Future Interdisciplinary Research Explorations (FIRE) Grant
Request for Proposal FFY2025

Deadline: April 8, 2024, by 5 PM CT

Award: Up to $60,000 for a 2-year period

Previously Funded Programs (PDF download)

The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) Future Interdisciplinary Research Explorations (FIRE) award program receives generous funding support from the ACES Office of Research. This grant encourages creativity and collaboration between ACES faculty and other research partners to conduct research to generate/gather preliminary data and results for use towards obtaining external funding. **This year's call is open to all tenure- and nontenure track faculty of all ranks with a primary appointment within ACES.**

The aims of FIRE proposals are for faculty to:

1. Develop exploratory research ideas that require involvement of multiple disciplines
2. Identify a research theme or question that gives coherence to the PI's research portfolio and relates to the scope of programs within the College of ACES
3. Collect preliminary data or other relevant information to address research questions
4. Prepare, develop, and submit research proposals for external funding

The expected product of the FIRE seed grant program is generation of preliminary data or results to support a fundable extramural interdisciplinary research proposal.

Projects are expected fall within the following priority research areas:

1. Plant health and production and plant products
2. Animal health and production and animal products
3. Food safety, nutrition, and health
4. Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment
5. Agriculture systems and technology
6. Agriculture economics and rural communities
7. **Other crosscutting Hatch-eligible theme**

Projects will be expected to achieve milestones and to actively seek significant external support in the form of a multi-PI research proposal to NIFA, NIH, NSF, DOD, DOE, or other federal agencies, industry, or foundations. Progress reports will be required at key time points, which may affect continual funding.

Applicants can request a maximum of $60,000 over 2 years (FFY2025: Oct. 1, 2024 - Sept. 30, 2025; FFY2026: Oct. 1, 2025 - Sept. 30, 2026). Investigators can also request funding for a single year (up to $35,000) for FY2025.

The lead PI must be a faculty member with a primary appointment within ACES. To streamline the funding process, the lead PI should have an active Hatch project related to the proposed activities by the time of award.

Proposals should include a description of the innovative nature of the research and the team's capabilities, where the contribution of each collaborator's expertise is evident.

Proposals should be no more than 3 pages, single-space, Times New Roman 11-point font, 8.5" x 11", 1-inch margins.

REQUIRED ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE 3-PAGE LIMIT

- Problem statement and potential impact (**0.5 page max**)
- Approach (including a description of the innovation of the research and alignment with current areas of strength) (**2 pages max**)
- Need for collaboration (including how this team is well-suited to tackle the problem) (**0.5 page max**)
- Plans for execution and continuation. This section is critical for accountability. Be as specific as possible when identifying external funding opportunities. Provide a clear path for how the project will evolve. (**150 words max**)

REQUIRED ITEMS NOT SUBJECT TO THE 3-PAGE LIMIT

- Online form information
- Title
- PI and Co-PI information (names, titles, affiliations, and email addresses)
- PI descriptions for each of the team members indicating publications and external grants received during last 5 years only (**no page limit**)
- Project summary/abstract (**150 words max)**
- References **(no limit)**
- Budget (SPA template)
- Budget justification (**1 page max**)

FIRE funds can be used for research assistant support, limited travel support, and other support necessary for generating outstanding research (e.g., critical piece of equipment, personnel [i.e., graduate student or postdoctoral researcher] or supplies). The applicant has the discretion and flexibility to use the funds according to research needs.

FIRE proposals will be evaluated and ranked based on merit by the ACES OR staff and the Research Policy Committee or other ACES faculty with relevant expertise using the criteria outlined.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

1. *Problem and Impact Statement (10%)*
   - Does the study address a well-defined problem?
   - Is the problem important?
   - Are the potential impacts meaningful?
   - Are there potential benefits of the proposed activity to the scientific community, stakeholders, and/or society?

2. *Approach (20%)*
   - Is the approach well-developed, well-reasoned, and appropriate to the aims of the project?
   - Is the project original and innovative?
   - Does it build on current strengths or add new directions to previous research?
   - Is the approach feasible?

3. *Collaboration and Suitability of Team Members (20%)*
   - Does the team have complementary and integrated expertise in distinct disciplines?
   - Do collaborative efforts enable the team to achieve collective results that would not be possible with a single disciplinary perspective or approach?
   - Is the PI capable of leading the team and accomplishing the proposed task(s)?
   - Does the assembled team have the right composition to complete the proposed task(s)?

4. *Plans for Execution and Continuation (15%)*
   - Will the plans improve the team's chances of obtaining external funding?
   - Have specific funding opportunities been identified?
   - Are the opportunities well-suited to the team's objectives and visions?

5. *Budget and Budget Justification (10%)*
   - Is the budget realistic?
   - Will the use of funds help lead to the development of an extramural grant proposal?

6. *Overall Assessment (25%)*
   - What is the overall assessment of the proposal?
   - Does the proposal and team have a high probability of success? Does the project align with the goals of the FIRE seed grant program?
   - Will the funds enhance collaboration and address important interdisciplinary questions?
   - Will the proposed tasks make the team more competitive in obtaining external funding?
   - Will funding this proposal lead to the development of an outstanding interdisciplinary research project?

The deadline for submission of FIRE proposals is **April 8, 2024 by 5 PM CT**. Proposals should be submitted online via the OVCRI Special Programs tool as a combined .pdf file.

For more information, please visit the FIRE website.

Questions? Contact Barbara Godlew: aces-or-support@illinois.edu.