What is a Preliminary Proposal?

Preliminary proposals, sometimes referred to as “white papers” or “pre-proposals,” are concise, preliminary descriptions of projects that are submitted to funding agencies. Funding agencies use preliminary proposals (1) to determine whether potential projects address their funding priorities, and/or (2) to gather information on specific topics.

Funding Agency Guidelines

Funding agency guidelines regarding Preliminary Proposals vary. Other information may be requested, in addition to project descriptions, such as strategies, partnerships and cost estimates. Some agencies require Preliminary Proposals to be submitted by the University’s Office of Sponsored Programs and others require them to be submitted by the Principal Investigator (PI).

Is this a Pre-Proposal?

The question occasionally arises as to whether or not a “preliminary proposal” requires authorizing approval of the institution prior to submission.

If the submission meets any of the following criteria, it is not a preliminary proposal, and should be routed:

- The submission requires a detailed budget,
- The submission will serve as the basis for an award,
- The submission includes an irrevocable commitment of UMBC resources,
- The submission is going to industry,
- The submission includes items that require institutional approval, like a reduced or a waived F&A cost recovery rate; or
- If there are any restrictions on IP ownership or publication rights.

If none of the above criteria are met, then is it a preliminary proposal. If the unit and PI would like to have the pre-proposal tracked, then they should create a “Pre-Proposal” by selecting it as the proposal type in Kuali, and route it as they would a regular proposal. The user can change the Kuali proposal type to “New” if and when the preliminary proposal becomes a full proposal. A preliminary proposal does not require routing and no Institutional Proposal will be created. If not entered into Kuali the Office of Sponsored Programs requests an information copy.

Should a proposal be submitted to a sponsor without UMBC institutional approval, the proposal may be rescinded and/or award declined.

Preliminary proposals submittals should also include the following statement:

“Preliminary Proposal: Pending Institutional Approvals. This does not represent a firm quote and does not commit University personnel, facilities or funds.”