This tutorial addresses grant management strategies that may be particularly helpful to the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) community in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on project management.

It is based on a June 10, 2020 webinar, hosted by Mentor-Connect, ATE Central, and the American Association of Community Colleges.

Presenters were Elaine Craft, Mentor-Connect PI; Pamela Silvers, PI of an ATE-funded project at Asheville-Buncombe Technical College, and Celeste Carter, ATE Program Lead at NSF.

Topics covered include making project adjustments, explaining the adjustments in annual reports, and using no-cost extensions and supplemental funding to help implement necessary changes. While the impetus for the webinar was project changes that may be necessary to respond to Covid-19 challenges, the strategies apply to all project adjustments, whatever the reasons for them.

Changes to Your Project

Significant changes will require approval by your Program Officer. Explain the planned changes in a concise email message and request a telephone appointment if you think a discussion is warranted. If you are uncertain whether your changes need to be approved, don’t hesitate to ask your Program Officer. ATE wants your project to succeed and the Program Officers are there to help you.

Preserve your goals, intellectual merit and broader impacts

They were the basis for funding your proposal, and it is important to maintain them to the extent possible as you consider any necessary changes.

Focus on deliverables, timeline and scope

Many deliverables can be modified without impacting the integrity of the project. For example, you may be able to accommodate social distancing requirements by modifying courses with virtual methods, replacing in-person workshops with webinars, holding meetings by Zoom, and delivering conference presentations on-line. Recasting such deliverables may require revised timelines, scope, and budget allocations, but it will not change their purpose. These are examples of relatively minor changes that do not require Program Officer approval, unless they require moving funds within or from Participant Support Costs.
What if the college must cancel a course that your project planned to update? If it is only one of several courses to be updated, and if you can proceed without it or replace it with a different course, it may not change the scope of your project. However, if the canceled course was central to your project, and refocusing on a new and different course requires significant adjustments, these must be discussed with and approved by your Program Officer.

College budget shortfalls can lead to lost faculty positions. What will you do if you lose a Co-PI? First, notify NSF (using an on-line form available for that purpose) that the Co-PI will be leaving the project. If you must continue without a replacement, the extent of the impact on your project will determine whether you need to confer with your Program Officer about the absence of key personnel. If you identify a replacement Co-PI, remember that this will require Program Officer approval. The same is true if you must replace the PI. Your Program Officer must be notified and must approve the replacement.

Annual Reports

Due dates
The reports are due before the end of each project year. Three months before the end of each year, you and your Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) will receive email messages from NSF saying that your annual reports are now due.

Don’t panic! The actual due date is not until the end of the project year, and filing a report three months early won’t allow you to report all of what you accomplished. Aim to submit the annual reports three to four weeks before the end of each project year. Having some extra time before the deadline will enable you to address any unforeseen problems without risking that you will miss the due date.

Required information
The annual report reporting form will ask you to state the project goals. Phrase them the same way that you did in the proposal. (Do not change your goals without the approval of your Program Officer!) You are asked next what you accomplished during the year in order to reach those goals. What are your objectives, what activities were conducted, and what are your main outcomes? Did you offer professional development? Did you disseminate project results? How will this year’s accomplishments and problems impact your plans for the coming year?

It’s good practice to maintain a spreadsheet record of all events, with dates, locations, the number of participants and their identities. That makes the information readily available for each annual report.

You may need to report Covid-19-related (and other) shortfalls. Did you have to cancel planned activities or postpone important components of the project? Did project personnel stop working on the project in order to restructure their classes for online delivery? Do not hesitate to describe problems that developed during the year. The Program Officers know that things do not always go as planned, even in more normal times, and they are well-aware that many adjustments are being made because of the Covid-19 challenges on campuses across the country.
Common pitfalls
Program Officer Tom Higgins identified the following pitfalls in a presentation at the 2019 ATE PI Conference. They are worth noting!

- Do not recycle your prior year’s report without making any changes. The goals stay the same, but everything else should be different. You did not do the same things with the same results!
- Do not include student names. Instead of saying “John Brown said” change to “A student in the Intro to Computer Science said. . . “
- Attach your evaluator’s report. (Be sure to provide your evaluator with information on a regular basis about your activities and the results of those activities.)
- Make sure that you and your evaluator are on the same page. You don’t want to be reporting data for 11 months and find out your evaluator was reporting for 10 months.
- Report the positives and the negatives. Things seldom work out as expected.

See the Mentor-Connect resource library (www.library.mentor-connect.org) for more information about preparing annual reports:

- Effective Strategies to Prepare Annual Reports: Demystifying the Process (a PowerPoint presentation from the 2019 ATE PI Conference)
- Preparing the Annual Report for Your NSF ATE Project (a tutorial based on the ATE PI Conference presentation)

No-Cost Extensions

Few projects proceed exactly as expected. Start-up can be slow, and problems - like Covid-19 - can arise. NSF understands this and offers one-year no-cost extensions to give you more time to accomplish the work of your project. Previously unused grant funds may be carried forward during a no-cost extension year. If you complete your work or use up your grant funds before the year is over, you may close out the grant at any time during that year.

Eligibility

To be eligible for a no-cost extension, you must have funds remaining in your grant award at the time of your request, and you must have project work that needs to be done. (No-cost extensions are not solely for the purpose of using up remaining grant funds!)

Types of no-cost extensions

You may file for a no-cost extension more than once.

- Your first no-cost extension is grantee approved. This means that you will simply notify NSF that you need an extension. You will receive it automatically if you submit the notification on time and if you are working on your original project objectives.
- A second - and any no-cost extension beyond that - is program officer-approved. It requires a request, rather than a notification, and approval of that request by your Program Officer.
Both the notification and the request require filling out a form that includes a brief justification (such as Covid-19 disruptions). Make it clear that the work you will accomplish will adhere to the previously approved goals and objectives of your project.

**Due dates**

No-cost extension notifications and requests are due within 2 months of your current project end date. According to the Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG) 20-1:

- A notification for a first no-cost extension must be submitted no later than 10 calendar days before the scheduled end date of your grant. However, it is far better to do so at least a month before the expiration date. Receiving an extension means that you need to file an annual report before the end of the project year, instead of a final report, which would not have been due until well after the end of the year. You need time to prepare this report; your evaluator needs time to contribute to it; and your Program Officer needs time to read it and possibly discuss it with you. All of this must happen in time for it be finalized and approved before the end of the project year.

- A request for a no-cost extension beyond the first one must be submitted no later than 45 days before the scheduled end of your grant. This is to give your Program Officer time to consider the request and to ask for any necessary clarifications or additional information.

**Submission process**

No-cost extension notifications and requests require a two-step process, much like submitting a grant proposal. The PI initiates the request and the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) signs off for the college and submits the request in Research.gov.

You will not receive any direct notification from NSF that a no-cost extension has been granted. You will know that your extension is in place when the end date for your project changes in the awards database on the NSF website. Check the database regularly after your submission!

To submit a no-cost extension notification or request, go to Research.gov and log in with the same credentials that you use for FastLane.

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**Under Awards & Reporting, select Notifications and Requests.**

- **Prepare & Submit Proposals**
  - New Proposals
    - Limited Proposal Types
  - Prepare Proposals in FastLane
    - Proposal Status
- **Awards & Reporting**
  - Notifications & Requests
  - Project Reports
  - Award Functions
    - NSF Public Access Repository (NSF-FAR)
    - Deposit Publication(s) | Manage Publication(s)

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*ATE Grants Management During Covid-10*

Mentor-Connect: Leadership Development and Outreach for ATE-3, NSF DUE #1840856.

Opinions of the webinar presenters who are not NSF employees do not necessarily express NSF views.
On the next screen, select Prepare New.

Select no-cost extensions in Steps 1 and 2.

Click “Go” to reach Step 3, enter your award number, and click “Prepare New.”
You will then be prompted to enter your revised project end date and provide your justification.

Your award number was used to determine whether you have previously submitted a notification or a request.

If this is your first no-cost extension, this screen will ask for a grantee-approved justification. If not, it will ask for a Program Officer-approved justification.

The last step is to either save your work for later review, or to save it and forward it to the AOR for submission to NSF. Remember to follow up with the AOR to ensure that this has been done!

More information about no-cost extensions
See PAPPG 20-1, Part II Award Administration and monitoring of Grants and Cooperative Agreements: Chapter VI: NSF Awards, Subpart D: NSF Grant Periods, Subpart 3, Change in Grant Period, Subpart c, No-cost extensions.

Budget Adjustments
As you make changes to your project, whether they are based on COVID-19 complications, other implementation problems, or evaluation feedback, keep in mind that PIs have the authority to move money around in the grant budget as needed.

There is only one major restriction. You may not move money out of Participant Support Costs or between categories in this line item (Stipends, Travel, Subsistence, and Other) without your Program Officer’s permission. You may, however, move money into this budget category without permission to better serve and support your participants.

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<td>4. OTHER $______________</td>
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Make note of two administrative issues:

- Your college policies and procedures regarding expenditures and procurement must be followed as you make budget adjustments.
- **Indirect Costs** may be impacted when you move money around in your budget, since the indirect cost calculation was based on the original budget allocations. Be sure that your business office remains alert to any changes in indirect costs that result from budget reallocations. (Moving funds into Participant Support Costs may, for example, reduce the base from which Indirect Costs are calculated.)

**Supplemental Funding**

What if you cannot implement your project as planned in a COVID-19 world? Maybe you need more expensive technologies and instructional delivery methods to accomplish your goals. Maybe you need to provide at-home instructional resources for students who lack computer capability or broadband access. Maybe you need different expertise on your team or different equipment to adapt to changes that are now essential for your project to be successful. Can your budget accommodate such changes?

If not, you may be able to cover the necessary costs with supplemental funding. In addition to helping to address problems, such funding is also available to allow you to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities (like an invitation to host workshops for your high school district) that may arise during project implementation. Just remember that the proposed work must be completed within the time frame of the current grant. Do not be deterred by the phrasing in the PAPPG 20-1, which limits supplemental funding to “unusual circumstances.” ATE Program Officers have considerable flexibility in allocating supplemental funds. Keep in mind, however, that the overall ATE budget in any given year influences all funding decisions. At any point in time, a Program Officer may or may not have funds available for this purpose.

**Special-purpose supplemental funding**

In addition to the ad hoc supplemental funding described above, which is based on a need that arises in order to carry out the work of the project or opportunities to enhance the project, NSF also offers grantees special-purpose funding via announcements called Dear Colleague Letters. In June 2020, three such supplemental funding opportunities were available to current ATE grantees:

- NSF 16-007 Dear Colleague Letter: Advanced Technological Education (ATE) Program Support for Manufacturing Innovation Institutes (MIIs) and Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnerships (IMCPs)
- NSF 19-057 Dear Colleague Letter: International Training and Education in Advanced Technologies (ATE-I)
- NSF 20-054 Dear Colleague Letter: Undergraduate Research Experiences in Advanced Technological Education (ATE-URE)

**When to consider supplemental funding**

Discuss the possibility of supplemental funding with your Program Officer as soon as you have identified project adjustments that cannot be addressed or new opportunities that cannot be considered because of budget constraints. Never submit a supplemental funding request online without first communicating with your Program Officer!
Before contacting a Program Officer about supplemental funding, you should:
  • Have a clear idea of what you want to do
  • Know why you want to do it and how you will do it
  • Estimate approximately how much it will cost

When to submit a request
You may approach your Program Officer to discuss a supplemental funding idea in any year of your grant, including a no-cost extension year. Requests may be submitted at any time in the grant year, but between January and June is generally preferred. Note that the PAPPG 20-1 specifies that Supplemental Funding requests must be made no later than two months before you need the money.

Restrictions on the size of supplemental funding requests
  • The amount that can be requested in a given year is described in the PAPPG 20-1 as up to six-month support, so it is a limited portion of the total award.
  • All requests in a given year must be within the annual supplemental funding limit for the project. In other words, all supplemental funding received in a given year is additive and cannot exceed the annual limit for a project.

Steps for requesting supplemental funding
  • In 1-2 pages, outline your idea/concept for a supplemental funding request along with an estimate of the cost.
  • Send your idea to your Program Officer via email and request feedback. Submit a Supplemental Funding request ONLY after you receive an OK to do so.
  • Log in to Research.gov.
  • Under “Awards and Reporting,” select FastLane.

Once you are in FastLane, select Award and Reporting Functions.
Next, select Supplemental Funding Request.

A new screen will appear, asking you to select your grant number. Doing so will take you to a template for submitting the supplemental funding request.

It is similar in format to the template NSF uses for grant proposal submissions, but with fewer components. These are uploaded separately and include:

- Summary of proposed work
- Justification for the request
- Budget (The form is identical to the one used for grant proposals.)
- Budget Justification

Note that requests based on Dear Colleague Letter opportunities may have additional requirements. These are specified in the letters.

**Notification of approved supplemental funding**

A supplemental funding award generates an award modification letter stating the new total budget amount for the grant.

**More information about supplemental funding**

See PAPPG 20-1, Part II-Award Administration and monitoring of Grants and Cooperative Agreements: Chapter VI: NSF Awards, Subpart E: Additional Funding Support, Subpart 4, Supplemental Support.

**Additional project management resources**

See the Mentor-Connect resource library (www.library.mentor-connect.org) and use the search box for a wide range of resources. Mentor-Connect provides one-on-one mentoring, resources, and technical assistance for preparing ATE grant proposals as well as support for implementing ATE-funded projects. Project personnel are eager to support you as you complete your current project and as you to apply for ATE funding for future projects that will advance technician education. Visit our library and reach out to the Mentor-Connect team whenever you have questions or need help.