RCAF Proposal Guidelines

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OVERVIEW

The TCU Research and Creative Activities Fund (RCAF) is dedicated to supporting full-time instructors, professors of professional practice, and tenure-track and tenured faculty at TCU. The fund aims to advance research and creative activities that significantly contribute to their disciplines, spanning a broad spectrum of projects and promoting excellence across all university divisions.

Objectives: The RCAF provides seed funding to:

- Conduct preliminary work necessary for proposals for external funding.

- Gather initial results to strengthen resubmissions for previously unawarded external funding.

- Advance scholarly research and creative projects in underfunded areas.

- Develop and evaluate innovative teaching methodologies through research into student learning to enhance educational outcomes.

Funding Priority Areas: RCAF supports initiatives in:

- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) – improving student learning outcomes by investigating student learning, developing new teaching methods and measuring the impact on student learning.

- Humanistic Research and Artistic Creation - understanding the human experience through qualitative methods, or producing art as a way to express and explore the human experience through various mediums.

- STEM Research – research conducted within the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics to solve problems and advance knowledge.

Eligibility: Applicants must:

- Hold a full-time faculty position at TCU.

- Have submitted timely final reports for all prior internal grants, except active ones. Applicants with outstanding reports will be ineligible.

Key Dates

- **Proposal Due:** The First Monday in February (Monday, February 3, 2025

by 5 PM)

- **Award Announcement:** The last Monday in April (Monday, April 28, 2025)

- **Project Start Date:** June 1

- **Project End Date:** May 31 of the following year

Submission Guidelines

- Faculty may submit one proposal per year as Principal Investigator (PI) but can serve as Co-Investigator (Co-I) on other applications.

- Only one award will be granted for multiple applications focusing on the same project.

- Projects are typically funded once; a renewal request for funding to gather additional results for external funding resubmission may be considered, with reviewers' comments included as an appendix.

Review Process

- Applications are evaluated by dedicated RCAF committees, each specialized in one of the funding areas, ensuring alignment with the project's focus.

- Reviews generally take place from late February to mid-April.

Funding Amount

- **Individual RCAF Awards:** Capped at $4,500.

- **Junior Faculty Summer Research Program (JFSRP) Summer Supplement:** $6,000 Supports junior faculty by covering summer salary, separate from the general award cap.

- **Student Mentorship Supplement:** Up to $1,500, supports student mentorship activities during the funded project, separate from the general award cap.

- Requests under $500 are typically non-competitive and should be sourced from departmental resources.

PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

General Information

Submission Instructions

Prepare your proposal following the provided guidelines and compile all materials into one PDF file. Submit electronically to the Office of Sponsored Programs at SponsoredPrograms@tcu.edu by the specified deadline.

Required Documents

The PDF should include the following items in order:

- **RCAF Grant Application Form:** Acts as the cover sheet and must include chair and dean approvals

- **Project Narrative:** No more than 5 pages, adhering to the narrative guidelines.

- **Record of Scholarly/Artistic Activities**

- **Budget Form:** Should include a budget template and justifications.

- **Appendices**

- **Student Mentorship Supplement (if applicable):** Include a Mentorship Plan and Budget Justification.

- **Junior Faculty Summer Research Program Supplement (if applicable):** Include a Budget Justification.

Review and Approval

Before submission, proposals must be reviewed and approved by the applicant's chair and dean.

Formatting Guidelines

- Use a standard, widely accepted serif-type font, size 11 points or larger.

- Smaller font sizes are permissible in graphs, tables, figures, diagrams, and charts, provided they are legible at 100% view.

- Ensure legibility throughout the document.

Content and Clarity

- Address each section of the narrative thoroughly and succinctly.

- Avoid discipline-specific jargon. Proposals may be reviewed by colleagues from different disciplines; ensure that your presentation is clear to a well-educated individual outside your field.

- Reviewers will score any missing section with 0 points.

Citation Format

No specific citation format is required.

Project Narrative (Up To 5 Pages)

The project narrative should outline the purpose, background, methods, investigators responsibilities, professional development implications, and references of your project. It should be structured as follows and must not exceed 5 pages, excluding refereces.

Purpose/Goal of Project

Begin with a concise paragraph that clearly states the project's purpose and goals. Outline what you intend to accomplish or produce through your work.

Background and Significance

1. **Background:** Provide a review of relevant prior work or literature to position your project within the current research, knowledge, or artistic landscape.

2. **Significance:** Explain the necessity of your project. Does it introduce new techniques, address a critical gap, or advance the field significantly?

Method/Approach

1. **Methods and Procedures:** Describe the specific methods, procedures, or techniques you will use to accomplish your project goals.

2. **Justification:** Justify the choice of methods and explain why they are best suited for achieving the project's objectives.

3. **Execution Plan:** Provide a detailed plan for the execution of the methods, including timelines and milestones.

4. **Expected Outcomes:** Discuss what outcomes you expect from implementing these methods and how they will contribute to the overall project goals.

5. **Ethical and Regulatory Compliance (when applicable):**

   - Address any ethical and regulatory considerations related to human or animal subjects.

   - Note that no project funds will be released without the necessary approvals from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subjects or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) for animal subjects.

Investigators Responsibilities

As part of the review criteria, applicants must provide a concise description of the roles and responsibilities of each investigator involved in the project. This description should include:

- **Principal Investigator (PI):** Outline your specific responsibilities as the PI, which may include overseeing all project activities, ensuring regulatory compliance, and managing communication among team members and with external stakeholders.

- **Co-Investigators (if applicable):** Specify the roles and responsibilities of each Co-Is, detailing how their skills and tasks align with the project's needs and objectives.

Professional Development

Detail how the project will enhance your trajectory as the Principal Investigator. Key potential impacts include:

- **Competitive Funding Applications:** Enabling the development of competitive applications for external funding, demonstrating project viability and innovative approaches.
- **Scholarly Products:** Leading to an array of scholarly products, including:

  - Publications in peer-reviewed journals.
  - Exhibitions at recognized galleries or public spaces.

- Presentations at major conferences.
- Performances at notable venues.
- Other outputs that showcase the project

References (excluded from the 5-page limit)

Include a bibliography formatted according to your discipline's standards, listing all references cited and key sources that inform your argument.

Record Of Scholarly/Artistic Activities (Limited To 3 Pages)

Provide a detailed record of your scholarly or artistic activities from the past three to five years, including publications, presentations, performances, exhibitions, and external funding. This record should demonstrate active engagement in your field and sufficient experience to successfully execute the proposed project. Relate this section to the Professional Development goals discussed earlier.

Prior RCAF/JFSRP Support

1. **Previous Support:** If you have received RCAF/JFSRP funding in the past, briefly describe those projects. Clarify if your current proposal:

   o **Continuation of Support:** Seeks to gather additional information in response to feedback from a previously reviewed externally sponsored project (attach reviewers' comments in an Appendix).

   o **Independent Project:** Explain how this proposal is independent from previous RCAF/JFSRP projects.

2. **No Previous Support:** If you have not received RCAF/JFSRP support before, please state this clearly. Lack of prior support <u>will not negatively impact your evaluation.</u>

Budget and Budget Justification (Use Budget Forms)

Your budget should clearly outline how RCAF funds will be allocated. Include a detailed description for each area of expenditure using the provided Budget Form, which includes both a Budget Spreadsheet and Justification. This form does not count towards the 5-page maximum of your project narrative. You must complete the RCAF budget form to apply for RCAF project funds, the RCAF student mentorship supplement budget form to apply for the up to $1,500 supplement and the JFSRP budget question form to apply for the JFSRP $6,000 summer supplement.

Specific Guidelines for Equipment Requests:

- Justify the necessity of any equipment, including computers, specifically for the project.
- Explain why existing campus resources are insufficient.
- Outline a plan for the disposition of the equipment at the project's conclusion.

Non-Allowable Expenses: RCAF funds cannot be used for:

- Travel unrelated to direct research or creative activities (e.g., attending conferences).
- Dissertation completion or publication costs.
- Faculty salaries, except for pre-tenure, tenure-track faculty in the Junior Faculty Summer Research Program.
- Support for graduate students who are already receiving fellowships or assistantships.

Budget Justification:

Every expense must be clearly linked to the proposed activities and necessary for the completion of these activities. Costs should be reasonable, and any unusual expenses must be thoroughly explained.

Appendices (Optional; Required for External Grant Reviewer Comments)

- You may include up to three appendices containing relevant supporting materials that clarify but do not duplicate the content of the project narrative.
- Appendices should not be used to circumvent the page restrictions of the main proposal.
- Appropriate Content: Examples of suitable appendices may include:
  - Survey instruments
  - Letters of collaboration from co-investigators
  - Detailed budget justifications for complex items
  - Product catalog pages or vendor bids for high-cost budget items
  - Reviewer comments from previous submissions (required if applicable)

REVIEW CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Review Timeline

- **February:** Applications are screened and assigned to subcommittees based on the specific RCAF categories: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), Humanistics, and STEM.
- **March:** Subcommittee members thoroughly review and score the assigned proposals.
- **Late March to Mid April:** Meetings are held to discuss the evaluations and finalize recommendations.
- **Mid-Late April:** Recommendations are submitted to the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP).

Review Criteria

- **Reviewed by RCAF Committee:**

1. **Project Significance / Intellectual or Artistic Impact**

   Evaluates the project's potential to fill gaps in the current state of knowledge or practice. Reviews how the project could advance understanding, innovation, or provide significant societal benefits.

2. **Project Design / Approach**

   Assesses the methods, procedures, and techniques that will be employed to meet the project's objectives. This includes a review of the logical coherence of the proposed activities and their feasibility, as well as the robustness of the evaluation mechanisms to assess success.

3. **Investigator / Investigative Team**

   Considers the qualifications and past performance of the investigator(s) to carry out the proposed project effectively. This includes a review of past scholarly activities and how the project aligns with and contributes to the investigator's career development. For team applications, the roles and contributions of each member are assessed.

- **Reviewed by OSP:**

4. Budget / Budget Justification

Analyzes the financial plan for the project, ensuring that each line item is justified in terms of the project's goals. This section scrutinizes the necessity and appropriateness of the budgeted items in achieving the proposed objectives.

Scoring Criteria

The NIH review scoring system is adopted for clarity and consistency, with smaller numbers indicating stronger proposals:

1-3: Exceptional—Proposal excellently meets criteria with strong potential for significant impact.

4-6: Good—Proposal adequately meets criteria, though some areas may require clarification or minor improvements.

7-9: Fair—Proposal meets criteria but with several areas that significantly detract from its overall impact.

POST AWARD ADMINISTRATION

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator (PI)

- **Budget Management:** The PI is responsible for ensuring that grant resources are used judiciously to achieve the proposal's objectives within the approved budget.

- **Change in Funding Use:** Any deviation from the approved budget must receive prior approval from the Director of Sponsored Programs.

- **Disclosure of Additional Support:** The Office of Sponsored Programs must be informed of any partial or full support received from other sources for approved budget items.

Reporting Requirements

- **Award Issuance:** Awards will be distributed on June 1.

- **Progress Reports:** PIs must submit a status report at the six-month midpoint and at the end of the twelve-month funding period. Continued funding is contingent upon satisfactory progress as assessed in the midpoint report.

- **Final Report:** Due within 60 days of project completion or funding expiration, whichever is earlier, detailing:

Report Content

- **Grant Details:** Specify the grant program (e.g., RCAF, JFSRP, TCUIS), project title, and project number.

- **Accomplishments**: Detail the progress made towards the original goals and highlight any significant achievements.

- **Challenges:** Describe any delays or obstacles encountered during the project period.

- **Publications and Dissemination:** List any publications, presentations, and proposals submitted to external funding agencies that resulted from the project.

- **Future Plans:** Outline steps for finalizing the project and plans for dissemination, including potential publications or further external funding

submissions.

- **Mentorship Impact** (if applicable)**:** Discuss how the student mentorship supplement contributed to the educational experience.

Compliance and Consequences

- Failure to submit required reports or demonstrate progress may lead to cancellation of the project and withdrawal of funding.

- Upon project completion, PIs are expected to present their findings at a university-organized seminar or workshop (details to be determined).

Financial Closure

- Unspent funds revert to the RCAF account at the grant period's end. Purchase orders made just before the grant period's end will be honored, even if items arrive post-expiration. Early purchases are recommended to avoid end-of-period complications.

Acknowledgment of Support

- Any publications, performances, or exhibitions partly or fully funded by TCU/RCAF should acknowledge the support. Suggested statement: "This work was supported in part by a grant from the TCU Research and Creative Activities Fund."

RCAF SUPPLEMENTS

Junior Faculty Summer Research Program (JFSRP) Supplement

Junior faculty applicants are invited to apply for an additional $6,000 supplement to their application. This supplement provides $6,000 in summer salary support to junior faculty at TCU, enabling them to advance their research or creative projects during the summer without the need for summer teaching.

Eligibility

- **Faculty Status:** Applicants must be full-time, tenure-track assistant professors at TCU.
- **Experience Limit:** Eligible faculty are those within their first three years at TCU or those who have not received the JFSRP more than once
- **Duration Commitment:** Faculty must commit to being at TCU for the entire duration of the award (summer through the following spring).
- **Teaching Option:** Although the supplement is primarily for salary support, recipients may teach up to two summer school sessions if departmental needs and funding permit.

Review Consideration

- **Evaluation Basis:** The research plan will be assessed based on its quality, impact, and merits under the RCAF criteria. Submit a detailed RCAF research plan as per the guidelines in the section: PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION.
- **Weighted Scoring:** Junior faculty applying for the JFSRP will receive weighted scoring to highlight their applications.
    - Adjustment for Rank: Eligibilbe applicant, (i.e. Junior faculty in their first three years at TCU or those who have not previously received JFSRP) will be identified for a scoring adjustment.
    - Percentage Decrease: After initial scoring, the scores of eligible junior faculty will be reduced by 10%. A lower score improves their competitive position.
    - Application: This adjustment aims to balance the evaluation process, recognizing the developmental stage of junior faculty and enhancing their opportunity for funding.
- **Funding Decision:**
    - Decisions are based on the comprehensive quality of the RCAF plan. Thus, an application may be approved for RCAF funding but not necessarily qualify for the JFSRP supplement if it does not meet specific criteria set for the supplement.

- Awards are made for meritorious proposals based on available funding.
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Funding Usage
- **Salary Support:** The $6,000 supplement is exclusively for salary, allowing faculty to dedicate full attention to their research projects.

Reporting
- **Final Report:** A comprehensive report is required at the end of the funding period. It should include detailed outcomes of the project, its impact on professional development, and any subsequent external funding or publications.

Student Mentorship Supplement

Faculty applicants are invited to apply for an additional $1,500 to apply towards a student mentorship component of their application. These financial resources are intended to provide students with individualized research mentoring opportunities. *The faculty RCAF award ($4500) <u>must not</u> depend on receipt of the student mentorship supplement; that is, it is possible that only the faculty portion will be awarded.*

Application Requirements

- **Mentorship Plan:** Submit a single-page plan outlining research/mentoring goals and activities that will be jointly undertaken by the student and faculty to achieve these goals. The plan should detail the type and frequency of interactions (e.g., weekly in-person meetings throughout the project).

- **Student Details:** Indicate the student's educational level (undergraduate or graduate) and program. The specific student need not be identified at the time of application but must be selected after the supplement is awarded.

- **Budget Justification:** Use the provided budget template to show how the $1,500 will be utilized towards achieving the research goals. Acceptable uses include compensating the student's time, materials for additional research activities, and travel expenses for presentations, trainings, or collaborations.

Eligibility

- RCAF eligibility requirements must be met to request the student

mentorship supplement.

- The supplement cannot support students already receiving fellowships or assistantships.

Reporting

- **Final Report Inclusion:** Include a summary in the final report detailing how the supplemental support enhanced the student's educational experience.

Funding Usage: Funds may cover expenses such as:

- Compensation for the student's time in the lab.
- Materials for an additional research experiment or project.
- Travel expenses for presenting at conferences, attending training, or visiting collaborative sites.