Future Interdisciplinary Research Explorations (FIRE) Grant FY2024 FAQs

- *What is the timing of the grants?*
  The grants follow the federal fiscal year that starts on October 1. For the current cycle:
  FFY2024: Oct. 1, 2023-Sept. 30, 2024
  FFY2025: Oct. 1, 2024-Sept. 30, 2025

- *What is interdisciplinary research?*
  We use the National Academies' definition: "Interdisciplinary research is a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice."

- *Can teams include faculty members from the same department?*
  Yes, if they have expertise in distinct disciplines. Roles, expertise, and contribution of each team member must be clearly defined. Inclusion of faculty members from other departments/units/colleges is highly encouraged.

- *Can departments and institutions outside of ACES be included in the team?*
  Yes. The Office of Research recognizes the importance of collaborating with colleagues both within and outside of ACES. Inclusion of faculty members from other departments/units/colleges is highly encouraged.

- *What was the reviewer feedback from previous rounds of FIRE proposals?*
  In general, reviewers gave preference to proposals that emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of the research, included teams of 3 or more people, listed specific measurable tasks in the approach, and explored new areas rather than extending current research.

- *What level of detail is required in the proposal?*
  Reviewers may or may not have expertise in the proposed area of research. As such, applicants should write to a broad audience and clearly describe the roles and contribution of team members. Ensure that the proposal is written to a nonspecialist reviewer. Applicants should avoid being overly technical in the description of their approach.

- *Can the team submit this year if they have submitted proposals previously?*
  Yes. If referencing a previous submission, make sure to provide additional details (based on previous reviewer comments) to demonstrate the need of the proposed data for the resubmission.

- *Can existing well-established teams apply?*
  Yes. Reviewers typically have higher expectations for proposals from established teams. Applicants must demonstrate to the reviewers how the funds will strengthen the team and/or the scope and direction of the research. Existing teams must describe how the funding will allow them to achieve a new level of success.

- *Who can be considered Co-PIs and collaborators on the project?*
  Anyone essential to the project can be listed as a Co-PI. Although this will primarily be other faculty members, postdoctoral and graduate students can also be Co-PIs and collaborators.

- *Can faculty members be involved in more than one FIRE proposal?*
  Yes. At this time, we have not limited the number of proposals in which a faculty member can be listed as a collaborator or principal investigator. **PIs _can_ have more than one active FIRE award at a time.**

- *What is meant by "alignment with current areas of strength" in the RFP?*
  This phrase refers to:
    — Identifying a research theme or question that gives coherence to the project and relates to the scope of programs within the College of ACES

    — Ensuring that your proposed activities are a logical progression given each team member's expertise and past research, and that they pertain to the College of ACES scope of research.

- *What should be included in the "Plans for Execution and Continuation" section?* Provide specific plans and next steps for the continuation of the selected research idea, including a clear path to what the team plans to accomplish, a detailed plan for obtaining future extramural support, and a description of how the project would evolve after receiving future funding.

- *How much detail is needed for the budget? Will a budget template be provided?* A standard line-item budget and budget justification similar to that required by federal funding agencies is appropriate. Categories could include, but are not limited to, personnel, fringe benefits, equipment, travel, materials and supplies, etc. The reviewers need to see a general plan for how you expect to spend the money that relates to your approach.

- *Does FIRE support international collaborators?* No. Funds provided in this program cannot be transferred to another institution or collaborator abroad. This program prioritizes interdisciplinary collaboration within the University of Illinois. International collaborations are allowed if there is no cost to the University of Illinois.

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- *How should fringe benefits, tuition remission, and indirect costs be handled?*
  The FIRE program is supported by Hatch formula funds. **Tuition remission and indirect costs do not need to be included in the budget.** For salaries, include the fringe benefits within the $60,000. Hatch funding has different fringe benefit rates depending on the type of position (e.g., post-doc, student hourly, etc.). Consult your department business manager for details.

- *Can faculty summer salary be included in the budget?*
  No. Summer salary is not funded through the FIRE program.

- *Can travel be included in the budget?*
  Yes. Domestic travel for meetings and conference, including programmatic and administrative/fiscal conferences that benefit the award and are necessary to accomplishing the goals of the award are allowable if the costs are reasonable and consistent with the university's travel policy. This includes insular area travel to conferences/trainings directly related to the grant, benefit the grant, and are allocated in proportion to staff appointment, if appropriate.

  International travel for personnel outside of the University of Illinois is not allowed.

- *What should be included in the paragraph of professional information?*
  The professional information can include a short description of the team member's research, publication, and grant awards record. This should be given in the context of the proposal. You can indicate just the number of publications and grants in the last 5 years (i.e., Publications: X, Grants: X) or details of those publications and grants as appropriate for the application.

- *Can support letters be included?*
  To reduce the burden for proposal preparation, the Office of Research strongly discourages the inclusion of support letters.

- *Can additional materials be provided in the supplementary section?*
  All the necessary materials needed to review the proposal are requested in the RFP. Do not include additional supplementary documents such as articles, reprints, posters, methodology, and survey questions.

- *Do you need to have an active Hatch project to apply?*
  No. You can apply without having an active Hatch project. However, if you receive a FIRE award, you will need to have a Hatch project that has overlapping objectives with your FIRE proposal in order to receive the funds.

- *Can PIs with previous FIRE awards apply?*
  Yes. Principal investigators with an active award can have more than one active award.

- *Will there be another call for FIRE proposals? If so, when?*
  Future funding and timing of calls for the FIRE program depend on faculty feedback and funding availability.

- *Where do I submit my application?*
  Proposals should be submitted online via the OVCRI Special Programs tool as a combined .pdf file.