

K12 Application – Frequently Asked Questions

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****This FAQ may undergo revisions between October 1, 2024 and March 3, 2025. Please check back for updates.***

I) Application Guidelines:

- **Q.** There is a 4-page limit to the Research Strategy section. Will this portion contain background, Specific Aims, innovation, rationale, methods, and preliminary data?
 - **A.** Specific Aims is its own section. The proposal section is composed of the applicant background, and also contains the research strategy that would cover “innovation, rationale, methods, and preliminary data.” Applicants should work closely with their mentors and adhere closely to the RFA instructions when completing the application.
- **Q.** Is there a page limit on the budget justification?
 - **A.** There is no page limit on the budget justification as long as it addresses each area outlined in the guidelines.
- **Q.** Do I need a mentor’s plan to provide mentoring, and is this separate from the support letter?
 - **A.** Yes, applicants are required to provide their mentor’s plan to provide mentoring in the “Career Development Plan/Career Goals and Objectives/Mentor(s) plan to provide mentoring” section (2 pages). Applicants should include their Mentor’s plan to provide mentoring in the two pages designated for “Career Development Plan,” which is separate from the support letter.
- **Q.** Do I need two separate letters of support from my Department Chair & Division Chief?
 - **A.** Applicants may submit one joint letter of support if they have both a Department Chair and Division Chief.
- **Q.** Can I submit the budget plan as a pdf file in NU Competitions?

- **A.** Yes, please submit your budget as a pdf. The NU Competitions site will not support excel files. You may use the .xls file linked in the RFA to create your budget and then save it as a pdf before uploading it to NU Competitions.
- **Q.** When I submit the grant application sections, should the references be in each section? Or only in the final section?
 - **A.** References are usually only attached to the research strategy section, but applicants are welcome to attach references for each section. References do not count towards page limitation.

II) Letter of Intent (LOI) Guidelines:

- **Q.** Do I need to wait to hear if the LOI has been approved for full proposal/application submission?
 - **A.** Applicants do not need to wait for approval of the LOI in order to submit a full application by the posted due date.
- **Q.** Is the project summary/abstract word doc where we would paste a 'Specific Aims' type of page? Or is this where we would put the Letter of Intent? Or is the REDCap form serving as the 'letter'?
 - **A.** The project summary/abstract is different from the Specific Aims and the REDCap form serves as the Letter of Intent. Please note, the LOI form will be open for amendments through the full application due date, so you are always encouraged to work with your mentor to revise submissions. Your mentor should be able to give you examples of the project summary/abstract vs the Specific Aims page if needed.
- **Q.** How do I access my submitted Letter of Intent (LOI) for edits?
 - **A.** All applicants should receive a custom link to their LOI upon submission. Please use your custom link to make any adjustments to your LOI. If you are unable to locate your custom link you may contact [Morgan Barrowman](#).

III) K12 Budget (template questions, salary, fringe rates, etc.):

- **Q.** Should I use the fringe rate listed on the excel budget template?
 - **A.** Yes, applicants should use the fringe benefit rate listed on the budget template (contact Morgan Barrowman for this). Current NU Fringe Rates can be found here: <https://osr.northwestern.edu/budget-fringe-rates/>
- **Q.** Does the \$120,000 cover salary and fringe?
 - **A.** No, the \$120,000 includes a minimum of 75% effort salary exclusive of fringe benefits.
- **Q.** Should I use my current Institutional Base Salary (IBS) in the budget template if I will have a different salary at the start of the award, or should I use my projected salary?
 - **A.** Applicants should use their current salary. The IBS can be adjusted if awarded the K12.

- **Q.** Can I consider a provisional increase of my IBS, for example in year two?
 - **A.** As long as the total salary does not exceed \$120K, applicants may increase their IBS. Please note: the 75% effort is the minimum requirement for each year on the K12 (except for those in surgical or procedure-intensive specialties who must have at least 50% effort on the K12)
- **Q.** The RFA allows for 75% effort, but provided I don't exceed the \$120K for salary, could I include more than 75% effort?
 - **A.** The 75% effort is the minimum requirement. As long as the total salary doesn't exceed \$120K, you can increase the effort listed on the budget template.
- **Q.** My salary at 75% effort is under 120K, can the remainder I'm not using go toward reagents or experiment costs?
 - **A.** No. Excess funds cannot be budgeted to other direct costs.
- **Q.** Do I have to budget tuition fees?
 - **A.** Yes, applicants should budget for tuition. The \$35k does not include tuition, but it can be put towards additional tuition expenses if needed. In addition to the \$35k Scholars can get one The Graduate School (TGS) course covered.
- **Q.** Is there a cap on indirect costs for Lurie Children's Hospital applicants?
 - **A.** If the K12 applicant's research work is done using NU facility, then NU will keep the indirect cost and there will be no indirect cost for LCH. Otherwise, NU will pay 8% (MTDC- Modified Total Direct Costs) indirect cost to LCH.

IV) K12 Budget (computer(s) and equipment):

- **Q.** Can Scholars purchase computers (workstations) that will be essential and used only for the proposed research if they exceed \$5K? Is an approval of some sort required if explanation is provided in budget justification?
 - **A.** Purchase of computers are fine as they are project-related expenses. If costs exceed \$5K for a single equipment, it is considered capital equipment.
- **Q.** If I plan to include electronics (i.e., desktops, smartphones) in my budget that are below \$5k, will these expenses be categorized as capital equipment or non-capital equipment?
 - **A.** It is fine to put electronic expenses in the budget if it is a project related expense. It should be categorized as non-capital Equipment.

V) K12 Budget (mentor and personnel support):

- **Q.** If mentor support includes up to \$10,000 per year for associated laboratory or other research-related expenses, do mentors provide \$10,000 on top of \$35,000? Or can the mentor take up to \$10,000 from that \$35,000?
 - **A.** The total R&D allotment is \$25k + \$10k for your mentor for a collective \$35k. If an applicant's primary mentor doesn't need all/parts of the \$10k, applicants could allocate those funds as their own R&D with their mentor's approval.

- **Q.** Can anyone else, other than the Scholar be added as Key Personnel (e.g., other staff such as Graduate Research Assistant and Research Engineer) to be included in the \$35,000 R&D Allotment? Can Mentor(s) be included as Key Personnel?
 - **A.** Yes, key personnel can include staff such as Graduate Research Assistants and Research Engineers. Mentors are not included as key personnel and salary support for mentors is not an allowable budget item. Mentor support may include up to \$10,000 per year for associated laboratory or other research-related expenses.
- **Q.** Can I include a Graduate Research Assistant's (ex. PhD student) salary + fringe benefits in the Personnel, if the total (student's and K scholar combined) is within \$120K?
 - **A.** A Graduate Research Assistant would be considered key personnel, and costs for this role would come out of the \$35k R&D, not the \$120k salary support for K scholars.
- **Q.** Can I hire a Research Engineer, then cover their salary + fringe benefits with Scholar's R&D? (within \$35K limit)?
 - **A.** All supporting personnel (i.e., Research Engineer) would need to be covered under the \$35k budget allotment, so it would depend on the costs for the Research Engineer the applicant intends to hire.
- **Q.** Can I hire a Research Clinician, then cover their salary + fringe benefits with my Primary Mentor's R&D? (within \$10K limit)?
 - **A.** All supporting personnel (i.e., Research Clinician) would need to be covered under the \$35k budget allotment. Regarding the primary mentor, it will depend. If the primary mentor doesn't need all/parts of the \$10k, applicants could allocate it as their own R&D with permission from the mentor.
- **Q.** What portion (Personnel vs. R&D) should I use to support the student's tuition for the PhD Program?
 - **A.** The K12 award is for the development of the recipient, and any allowable tuition would be for the K12 recipient, not a collaborator. If the student is assisting with the research, they could be compensated for their time, but tuition would not be allowable.
- **Q.** Are K12 Scholars permitted to hire student assistant(s) who are paid hourly, instead of by salary and fringe?
 - **A.** Yes. The payment for the student assistant(s) would come from the Scholar's R&D budget.

VI) K12 Budget (travel expenses):

- **Q.** Under the travel expenses heading on the budget, am I supposed to list all expected travel costs, or only those in excess of \$2500 per year?
 - **A.** For budget purposes, applicants only need to list \$2500 per year. If it is funded, Scholars can re-budget between travel and R&D funds.

- **Q.** Does the \$2500 per year for travel count toward the \$35K? Or is it only travel costs greater than \$2500 that count toward the \$35K?
 - **A.** The \$2500 in travel is in addition to the \$35k in R&D for a total of \$37,500

VII) Returning K12 Applicants:

- **Q.** If I am submitting a revised application from the last K12 cycle, am I allowed to submit an additional one-page introduction to the revised application (similar to NIH format)?
 - **A.** Each application in every cycle is viewed as a new submission, so a response to reviewers is not included in the K12 application.

VIII) Tuition & Discounts:

- **Q.** Which tuition rate applies to applicants as a faculty member?
 - **A.** Faculty get 90% tuition reduction, and the benefit is up to \$12,000 a year. That equates to roughly two courses in The Graduate School each year, so the tuition rate would apply to the tuition for the Graduate School: (<https://www.northwestern.edu/sfs/tuition/graduate/the-graduate-school.html>).

*** Note: There is a payroll impact as any benefit over \$5,250 is reported as taxable income and will result in a larger amount being withheld. For more information about the employee reduced tuition benefits please visit this site:*

<https://www.northwestern.edu/hr/benefits/tuition/employee/reduced-tuition-benefits.html>

- **Q.** Is there an employee discount on courses taken in The Graduate School?
 - **A.** Faculty get 90% tuition reduction, and the benefit is up to \$12,000 a year. That equates to roughly two courses in The Graduate School each year.
- **Q.** Will undergraduate courses be included within the \$35,000 R&D budget?
 - **A.** There is a possibility to use the \$35,000 R&D to cover your tuition if it is needed. Link to undergraduate tuition: <https://www.northwestern.edu/sfs/tuition/undergraduate/index.html>. The cost for your undergraduate course would still need to fit within the faculty tuition benefits outlined above.
- **Q.** Can I take additional classes (other than the 1 that is covered) and pay for them with the 35K annual budget?
 - **A.** Yes, tuition and fees related to career development can be covered by the annual \$35k budget.
- **Q.** Can courses be in Feinberg and The Graduate School (TGS)?
 - **A.** Scholars can take a course in Feinberg or TGS, but the coverage is still limited to the cost of one TGS course amount.
- **Q.** Does the K12 provide enough support for the full MSCI degree?

- **A.** The K12 does not provide enough support for the full degree, but enough for 1-2 classes per year.
- **Q.** Do tuition costs count toward the \$35k? If not, what is the limit on tuition costs?
 - **A.** The \$35k does not include tuition. In addition to the \$35k Scholars get one The Graduate School (TGS) course covered.