

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
ASPIRE-II
Request for Proposals

Announcement Release Date:	October 23, 2020
Application Receipt Date:	February 25, 2021
Award Announcement Date:	April 30, 2021

Purpose: ASPIRE-II (Advanced Support Program for Integration of Research Excellence-II) funding is provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research to support research involving at least 2 or more colleges within USC or, with justification and pre-approval from the VPR's office, 2 or more departments within extremely diverse colleges such as Arts and Sciences. This call is aimed to promote interdisciplinary collaborations between at least three or more faculty members, acting either as Co-PIs or PI/Co-Investigators, from *within USC* to develop preliminary data to apply for targeted Program Projects, Centers of Excellence Grants, or similarly-sized mechanisms of extramural funding. If you have questions about your eligibility for collaboration, please contact Beth Herron at 777-2885. The goal of this internal grant program is to seed new projects or to support existing collaborative interdisciplinary research that is nationally and internationally competitive and has a high potential to be supported and sustained by external funding agencies.

Eligibility: Eligible applicants include all tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty who are USC employees and who have independent research programs on the USC Columbia Campus, USC School of Medicine Greenville, and USC Senior or Regional Campuses. However, the lead PI must have a strong track record in securing extramural grant funding and in leading interdisciplinary research teams.

Faculty who have received funding as a lead PI on an ASPIRE II during the past 3 funding cycles (2018, 2019, and 2020) are not eligible to apply as a lead PI for 2021 ASPIRE II funding. A faculty member may only participate in two 2021 ASPIRE II proposals as a Co-PI/Co-Investigator and may only serve as the lead PI on one. If a faculty person is named as a Co-PI or Co-Investigator on more than two proposals, one or more of the submissions will need to be withdrawn.

Faculty serving on the ASPIRE-II review committee are not eligible to apply for ASPIRE-II funds during the funding cycle in which they serve.

Faculty may resubmit a revised proposal that was not funded from the 2020 ASPIRE-II funding cycle; If so, they should clearly indicate that it is a revised proposal and should include an introduction (maximum: one page) responding to reviewer comments. The reviewers' critique must be attached to the proposal. This introduction will not be included in the narrative page limit. In addition, the revised applications should highlight the changes made in the research narrative. Resubmitted revised proposals lacking the introduction page and reviewer critiques will not be reviewed. Faculty may submit a revised ASPIRE application only one time. Faculty can submit an application on a similar theme that was not funded during the previous funding cycle as a new grant. In such an instance, there should be major revisions in the proposal. If they submit an unfunded application as a new application without making substantial conceptual changes, it will not be reviewed.

Funds Available: ASPIRE-II grants may be funded up to **\$100,000**. An applicant may request a project period of 15 months beginning July 1, 2021 and ending September 30, 2022. Under certain conditions, exceptions to these dates may be requested. One PI needs to be designated as the lead PI (the submitting PI in USCERA). The number of proposals granted will depend on the innovative character and academic quality as well as the demonstrated funding potential of the proposed interdisciplinary research.

Budget Information: Budgets will need to be presented in general categories and require detailed explanation. Although the ASPIRE Review Committee intends to fund projects as closely as possible to the requested amount, it reserves the right to alter the amount depending on the number of proposals received and funds available. Cost share is not encouraged.

Allowable Costs

- Salary and fringe benefits of research personnel including undergraduate students, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and technicians directly involved in providing data for the project.
- Up to one month of salary *may* be included for each PI or key investigator if used directly to work on this project. However, faculty salary support should be limited to the extent possible.
- Equipment (The formal definition of “capital equipment” is any article of non-expendable, tangible property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition, or valuation cost of at least \$5,000). For more expensive equipment support please refer to ASPIRE-III.
- Project supplies.
- Animal maintenance.
- Travel *essential* to conduct the project; strong justification must be provided. All current UofSC travel guidelines related to COVID-19 must be followed. Projects requesting international travel must include ample justification for how this travel will be possible with on-going COVID restrictions. Given on-going COVID-related travel restrictions, the feasibility of completing projects that require travel or that include international travel will be considered in the review process.
- Graduate Student Tuition.

Unallowable Costs

- Costs in connection with faculty degree requirements.
- Food (for use as subject incentives and other research support).
- Travel to professional and non-project-related meetings.
- Undergraduate Student Tuition.

Application Procedure

1. Develop a six-page proposal narrative that provides:
 - a. A brief discussion of the background and significance of the proposed interdisciplinary research, including its relation to the present state of knowledge in the field and its anticipated future impact.
 - b. A detailed narrative of the project that includes the objectives, significance of the research, the research tasks and expected accomplishments, the specific outcomes of the project, a timeline, and a discussion of securing potential external funding.
 - c. A maximum of one page should be devoted to discussing how the proposed research/scholarship/creative activity will grow and be sustained in the future without internal funding.
 - d. Proposal should be single-spaced with margins not less than one-half inch and using a font size not less than 11 pt.
 - e. Attach a cover sheet to your proposal (not included in the page limit) that includes the project title, the total budget request, the PIs’ names, colleges/departments, and e-mail addresses. The cover sheet also should include a brief summary of the proposed work.
2. Attach the following supporting documentation to the end of the proposal narrative:
 - a. Bibliography (should be included as appropriate, but will not be counted in the narrative page limitation).
 - b. Two-page biographical sketch/cv of the principal investigator and each of the co- PIs or Co-investigator(s) that includes:
 1. Education
 2. Professional experience

3. Evidence of scholarship: most significant refereed journal articles, books, and book chapters, etc.
 4. Significant accomplishments and contributions
 5. Other information as appropriate
 - c. Current and pending support. Include current grant funding and pending grant funding using the form provided on the ASPIRE Program web site. Current and pending support forms need to be completed for all Co-PIs and Co-Investigators.
 - d. A detailed budget on the form provided on the ASPIRE Program web site and budget justification for total project costs consistent with the list of allowable costs shown above. Please see the information regarding the budget justification provided on the ASPIRE Program web site.
 - e. If you and/or your Co-PIs has received funding from the Office of the Vice President for Research in the past (not including SPARC or Magellan awards), you **must** include an appendix to your proposal that includes the titles and funding amounts of these awards, along with a description of the impacts of the award (s). If you previously have received an ASPIRE award or awards, please give a detailed summary of how the funds have benefitted your research program and/or enabled you to apply for extramural grants. This needs to be completed for each of the primary collaborators on the project.
3. Submit the completed proposal packet:
- a. Through USCeRA (<https://sam.research.sc.edu/uscera/>) before 5:00 pm on deadline date. **Proposals submitted after 5 pm on the deadline date will be returned without review.**
 - b. **Application Receipt Date: Thursday, February 25, 2021.**
 - c. Check yes to "Internal Request," then "VP for Research" and choose the category type (ASPIRE II) from the USCeRA drop down menu to ensure proper proposal routing. Failure to check the box will result in your proposal NOT being reviewed.
 - d. The Internal Commit Form should be used to list the total amount that you are requesting from the VPR. Do not enter an amount in the Start-Up box. Enter in your total request in the Year 1 box.
 - e. **Upload your proposal following the directions in USCERA.** PDF files are strongly encouraged.
 - f. Questions about submission? Contact: Beth Herron, Research and Grant Development Office, bherron@mailbox.sc.edu, 777-2885.

Review Process: Applications that are complete and responsive to this announcement will be evaluated by a Peer Review Committee. The Committee will provide a prioritized list of recommendations for funding to the VPR based on the quality of the proposals per the review criteria (see below). The VPR will make awards based on the Committee's recommendations and available funds.

Research Merit:

- Does the proposal provide a compelling argument for interdisciplinary research?
- Does the proposed project represent a significant advance to the investigators' fields of study? If so, how?
- Does the Lead PI have experience in leading collaborative teams? Do the PIs and other investigators have a track record of securing extramural grant funding?

Nature of Proposal:

- Does the proposal provide a clear statement of the overall project objectives?
- Are the proposed methodologies appropriate and accurate?
- Does the proposal provide a sound justification with clear and specific budget information? Is there a timeline, and is it realistic?
- Is the text of the proposal well-written?

Leverage:

- Will the project lead to the development of preliminary data to apply for specific Program Projects, Centers of Excellence Grants, or other similar mechanisms of extramural funding (e.g. multiple R01 or large-scale grants)?
- Does it significantly improve chances for funding from existing sources?
- Does the project offer significant opportunities for funding from new, external sources?
- Does the project help build interdisciplinary research networks within the university?

For more Information: Please contact Beth Herron, Research and Grant Development,
bherron@mailbox.sc.edu/803-777-2885.