process and be sure to include time for reading your literature, thinking about your ideas, and participating in discussions with your faculty mentors. Also, it is important to note that successful proposal writers seek out feedback from a variety of readers. This means you will need to plan time into your schedule to manage the process of circulating your work, soliciting feedback, and then processing and refining your proposal based on this feedback.

STEP 4: Drafting a Strong, Competitive Application

Proposal writing is its own unique genre. Its goal is to make a compelling case to a funder for why they should support you and your research project. Each competitive award will have its own formulaic framework and culture of proposal writing determined by the funder and your disciplinary norms. All applicants will be expected to adhere to the same set of guidelines in order to ensure consistency of presentation in the applicant pool so that the reviewers can easily access the specific pieces of information they need to evaluate your project and qualifications to do the project.

An informational video on effective application development titled, *Crafting Competitive Funding Applications*, can be found on the [Grant Writing Assistance](#) web page.

Additional Resources for Proposal Writing:

- [On Grant-Writing: Just What Are Your Project's 'Specific Aims'](#) by Jude P. Mikal
- [On the Art of Writing Proposals](#) by Adam Pzreworski and Frank Salomon
- [The Literature Review](#) by Nancy Rivenburgh
- ["Writer," "Draft," "Finishing" Words to Dissertate By: Changing your Mind\(set\) about your Dissertation](#) by Brianne Jaquette
- [Writing Proposals for ACLS Fellowship Competitions](#) by Christina M. Gillis
- [Introduction to Proposal Writing](#) Free Short Course by Candid Learning



Funding Plan for Graduate Study

Year	Graduate Activities	Expenses	Funding Source & Amount	Unmet Expenses

Key Funders and Awards List						
Funder	Award	Career Stage	Notes	Website URL	Deadline	

Application Development Plan														
Activity	Completion Date (Goal)	Due Date (Deadline)	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
Review Application Guidelines														
Inform My Institutional Office														
Set Up My Application Portal														
Check In with the Program Officer														
Write My Application Essays														
Request My Letters of Recommendation														
Develop My Budget														
Request My Transcripts														