Frequently Asked Questions and Responses (updated 02/07/2019)

Question 1. What is the timing of the grants?


Question 2. 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.”

Question 3. What was the reviewer feedback on previous rounds of FIRE proposals?

In general, reviewers gave preference to proposals that:

- Emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of new research
- Listed specific tasks and measurable endpoints
- Utilized funds to collect data
- Included teams of >3 people

The complete review criteria and detailed guidance provided to reviewers for scoring proposals is in the RFP.

Question 4. What is the level of detail the applicant should provide in the proposal?

Faculty members on the Research Policy Committee will work with the Office of Research to evaluate the FIRE grant proposals. Keep in mind that reviewers that may or may not have expertise in your area of research. Write to a broad audience (that may include nonspecialists) and clearly describe team member roles and contributions. Avoid using highly technical jargon in your approach. Reviewers prefer to see specific tasks listed in the Approach section.

Question 5. Can teams include faculty members from the same department?

Yes, if they have expertise in distinct disciplines. Faculty members outside of your department will review your proposal. Accordingly, if all team members are from one department, remember to clearly define roles, expertise, and contributions of each team member.

Question 6. 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 the College and University.

Question 7. Can the team have already submitted proposals in the past?

Yes. Several teams have used the FIRE seed funds to address reviewer comments of previously submitted proposals (typically to acquire additional preliminary data). If referencing a previous submission, please make sure to provide additional details from reviewer critiques to demonstrate the necessity of the proposed data for the resubmission.
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Question 8. Can existing well-established teams apply?
Yes. Keep in mind that reviewers typically have higher expectations for proposals from well-established teams. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate to the reviewers how the funds will strengthen your team and/or the scope and direction of your research. In the “Need for Collaboration” section, existing teams must describe how the funding will allow them to achieve a new level of success.

Question 9. Who can be considered a co-PI and collaborator on the project?
Anyone essential to the project can be listed as a co-investigator. Although this will primarily be other faculty members, postdoctoral and graduate students can also be co-investigators.

Question 10. Can faculty members be involved in more than one FIRE proposal?
Yes. Currently, there is no limit to the number of proposals on which a faculty member can be a PI or collaborator. However, a principal investigator can only have one active award at a time.

Question 11. How strict are the suggested limits for the summary and proposal sections?
Please try to follow the guidelines as closely as possible. The proposal cannot exceed 3 single-spaced pages. Refer to the RFP for font and margin requirements. The reference page is not part of the 3-page limit.

Question 12. What is meant by “alignment with current areas of strength” in the RFP?
Identify a research theme or question that gives coherence to the project and is tied to your proposed activities. Your proposed activities should be a logical progression of each team member’s expertise and past research. These activities should pertain to the College of ACES scope of research.

Question 13. What should be included in the “Plans for Execution and Continuation” section?
Reviewers generally find that applicants provide insufficient details in this section regarding next steps. Provide specific plans for the continuation of the selected research idea. This includes a clear path to what the team plans to accomplish, a detailed plan for obtaining future support (ideally with >1 program identified), and a description of how the project would evolve after receiving future funding. The latter is particularly important for teams starting with 2 members.

Question 14. How much detail should I provide for the budget? Will a budget template be provided?
The FIRE application does not have a designated a budget template. A standard line item budget justification that funding agencies use would suffice. Categories could include, but are not limited to, personnel, fringe benefits, equipment, travel, materials and supplies, etc. Reviewers need to see a general plan for how you expect to spend the money that relates to your approach.

Question 15. How should fringe benefits, tuition remission, and indirect costs be handled?
Hatch formula funds support the FIRE program. 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. Consult your department business manager for details. The current rate does not exceed 6.5%. In most cases, no fringe benefit rates will need to be applied.
Question 16. Can faculty summer salary be included in the budget?
The FIRE program does not fund summer salary.

Question 17. Can travel be included in the budget?
Yes. However, travel for personnel not from the University of Illinois is restricted due to the funding source.

Question 18. What should be included in the paragraph of professional information?
The professional information should include a short description of the team member’s research, publication, and grant record as it relates to the proposal. You may choose to indicate just the number of publications and grants in the last 5 years (i.e., publications: X, grants: X). However, you may want to include the details of those publications and grants.

Question 19. Can support letters be included?
To reduce the burden for proposal preparation, the Office of Research discourages inclusion of support letters. However, if provided, the letters will be included with the proposal during review.

Question 20. Can additional materials be provided in the supplementary section?
The RFP provides all the necessary information needed for review of the proposal. Accordingly, inclusion of additional supplementary documents, such as articles, preprints, methodology, survey questions, etc., is discouraged. However, if provided, the materials will be included with the proposal during review.

Question 21. Do you already need to have an active Hatch project to apply?
No. You can apply without having an active Hatch project. However, if you receive the award, you will need to have a Hatch project that has overlapping objectives with your FIRE proposal in order to receive the funds.

Question 22. Can previous FIRE award principal investigators apply?
Yes. However, the previous award must no longer be active by the start date for the current cycle. Principal investigators with an active award can still serve as a co-investigator on other FIRE proposals while their award is active.

Question 23. Will there be another call for FIRE proposals? If so, when?
Future funding of the FIRE program depends on the faculty feedback and funding availability. We hope to have additional calls for proposals. In the future, we plan to use the following timeline:

1. RFP released in December/January
2. Proposal deadline in March
3. Notifications in April
4. Funding to begin in October.

This timeline is subject to variability.