

POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR AWARDING RESEARCH/CREATIVE ACTIVITY (RCA) GRANTS

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OVERVIEW

Research/Creative Activity (RCA) Grants provide funds for substantive support of research and creative activities and are intended to advance a faculty member's scholarly activities. They are intended for larger faculty research and creative projects that require more support and time than pilot studies or minigrants.

Applications are reviewed and funds are awarded by the University Research Council (URC), with final approval granted by the Provost and VPAA, and the program is managed by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS).

For purposes of this competition, **research** is defined as "a systematic study directed toward fuller scientific knowledge or understanding of the subject studied."¹ **Creative activity** is defined as the preparation and execution of original works and creative contributions designed to advance artistic accomplishment, principally in art, music, theater, dance, and similar areas within the performing and visual arts.

RCA awards are not for the development or evaluation of curricular materials or instructional support. Summer salaries are intended to compensate faculty members while they conduct intensive project activities during the term in which they are paid. RCA funds do not support graduate student assistant appointments and should not supplant other funding sources (i.e. department, state, federal).

Time Line

The annual RCA competition is held during the fall semester, and funded proposals are carried out in the spring and summer semesters (January – August).

The University Research Council (URC) reviews the RCA proposals and makes recommendations to the Dean of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS). If approved, the Dean notifies the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs who makes final approval and recommendations.

Approximately 5-7 RCA awards will be made each academic year, depending on the quality of applications and availability of funds.

Application Categories

Applications are divided into the below two categories and are evaluated using separate criteria:

1. Research
2. Creative Activity

As of FY18, applicants select if they are applying for the Research or Creative Activity funding.

¹ From the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board rules, Chapter 13. Financial Planning, Subchapter G. Research Development Fund

Allowable Costs

In addition to faculty 6-week summer salary*, funding up to \$10,000 is allowable for the following purposes:

- Supplies and materials
- Hourly wages and benefits for student assistants
- Wages and benefits to other staff to assist in the project
- Non-capital equipment (a single item less than \$5,000; See the SFASU Property Manual for definitions and examples)
- Expendable materials, supplies, chemicals/reagents
- Travel to collect data (travel to conferences is not allowed nor is student travel)
- Contractual expenses (i.e. translator, sample analysis, etc.).

*If a co-investigator is named on the project, there are three possibilities for salary:

- a. Neither PI or Co-PI receive summer salary;
- b. Either the PI or the Co-PI receive summer salary; or
- c. Both the PI and the Co-PI receive 50% of a full-time 6-week summer salary.

Unallowable Costs: Activities/items that are never eligible for RCA support, regardless of worthiness, include:

- Development or evaluation of curricular materials or instructional support
- Non-faculty requests (students or staff), or requests from lecturers, adjunct or visiting faculty; Professional or support staff salaries
- Personal computers, printers, and portable communication devices (upgrades or software will be considered if directly related to research activities; laptops or computers required for field or advanced computational work may be considered with adequate justification)
- Materials for routine use in academic courses
- Professional development activities, including speaker fees
- Program development, curriculum development, or related evaluation activities
- Support for faculty dissertations or student theses and dissertations
- Salary for research assistantships/graduate student appointments
- University limitations on the use of the funds (e.g., non-per diem food, door prizes, gifts, participant support).

In addition, requested funds should not supplant other funding sources (i.e. department, state, federal).

Eligibility and Conditions

1. Individuals with a full-time, tenure-track academic appointment detailed in SFASU policy 8.11 are eligible to apply for the RCA Grant. These are: Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Instructor, and Librarian I-IV. Non-tenure track faculty are not eligible.
2. RCAs will not be awarded for the purpose of obtaining an advanced academic degree and cannot be used to fund student theses or dissertations. This does not preclude the use of RCA funds to hire students at an hourly rate to assist faculty members with their research or creative endeavors.
3. Limitations:
 - Applicants are limited to one competitive award (RCA, RGD, RPS) per fiscal year.
 - Individuals cannot receive a competitive award (RCA, RGD or RPS) during the same semester(s) that they are on faculty development leave or sabbatical.
 - Individuals cannot receive a Project Support award at the same time as an RGD or RPS award.
 - Individuals who receive an RCA cannot receive a Travel Support or Project Support Minigrant award during the summer period when RCA work is being done.
 - The recipient of an RCA in a given year is ineligible to apply for a new RCA the following year.
4. New researchers or faculty members who have not utilized the Research Enhancement Grant Program in the past are encouraged to apply and may receive bonus points if they meet the criteria listed under the Criteria sections for each type of proposal.
5. RCAs should be considered seed money and are not intended to support the continuation of research funded from external awards or continuation projects from internal awards (pre-existing awards with a continuing theme), including previous awards from the Research Enhancement Program.

If applicable, a faculty member who previously received Research Enhancement funding should justify in the proposal why another internal award is warranted (rather than applying for external funds). To be competitive, the research or creative proposals should target new and/or innovative areas, or propose innovative approaches to the research or creative activity. Initial research or creative activities to enhance external funding proposals is encouraged.

6. For resubmission of a previously unsuccessful RCA application, a faculty member should describe clearly in an addendum to the proposal how the URC's comments from the previous competition were incorporated into the revised proposal.
7. RCA funds may not be used to pay for research or creative activities or equipment that are, or have been, supported with funds from an external sponsor or from university resources (i.e. they cannot be used to supplant).
8. Individuals who have access to research funds from other sources are encouraged to exhaust all alternative funding pathways prior to applying for an RCA.
9. An RCA recipient must follow all local, state, and federal regulations and SFASU policies and procedures applicable to the award.
10. Research or creative activity proposals selected for funding that involve the use of human subjects, laboratory animals, or hazardous materials must be accompanied by a memorandum of approval from the chair of the appropriate university committee prior to award. These committees are: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB), Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), Environmental Safety and Health/Radiation Committee, Biosafety Committee, and Public Health Committee.

11. An RCA recipient must attend a brief orientation session with ORGS staff to review the terms of the grant and to provide an opportunity for the faculty member to ask questions about use of funds, grant accounts, and grant management.
12. An RCA recipient must provide progress and final reports about the project as required ORGS. The final report must consist of a 3-5 page (single or double-spaced) report that includes a description of project activities and outcomes for each project objective, as well as a 200-word abstract of the research findings or creative outcomes suitable for posting on the ORGS web site.

These reports allow the URC and ORGS to ensure the funds were spent appropriately. In addition, these reports are used to provide summaries to others concerning effective use of the funds and the continued need for funding.
13. The project should result in appropriate outcomes. For research projects, this includes faculty publications, grant applications, or other form of scholarly advancement. For creative activity projects, this includes exhibitions, performances, concerts, or other appropriate venues.
14. Any publication, presentation, or exhibition resulting from an RCA award shall include the following acknowledgement:

“The project was conducted under a Stephen F. Austin State University Faculty Research/Creative Activity Grant.”

Awardees are encouraged to provide ORGS with copies of publications, DVDs, or other appropriate media that constitute documentation of a published work or exhibition.

Awardees are also encouraged to submit publications to the Center for Digital Scholarships at the Steen Library for submission as a research project in the university's digital archive *ScholarWorks*.

URC METHODS OF EVALUATION

Because grant proposals are often improved as a result of internal peer review, the URC strongly recommends that departments and colleges establish peer review procedures. The procedures should be completed in time for the applicant to make revisions prior to the final deadline for proposal submission.

A. Discussion of Proposals

Discussion of RCA proposals will be done through at least two meetings.

1. In preparation for the first review meeting, URC members should read the proposals and prepare preliminary reviews of proposals including a list of clarifying questions, as applicable.
2. In the first review meeting, each proposal will be discussed so that any clarifications and explanations can be made by URC members, and summary comments can be collected on all proposals. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used.
3. If, after preliminary discussion of a proposal, there are unresolved questions, the URC Chair will contact the applicant and obtain answers to the URC members' questions. As applicable, the URC will then briefly discuss the proposal again with this input from the URC Chair.
4. For the final review meeting, the URC Chair will compile the preliminary comments and recommendation levels for each proposal in addition to assembling any other measures requested by the URC members (such as averages scores, ranking, etc.).

During the final review meeting, the URC will discuss the above measures in addition to the relative merits of each proposal to determine which proposals to recommend for funding. The URC Chair will compile the final scoring and individual reviews upon completion of this final meeting.

B. Funding Recommendations of Proposals

1. After discussion, the voting members of the URC will formulate a funding recommendation that will be adopted if a simple majority of the URC is in favor of the recommendation. Discussion will continue until a consensus of the URC is reached.

The recommendations fall into the following areas:

- Fund as submitted.
 - Fund with revisions.
 - Not recommended for funding, but has merit. Recommend resubmission with revisions in a future competition.
 - Not recommended for funding.
2. The URC Chair submits the Council's recommendations to the Dean of ORGS who submits for final approval to the Provost/VPAA, and then to ORGS to begin preparing award materials.
 3. The URC Chair will provide summary comments to the applicant upon request.
 4. All funded and not-funded notifications are completed according to the internal ORGS Research Enhancement Procedures Manual.

Criteria for Evaluating RESEARCH RCA Proposals

The URC will evaluate **Research** RCA proposals based on the criteria listed below. The written proposal should clearly meet the evaluation criteria to receive a competitive score. The faculty member may discuss his/her proposal and the evaluation criteria with a member of the Council before the final written proposal is submitted to the respective Dean.

The lists given below are intended to provide guidance on the meaning of each section and should not be considered exhaustive or adhered to as entirely prescriptive.

A. Significance of the Proposal (30 points)

1. The proposed project should improve the faculty member's knowledge and increase his/her ability to conduct more research in the area of interest or to create further artistic work in the area of interest.
2. The new knowledge gained from the project should be significant to the faculty member's academic discipline. The project should require the use of knowledge and skills usually possessed only by those having terminal degrees in the field.
3. The originality of the research or creative activity often determines its success and recognition. As a result, the project should possess unique characteristics in comparison to similar projects.
4. Once the project is completed, similar projects in the same discipline should follow. In some cases, it may be possible to obtain grant money from outside sources for further research. Such success enhances the University's prestige, provides a better learning environment for its students, and enables the University to better the community at large.
5. Applicants should show how they plan to disseminate the results of the RCA through presentations at professional meetings and/or publications in refereed journals. The project should be designed to lead to further study or an exhibition.

B. Proposed Approach (25 points)

1. The proposal should outline the objectives or specific aims, methodology, plan of operation/activities, expected outcomes, proposed evaluation, and plans for future dissemination.
2. The proposal should clearly describe the proposed procedures. The applicant should provide evidence that other professionals within the field will find the procedures acceptable.
3. The proposal's objectives should be clear, concise, and understandable to the Council members, who may not be specialists in the discipline.
4. The written proposal should follow the prescribed format as described in the *"Research/Creative Activity (RCA) Grant Application Instructions"* (separate document).
5. The applicant must demonstrate knowledge of research or knowledge of existing art/performances within the area of interest by discussing the research findings or works/performances of others who have made significant contributions in the area and cite any relevant literature or critical response.

C. Feasibility of the Proposal (20 points)

1. The proposal should clearly establish a feasible schedule for the proposed project.
2. The applicant should be able to conduct the project within the proposed time period.

3. The applicant should be able to complete the project with the funding requested.
4. The applicant should be able to complete the project with the available physical resources.

D. Applicant's Record (10 points)

1. The applicant should demonstrate his/her ability to carry out the proposed project; therefore, the applicant's record of accomplishment, including previous success in research or creative activities, should be presented clearly in the proposal.
2. In addition, the applicant should list any previous projects, including those supported by an RCA at SFASU, in the vita along with any resulting presentations, publications, works, or performances.

E. Budget and Cost Effectiveness (15 points)

The applicant should request an adequate and relevant budget for the proposed project. See the **Allowable Costs** section and the *"Research/Creative Activity (RCA) Grant Application Instructions"* (separate document).

F. Bonus Points (up to 10)

The University encourages proposals from beginning researchers/artists and new faculty members, as well as new and innovative lines of inquiry from established faculty members.

- Five points will be added for the first RCA application ever submitted by a faculty member (as primary investigator).
- Five points will be added for a faculty member employed by the University in an RCA-eligible position less than five years, including those faculty members who have previously submitted an unsuccessful RCA application.

Criteria for Evaluating CREATIVE ACTIVITY RCA Proposals

The URC will evaluate **Creative Activity** RCA proposals based on the criteria listed below. The written proposal should clearly meet the evaluation criteria to receive a competitive score. The faculty member may discuss his/her proposal and the evaluation criteria with a member of the Council before the written proposal is submitted to the respective Dean.

The lists given below are intended to provide guidance on the meaning of each section and should not be considered exhaustive or adhered to as entirely prescriptive.

A. Significance of the Proposal (30 points)

1. The proposed project should create further creative work in the PI/PDs area of expertise. Including but not limited to:

Exhibitions, art commissions, design commissions including commercial and/or client-based work, and/or peer-reviewed creative activities are to be regarded as analogous to publications in other fields (art)

And

Performances, recordings, and commissions (music)

And

Productions, designs, and administrations (theater)
2. The project should require the use of knowledge and skills usually possessed only by those having terminal degrees in the field. The rigor and practices of the project should correspond to the practices with the specialized field of study or area of expertise (theater, dance, art, etc.)
3. The originality of the creative activity often determines its success and recognition. As a result, the project should possess unique characteristics in comparison to similar projects.
4. Once the project is completed, similar projects in the same discipline should follow. In some cases, it may be possible to obtain grant money from outside sources for further creative endeavors. Such success enhances the University's prestige, provides a better learning environment for its students, and enables the University to better the community at large.
5. Applicants should show how they plan to disseminate the results of the RCA through presentations, performances, or displays at venues appropriate to the creative products. The project should be designed to lead to a continuing line of work.

B. Proposed Approach (25 points)

1. The proposal should outline the objectives or specific area of research or creative activity, methodology, proposed plan of operation/activities, expected outcomes, suggested evaluation, and projected dissemination of the work.
2. The proposal should clearly describe the proposed procedures. The applicant should provide evidence that other professionals within the field will find the research methodologies or creative efforts acceptable.
3. The proposal objectives should be clear, concise, and understandable to the Council members, who may not be specialists in the discipline.
4. The written proposal should follow the prescribed format as described in the "Research/Creative Activity (RCA) Grant Application Instructions" (separate document).

5. The applicant must demonstrate knowledge of existing art/performances within the area of interest by discussing the supporting literature for the proposed creative activity including research findings; critical responses; works/performances of others who have made significant contributions in the field.

C. Feasibility of the Proposal (20 points)

1. The proposal should clearly establish a feasible schedule for the proposed project.
2. The applicant should be able to conduct the project within the proposed time period.
3. The applicant should be able to complete the project with the funding requested.
4. The applicant should be able to complete the project with the available physical resources.

D. Applicant's Record (10 points)

1. The applicant should demonstrate his/her ability to carry out the proposed project; therefore, the applicant's record of accomplishment, including previous success in creative activities, should be presented clearly in the proposal.
2. In addition, the applicant should list any previous projects, including those supported by an RCA at SFASU, in the vita along with any resulting presentations, publications, works, or performances.

E. Budget and Cost Effectiveness (15 points)

The applicant should request an adequate and relevant budget for the proposed project. See the **Allowable Costs** section and the *"Research/Creative Activity (RCA) Grant Application Instructions"* (separate document).

F. Bonus Points (up to 10)

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