The University of Texas at Austin
College of Natural Sciences

CNS SPARK GRANT PROGRAM
2023 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Proposal Deadline: November 21, 2022, 5:00 PM CST

OVERVIEW

The CNS Spark Grant Program is an internal funding mechanism open to Associate Professors for the exploration of new research questions or approaches. The goal is to support new ideas that have the potential to elevate or transform a research program but that are too early-stage in development to be appropriate for external funding opportunities. The program encourages high-risk/high-reward projects. Applicants may propose to develop new methods or to gather preliminary data for new directions in research. Proposals for exploratory, discovery, or hypothesis-driven research as well as method development are all appropriate for the program.

AWARD INFORMATION

Up to five CNS Spark Grants (maximum of $200,000 each) will be awarded annually. Awarded funds will be available for four years. No-cost extensions will not be considered, and remaining funds will be swept after the close of year four.

Allowed Expenses	Unallowed Expenses
• Graduate student stipends and tuition	• Faculty salary (summer or otherwise)
• Postdoc and Research Scientist salaries	• Routine conference travel
• Lab technicians, undergraduate researcher salaries	
• Materials/supplies/consumables	
• Equipment	
• Course fees and travel for collaborations or acquisition of new skills/knowledge	

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants should meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Applicants must be a CNS Associate Professor at the time of submission.

- Faculty can only submit one application per cycle but may submit up to five applications in total while in rank as Associate Professor.

- Faculty can only receive one CNS Spark Grant in their career.

- The proposed project may not be under consideration with an external funding agency. Exceptions will be made for funding solicitations that are similar to the goals of this program (i.e., new research directions, high-risk, mid-career, etc.)

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

All application documents should be formatted using 1-inch margins and no smaller than 11-point font. The following documents are required and must be submitted in a single pdf document by the application deadline:

1. **Lay Summary**. In 500 words or less describe the proposed project and its potential impact using language that is understandable to non-scientists such as a colleague from a different college at UT-Austin. Following the lay summary, include 5 – 10 keywords that categorize the research proposed in this application.

2. **Proposal**. Limit to five (5) pages or less. Figures do not count against the page limit. Organize the proposal in four (4) sections as follows:

   a. *Rationale and Vision*

   Briefly describe your research arc. Summarize the key findings of your career to this point. Then, describe how the proposed project represents a new research direction or an enhancement of current directions. What motivates your interest in this new area/approach? Consider these questions:

   - How does the proposed project differ from your current research program?

   - What characteristics make the proposed project a novel addition to or enhancement of your existing research portfolio?

   - What technical hurdles are currently limiting your lab's trajectory in this direction?

   b. *Impact on Science*
   Briefly describe the potential impact of the project if successful. Consider how will it change the current state of knowledge, open new research methods, or impact society.

   c. *Project Description*

   Explain the project to be performed. This section should be technical, but understandable to scientists in CNS <u>outside</u> your field.

   d. *Future Directions*

   Explain how the project may open up new directions in your research program and foster research in the long-term.

3. **Bibliography/References**. No page limit. List citations/references in a document separate from the proposal.

4. **Response to Prior Reviews**. Limit to one (1) page. For applications being resubmitted, summarize any changes made to the proposal to address prior reviews.

5. **Budget and Budget Justification**. No page limit. Submit a budget outlining expected expenditures and annual totals in appropriate categories for each proposed year. Budgets should not include PI salary (summer or otherwise) or indirect costs/facilities & administrative fees. If applicable, other resources that will be committed to the effort, such as support from academic units, should be outlined. Justify major expenses in a budget justification. Applicants with discretionary account balances of $200,000 and above should explain why Spark Grant funding is necessary.

6. **Biosketch/CV and Current and Pending Support**. Submit a current biosketch or CV and current and pending funding information (direct cost per year and total duration). NIH, NSF, or similar format preferred.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Applications must be submitted through CompetitionSpace, UT's online submission interface. To apply, visit https://utexas.infoready4.com/#competitionDetail/1880994. Login using your UT EID and password to create your application. Complete the application form and upload the required application documents described above and click "Submit Application" at the bottom of the page. You will also have the option to save a draft and return to continue your application at a future time. If this is your first time submitting a proposal through CompetitionSpace, refer to the "Note" at the end of this RFP for further instructions. Application components should be combined in the order listed above and uploaded as a single pdf and submitted by the **deadline of 5:00 PM CST on November 21, 2022**.

REVIEW CRITERIA

A standing committee of faculty with expertise in fields represented throughout CNS will evaluate CNS Spark Grant proposals. Proposals should be written in a manner accessible to non-experts. Proposals will be reviewed using the following criteria:

1. **Potential impact to research program**: To what extent does the proposal offer a new research direction or a significant enhancement of a current direction? What impact will the new direction or enhancement have on the PI's research approach or methodology?

2. **Overcoming barriers**: What barriers currently hindering progress or innovation are identified in the proposal? To what extent is the proposed strategy to overcome the barriers plausible?

3. **Impact on Science or Society**: What is the potential for the project to foster long-term impact beyond the PI's research program? How might the project benefit a scientific field, discover new knowledge, provide novel insights and understanding, or impact society?

Uncommitted balances available to PIs through institutional accounts, such as startup accounts, will be taken into account in funding decisions to ensure maximum impact of new commitments. Final funding decisions will be made by the CNS Dean (or delegate) in line with available CNS funds and strategic priorities.

POST-AWARD REQUIREMENTS

Awardees will be required to submit a final report within two (2) months of the end of the award. Awardees may also be asked to describe results of Spark Grant-funded work at a future CNS event, such as an Advisory Council meeting, or in a CNS communication.

TIMELINE

Submission window opens: September 12, 2022

Submission deadline: November 21, 2022

Announcement of awardees: March 2023

Anticipated award start date: July 1, 2023

Award end date: Four (4) years from award start date

Anticipated date unexpended funds swept: July 1, 2027

CONTACT INFORMATION

Program website: https://cns.utexas.edu/strategic-research-initiatives/find-funding/spark-grant-program

Application submission: https://utexas.infoready4.com/#competitionDetail/1880994.

Program questions and application submission interface questions should be directed to CNS Strategic Research Initiatives: CNS_SRI@austin.utexas.edu.

The form and timing of CNS Spark Grant competitions and awards is subject to change in subsequent years.

The content of this announcement is relevant only for the 2023 CNS Spark Grant competition and awards.

Note: *If this is your first time submitting a proposal through the proposal submission website, you will first need to affiliate yourself with the College before you can submit. To do this, login with your EID and password, then click on the "Hello, [Name]" link at the top right of the website. This will take you to your user profile. In your user profile, under "Primary School or Department," select "Natural Sciences, College of" and then scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the Save Changes button. You will now be able to apply.*