ORIEI Seed Funding Opportunities FAQs

UPDATED: 3/16/2023 – NEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ADDED TO BOTTOM OF DOCUMENT

PLEASE NOTE: This FAQ page will be updated frequently with the update date posted. Please check back frequently

The goal of the ORIEI *Building the Foundation - Early Stage Research Seed Funding* is to **stimulate the development of new research and scholarship initiatives** through the support of projects that have a high probability of attracting new external support for sustained scholarly contributions and impact.

The goal of the *Take It to the Next Level: Multidisciplinary Research Seed Funding* is to advance ***scalable*** multidisciplinary projects for research and scholarship **in Sustainability, Biohealth or Digital Innovation**. This seed funding opportunity will drive stakeholder engagement and support planning activities to secure transdisciplinary basic and translational research and scholarship organized around topics that align with one or more of Mason's university-level research institutes; Institute for Biohealth Innovation, Institute for a Sustainable Earth, and Institute for Digital InnovAtion.

ELIGIBILITY (of Applicant or Project Focus) and TEAMING:

QUESTION(S):

This is just the type of opportunity that can help kickstart my research program. I suspect that the early stage opportunity is right for me, but I understand that it is ideally intended for those without external support. I do currently have modest external support (related to my proposal and planned direction). Can I still apply for ***Building the Foundation***?

I'm a relatively recent PhD and have been at Mason three years. However, I am not strictly speaking early career, as I spent over 10 years consulting before receiving my PhD. I also have received funding previously and serve as PI on a number of projects. I am not sure which funding opportunity is best for me.

For the ***Building the Foundation***, it appears that the funding is for *early stage researchers.* The Call notes that priority will be given to early career faculty, restart career faculty and those who have not yet received external funding. I currently have external funding for which I am a co-PI and I have another $100K funding on which I am PI. Both grants are for completely different project than what I would like to propose for this early stage seed funding grant. I wanted to know if I am still eligible or if I would be considered low priority because of the funding I already have.

ANSWER:

While the eligibility did focus a bit more on the *characteristics of the applicant* (e.g., early career, those who have not received funding yet, etc.), it is really better to focus on ***stage of your research and scholarship area***. It could be a new or early stage line of research where the initial seed funding can help build the foundation of the research because it is not an area of research in which the researcher has much of a track record or very much external funding. The aspect that distinguishes the two opportunities is that the ***Building the Foundation - Early Stage Seed Funding*** is ***not building on a well-established portfolio of research***. The seed funding is for developing new areas of research for all career stages.

The ***Take It to the Next Level*** opportunity ***is designed to give researchers an opportunity to build on their previous portfolio of research*** and propose a seed funding project aligned with one of the three institutes that will allow them to be more successful to propose for larger (more Center like) external funding and really scale their research to the next level. In this case, the stage of the research is much more mature, building on partnerships and a portfolio of research in which the applicant has engaged.

QUESTION**:**

For projects aligned with the Institute for a Sustainable Earth, could you please clarify whether it would be viable to focus on a single sustainable development goal/SDG (e.g. Zero Hunger, Climate Action, Quality Education, etc.) as a focus of a seed grant proposal?

ANSWER**:**

Yes, focusing on one SDG is appropriate. You ***do not*** have to focus on all 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals to be aligned with ISE. You can choose the goal(s) most appropriate for your proposed project.

QUESTION:
For scholars that "fall in the middle" between the two types of funding, will this funding be offered in the future. I am just building my collaborations and center now, but would not have everything I need for the ***Take It to the Next Level*** in a month. It would be good to know if this type of funding would be available in the future as I build my program. My work is really not early stage either, it is more mature than that. I want to continue to build my program and collaborations so that I can be ready when the funding is offered again. We are not quite ready to apply.
ANSWER:
A question we would ask is, "Is there an unmet need that could grow your research that the seed funding could address?" Perhaps there is a possibility that one of the opportunities could meet your needs. It appears that you want to ***Take It to the Next Level*** but are not quite there yet. If you are not quite ready to apply for one of the seed funding opportunities, please know that the Office of Research Innovation and Economic impact can help you as you continue to develop your program. Please do reach out and we may be able to assist you even if the seed funding is not appropriate right now.
With respect to whether the funding will be available in the future or annually, it will really depend on the funding available to our office. We certainly hope to provide this in the future, but it will depend on whether we receive funding. We requested funding this year for the seed funding initiative and received it. Future seed funding depends on whether we are able to secure the funding.
Also, please note that for all of our applicants, we do want to know what additional support (beyond just the seed funding) would be needed to help you prepare your external funding applications and make them more competitive. We will be providing some wrap around services in addition to the seed funding.

QUESTION**:**
Would a "training grant/project" be appropriate for the seed funding. Or is it only for research? This is related to a collaboration we have with local health providers on helping communities address COVID 19. As part of that project, we have come to realize that these workers would benefit greatly by having additional training and we would like to develop and implement a training curriculum to address the gaps we are seeing. We would then seek external funding to expand the training.
ANSWER**:**
Consistent with the Call for Proposals, these opportunities are to support your research, your scholarship and your creative activity. The activities described above definitely sound like scholarship and if there is an opportunity to scale that training and curriculum development for greater impact with external funding, then yes, this type of project would qualify for this seed funding.

QUESTION:
I had a question about the team composition. If there is an early career scholar and other senior scholars (in a multi-disciplinary team) on the proposal, does the early career scholar have to be the PI? Would that increase the chances for award? Or is it fine to be a co-PI and let a more experienced PI be the lead?
ANSWER:
It really does depend on what you are proposing. Is the project an ***early stage*** research, scholarship or creative activity project regardless of who the PI? And who on the multidisciplinary team is best to lead that activity and give you the strongest opportunity for external funding?
Another lens through which to think through this question is: What is the target opportunity for external funding you have in mind and what is the team structure that makes the strongest case for the target funding? And are there benefits to practicing that team structure from the beginning with this seed funding that will make a compelling case when you seek that target external funding? If so, then you should propose the team that makes the most compelling case for the external funding.

QUESTION:
For the ***Take It to the Next Level***, is there a preference for well-established collaborations or new collaborations?
ANSWER:
Again, here it also depends on the funding opportunity. For ***Take It to the Next Level***, we are looking for those teams and areas of research that are mature enough to think about how to scale their research to the next level for larger, perhaps center level, external funding opportunities. In those cases, the partnership may already be established. For

Building the Foundation or even for ***Take It to the Next Level*** in some cases, you may be using the seed funding to build the partnership that is needed to be more competitive for external funding. Often external funders will want to see that a team has worked together or published together and this seed funding could be used to help establish you and your partners as a team. It may also be that a new partner can bring something to the table that will strengthen and make your external funding application more competitive and you want to leverage that new partner and their resources by working together on the seed funding project. So, it really does depend on the goal of the seed funding and the target opportunity and how the seed funding can be used to make you more competitive for the external target opportunity.

***QUESTION*:**
I see the team can have external partners, I am wondering whether there are any restrictions on the external partners? Whether they can come from industry, national labs, or can also come from universities? In addition, what will be their roles: can they be senior personnel, or they can also be the Co-PI? In the latter case, can they receive funds if the project gets funded and how?
***ANSWER*:**
The external collaborator can be Industry, Community Organization, Government, Academic Institution, National Lab, or other external collaborators appropriate for your research and scholarship. You also have the flexibility to define the role as is appropriate for the level of effort on the project. While funds can be budgeted for the partner, it should not be the majority of the funding. If funding is needed for external collaborators, they would be treated as sub-awardees on the grant. However, as GMU is providing funds for the seed funding project, applicants should consider asking the partner to equally invest their time and resources (funding of a student, in-kind contribution of time, other resources) in support of the research project. The collaborator should be considered a true *partner* in the project.

***QUESTION*:**
Is there a preference for multi GMU PI vs individual PI for the project?
***ANSWER*:**
It depends on the project you are proposing. We have noted that the ***Take it to the Next Level*** should be a multi-disciplinary project because we believe that complex problems require expertise and experience from different disciplines, but whether that is a multi-PI project or a single-PI and other senior or contributing personnel depends on the project being proposed. You need to propose the strongest team to meet the goals of the project and the team that sets you up to be the most competitive for the targeted external funding opportunity.

***QUESTION*:**
How will early career PIs without external funding be prioritized in the review process? Will this status be communicated to the review panel, or will it be considered afterwards only as a tie breaker?
ANSWER:
The PI's status and their experience as noted in the biosketch will be part of the review process. Particularly for the ***Building the Foundation***, but really for both opportunities, it will be important to note how the seed funding advances your research, scholarship and creative activity and sets you up for success in applying for external funding to continue that work. You may note in the biosketch the extent to which you have or have not yet receive external funding.

QUESTION:
I'm planning to apply for the early stage funding with a colleague that was formerly an affiliate faculty member but is now at another institution. Is it worth it to try to reinstate the affiliate faculty status for the purposes of the application? There's no cost involved - it's purely honorary, but wanted to check before we went through the process.
ANSWER:
It is not necessary for you to try to reinstate your colleague as an affiliate faculty member. It could simply be a partnership with the colleague and the new institution.

QUESTION:
Can a foreign scientist be included on the project?
ANSWER:
There is nothing that specifically precludes a collaborator from another county but it would need to be fully justified.

QUESTION:
I am writing to query a question for the "**Building the Foundation – Early Stage Research Seed Funding**".
I am preparing a proposal for Building the Foundation – Early Stage Research Seed Funding. I have a collaborator from another department at Mason with whom I would like to explore possible research and strengthen our collaboration. That faculty member is preparing a proposal for "**Take It to the Next Level – Multidisciplinary Research Seed Fundin**g".
I know that Faculty may NOT submit a proposal for BOTH. **My question is whether I am allowed to list that faculty member as an internal partner in my Early-Stage proposal?**
ANSWER:
You can include the faculty member as an internal partner and building the relationship and collaboration together is appropriate for this seed funding. However, seed funding should *not* be used to pay a percentage of that faculty member's salary if salary is for him/her is also going to be budgeted on the separate Take It to the Next Level proposal. That is, should both projects be awarded, the faculty member would not be able to receive salary support from both grants.

BUDGET

QUESTION:
Does the $100,000 (or $50,000) funding include Indirect?
ANSWER:
No Indirect (or F&A) are charged on internal grant applications.

QUESTION:
Is PI support allowed? What about travel? What, in addition to the stipend for a graduate student, can be included in the budget. Is travel to present at a conference allowed?
ANSWER:
Applicants should budget what they need to complete the seed funding project. Salary support for the PI and others is allowed as is travel for data collection. Travel to meet with collaborators may not be allowed as such meetings can be conducted remotely. Travel to present at a conference would need to be justified in terms of how such travel will strengthen an application for external funding and meet the goals of the project. Any funding should be explained and justified in a budget narrative or budget justification.

***QUESTION*:**
For the ***Take It to the Next Level - Multidisciplinary Research Seed Funding Initiative*** I am a bit confused by the following two sentences in the RFPs.

- "We expect to fund 3 projects up to a maximum of $100K each plus tuition and health insurance for one full-time doctoral student per project, for an award duration of 12 to 18 months."
- "Proposed projects must include at a GRA stipend for at least one full-time doctoral student (tuition and health insurance for the GRA will be included in the Seed Funding)."

I have the impression that the tuition and health insurance for the GRA does not have to be in the proposed $100K budget, and those costs will be the additional support from ORIEI. Is my understanding correct?
***ANSWER*:**
Yes, the ***tuition and health insurance for one doctoral GRA will be included in addition to the $100,000***. We are asking applicants to pay for the stipend for the doctoral student as part of the budget they submit.

QUESTION:
Does our college's grant department get involved in the budget for this or are we on our own to develop the budget?
ANSWER:
That is really up to you and the resources available in your college. We certainly encourage you to ask them for assistance and we specifically encourage you to speak with your Dean or Associate/Assistant Dean for Research about your project. You should ***not*** use the RAMP system for this internal opportunity. While OSP can be a terrific resource, they also have limited bandwidth and while these seed funding opportunities are important, OSP is at capacity working with faculty and submitting proposals for external funding. You should also ask your academic unit about any policies

related to including salary or course buyout as part of the budget. Every college is different in terms of their policies related to course buyouts.

QUESTION:
Would it be useful if we used OSP's Excel template for our budget (but leaving off F&A)?
ANSWER:
You certainly can use the OSP budget template if you are familiar with it and comfortable using it. That said, you do not have to use it. You can provide us with a simple budget with each budget item broken out (e.g., Personnel and Fringe; GRA Stipend and Fringe; Consultants/Subcontract; Travel if applicable; and Other Direct Costs such as lab supplies, data from an external source, training supplies, equipment utilization fees, etc.)
PLEASE NOTE: Regardless of the template used for the budget, you must include a budget narrative or budget justification explaining the costs.

OTHER

QUESTION:
Does the doctoral student have to be the advisee to the PI? What if the doctoral student is pre-candidacy?
ANSWER:
The doctoral GRA does not have to be the advisee to the PI. The GRA should be a doctoral student with the knowledge, expertise and skills most directly relevant to the project.

QUESTION:
In the Call for Proposals, it mentions that "the topics that exploit technologies available in Mason's core facilities (e.g., MRI, Nanofabrication Facility, Visualization Lab, BRL, Center for the Arts, etc.) are encouraged." My question is whether we need to get a letter of support from the faculty members in these labs/centers or do we just need to clarify how the proposed topic can make use of these facilities in the future?
ANSWER:
A support letter is not required. You should clarify how you plan to use the facility to conduct the proposed research, scholarship or creative activity.

QUESTION:
I understand that we are to provide specific information about the planned funding mechanism or opportunity (e.g., URLs; funder site, etc.) for the targeted follow on funding for the project we are proposing. Does it make sense to provide information on more than one target funding opportunity.
ANSWER:
It is appropriate to try to leverage this seed funding for multiple opportunities. Indeed, there may be one opportunity that is the best fit and another opportunity that might also be appropriate as a complement to the first opportunity and you could describe both. That said, we would caution against applying for two opportunities with the same focus to the same funder (e.g., NSF, NIH) simultaneously. If you are submitting two proposals at the same time, the narrative should be how they complement each other and leverage one another for broader impact. What you want avoid is the appearance that one proposal is a backup for the other if you plan to apply to more than one. Program Directors can spot that and it can jeopardize your funding. For the purposes of this seed funding application, you can describe more than one opportunity if appropriate.

QUESTION:
If two proposals are very similar in nature, how will they be reviewed? Do the reviewers have the detailed expertise to distinguish the two from one another?
ANSWER:
We will be recruiting a pool of external reviewers with broad and deep background in a wide range of focus areas (e.g., biohealth, sustainability and resilience, digital innovation, etc.). Our goal is to have each application reviewed by three reviewers with the subject matter expertise appropriate for the application. The reviewers will review the applications based on the review criteria in the Call for Proposals. Each reviewer will be asked to identify any potential conflicts of

interest and sign a confidentiality agreement. These reviews will then be evaluated by an internal Mason panel. We feel confident that the reviewers will have the expertise needed to conduct the reviews.

QUESTION:

Are there example proposals for these seed funding mechanisms that we can view?

ANSWER:

This is only the 2nd time we are conducting this specific type of seed funding. A link to the funding announcement about the faculty who receive funding in last year's competition is posted on the Research Development website (https://resdev.gmu.edu/2022-oriei-seed-funding-awards/). You may reach out to one or more of the PIs and ask if they would be willing to share their proposal.

QUESTION:

So, if my ***Take It to the*** **Next Level** is a planning grant, just for my clarity, is some data collection necessary? Or it is based on the need to the apply for the targeted funding opportunity?

ANSWER:

The ***Take It to the Next Level*** should build on existing research and scholarship or your portfolio of research and scholarship. So, if you are comfortable with the data that you have collected as part of that existing portfolio of work and you do not see value in additional data collection to make the proposal for external funding more competitive, then it would be appropriate to use these funds to focus on planning and move your research and scholarship forward to be more competitive for external funding. This funding is about building and working your team and strengthening your partnerships to make you more competitive to secure larger external funding and scale your research and scholarship activity.

QUESTION:

How does this mechanism differ from the Faculty Research and Development Awards (FRDA) within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences? Is it primarily that this seed funding is a university-wide competition, and the maximum award amount is higher? I just want to be sure I'm not missing something.

ANSWER:

Many of the academic units have their own seed funding opportunities with different eligibility criteria, proposal structures, funding, and review criteria. The primary difference is that these two seed funding opportunities are being offered centrally by the Office of Research Innovation and Economic Impact (ORIEI) and has separate funding, eligibility and proposal and review structures. Applying for FRDA does not preclude you from applying for either of the seed funding opportunities being offered by ORIEI.

QUESTION:

Regarding the Early Stage Research Seed funding opportunity, is the description of current or prior collaborations among team members (250 words) to be included as part of the 4-page proposal narrative or is it a separate section?

ANSWER:

The short description of current or prior collaborations (Max 250 Words) is ***OUTSIDE*** of the 4-page Proposal Narrative and is optional.

QUESTION:

The members of our team are all from one college but represent three different departments and very different disciplines. It that multidisciplinary enough, or should we have faculty from other colleges as well?

ANSWER:

As we did not specifically stipulate that the team had to include faculty from different colleges, we cannot make that a requirement. It also would not be appropriate to simply add a team member simply to fill such a requirement if it does not add substantively to your team. In the narrative, you should discuss what each member and their discipline brings to the project.

QUESTION:

Our team is in the process of asking for letters of support for our ***Take It to the Next Level*** application, but I needed some clarification. Though noted in the Call for Proposals as "letters of support", the description in the call indicates that

these really should be letters of collaboration instead, written from collaborators. So, a letter of support from the department chair simply noting the importance of the activity is not permitted, is it?
ANSWER:
That is correct. The letters really should be from collaborators acknowledging the way in which they will be collaborating in the project and, if appropriate, in the application for external funding. Letters of support from the department or college are not needed.

NEW/UPDATED 3/16/2023

QUESTION:
The Call for Proposals states

> "Faculty may NOT submit a proposal for BOTH the Building the Foundation – Early Stage Research Seed Funding and the larger Take It to the Next Level – Multidisciplinary Research Seed Funding opportunity."

Does "submit" refer to both PIs and Co-I's? I'm specifically wondering if I can submit a "Building the Foundation" proposal as a PI, and be a Co-I on a "Take it to the Next Level" proposal.
ANSWER:
This question seems to stem from different criteria in the Calls For Proposals. For Build the Foundation, we note: "A faculty member may only participate as a member of the proposing team on one (1) proposal in this competition." For Take it to the Next Level, we note: "A faculty member may participate as a member of the proposing team on no more than 2 proposals in this competition."
The Calls for Proposals were, indeed, silent on whether a faculty member could be a PI on the on one proposal for one Call and serve on a team for another proposal for the other Call. We see the value in allowing a faculty member to submit a Build the Foundation application and serve as a collaborator on a Take it to the Next Level. So, that would be allowed.

QUESTION:
I am a Postdoc working at GGS department and I am interested in applying for the 2023 ORIEI Early Stage Seed Funding. I am planning to submit a proposal as a PI. Does ORIEI requires extra paperwork/letters for postdocs to be PIs?
ANSWER:
To serve as a PI, you must meet the eligibility requirements of Mason's Principal Investigators Policy 4012. Based on that policy, it appears that you may be "Eligible by Exception." As such, you would need to follow the Procedure for Request and Approval of a PI Eligibility Exception. You would need to provide that approval a part of the application.

QUESTION:
Can one serve as "PI or Co-PI on one proposal and "science collaborator" on another one for the ORIEI Early Stage submissions?
ANSWER:
The Early Stage Seed Funding Call states that "A faculty member may only participate as a member of the proposing team on one (1) proposal in this competition." So, you would not be able to be a PI or Co-PI on one Early Stage Seed funding and a collaborator on another Early Stage Seed Funding.

QUESTION:
Do we need IRB approval before the submission?
ANSWER:
No. If the proposed project involves human subjects, the PI will need IRB approval prior to award but not at the time of submission.

QUESTION:
Do we need letters from all of our collaborators for Take it to the Next Level?
ANSWER:
If you are including a collaborator in your budget or you are proposing in-kind or other support from a collaborator, you should include the letter of collaboration so that the reviewers know that, indeed, the collaborator is aware of what you are proposing.

QUESTION:
Can we include collaborators who will be more involved after the seed funded portion of the grant is completed? That is, their involvement will be when we use the results of the seed funding to get other work?
ANSWER:
That would be appropriate. For example, you can explain that the collaboration will help you with the next stage of the research or project that may also be included in additional external proposal seeking.

QUESTION:
Is visa processing to collect data in a foreign country a legitimate cost for they budget.
ANSWER:
If the data collection in that country is a critical element of the project and a visa is required for travel, then it would be a legitimate budget item.

***QUESTION**:*
In assessing the potential success of the proposal in terms of securing external funding, how do you evaluate that. Should one offer examples of existing grant opportunities and how the project will position itself?
ANSWER:
Yes, that would be very useful. Indeed, for the Take It to the Next Level, applicants are asked to *include specific information about the planned funding mechanisms or opportunities (e.g., URLs; funder site, etc.) for the targeted follow on funding. Please indicate whether the targeted funder has funded similar work and, if so, how is your proposed project different*. Reviewers will look at the extent to which what you are proposing is related to the opportunity you are targeting.

QUESTION:
Can an Associate Professor or a full Professor apply for a Build the Foundation grant if they are proposing a new line or different line of research?
ANSWER:
Yes. You should consider the *stage of the research* ***not*** the stage of the researcher when deciding which opportunity is most appropriate.

QUESTION:
Can a Build the Foundation grant by multidisciplinary?
ANSWER:
Yes, absolutely.

QUESTION:
Can you propose a Take It to the Next Level project if you do not have previous grant funding for that work but you have publications? Do you already have to have funding for the work?
ANSWER:
Without knowing the specifics, it is hard to answer definitively, but the proposed work should build on a body of work regardless of funding. Having publications related to the project is one way to show the body of previous work. I also know that in some humanities and social sciences, there may not have been a history of funded scholarship but that does not mean that unfunded work has not been done. So, not having funding does not preclude you from the Take It to the Next Level, but you would have to describe how this work builds on previous work and the proposed work is scalable.

QUESTION:
Are there specific topics for the call?
ANSWER:
The short answer is no. For Take It to the Next Level, the proposal needs to align with one or more of the three University Research Institutes (IBI, ISE and IDIA), but those areas are quite broad.

QUESTION:
Is there a limit to the number of times we can apply?
ANSWER:
No, there is no limit.