

# Windows of Opportunity

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## Cayuse SP Scheduled for July 2020 Launch!

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First off, and most importantly, I hope this finds you all safe and well. These are certainly challenging times on so many levels. In the Office of Sponsored Programs, and in our profession as research administrators, we are working every day from our homes to do our part to maintain research continuity on our campuses. Proposals continue to be submitted and awards continue to be received. In fact, awards to MSU faculty and staff are at yet another record high for FY 20—as of this writing, approximately \$19.7M. Fortunately, platforms like Zoom allow us to maintain regular communication with our partners in Grant Accounting, IRB, and IACUC (to name a few).

A major effort that continues from 2019 is our Cayuse Sponsored Projects (SP) implementation, which will transform how we route proposals for approval, and how we report and manage our sponsored projects activities. We expect a “go-live” date of July 1. Over time, PIs, Deans, and Directors/Chairs will have unprecedented visibility into their proposal and award activity. In addition, Cayuse SP and Workday will integrate, eliminating duplicative data entry between OSP and Grant Accounting at award set-up.

Members of OSP’s pre- and post-award teams, Grant Accounting, and the Office of Research Compliance are meeting weekly (and virtually) with our friends at Cayuse in Portland, OR, to customize the Cayuse user-interface to best meet MSU’s needs. For example, MSU’s current routing form will be replaced by an electronic “Internal Processing Form” (IPF). Each section of the IPF contains reportable data that does not have to be manually re-entered into yet another

database by an OSP staff member. We will be able to report and track not only proposal and award activity, but also on many critical components of managing a “compliant” research enterprise, to include human and animal subject use, IP, COI, and Export Compliance considerations.

Cayuse utilizes a “train-the-trainers” approach, and what was originally planned as a visit to our campus has gone virtual due to the current crisis. During the week of May 17, OSP, Compliance, and Grant Accounting were trained in those components of the system that they would most likely utilize.

Once the trainers feel comfortable with the system, we will then offer trainings to departmental and college approvers (e.g., Chairs and Deans) and, of course, end users (Investigators and Program Staff across campus). An MSU-specific Cayuse SP manual is in the works, but we are hoping to have much of our training in easily digestible, online video format.

As a last note, Cayuse SP will not change how we submit proposals to our sponsors, meaning faculty will continue to use NSF FastLane and Research.gov, Cayuse 424, and other systems. Cayuse SP is largely the “front-end” of that process, beginning with the new electronic proposal routing form that supplies all the data points for a submission and, subsequently, an award.

If you have any questions about Cayuse SP, please feel free to reach out to me directly!

**Ted Russo,**  
Director of  
Sponsored  
Programs

# Communicating With Program Officers

## **Why should I contact a program officer?**

Program officers (POs) exist within all foundations and federal/state agencies with granting authority. They typically have several duties, including providing administrative and technical assistance to applicants with the preparation and submission of grants.

Although applicants are often reluctant to contact POs, working with a PO is an important part of the application process, which can improve the chances of funding. POs often serve as the liaison between an applicant and the application review committee. Additionally, a PO's immediate response can be a good predictor of an applicant's chance of success.

Contacting a PO before submission of a grant application can:

- Confirm if a project idea fits with the sponsor's/program's objectives.
- Provide insight into the potential enthusiasm for your project.
- Provide suggestions about more appropriate programs, institutes, or mechanism if appropriate and necessary.
- Expose underlying considerations, methodology trends, preferences, dislikes, and shifting priorities that do not appear in published material.
- Provide guidance about your project design, collaboration, budget, and timeline.

With the exception of some foundations that clearly discourage pre-submission contact, most POs will encourage applicants to contact them early and often. However, POs are busy. So, when you are ready for contact, you will need to be thoughtful, clear, focused, and patient.

## **How do I go about finding a program officer?**

You can identify the point of contact or PO for the funding opportunity or best suited to your project by searching through the request for proposals (RFP), funding opportunity web page, or on an agency, program, or institute contact list. (NIH also has a tool called Matchmaker that can help—see page 5 in this newsletter).

## **What is the best procedure for communicating with a PO?**

You should *always* email the PO first, asking for a follow-up telephone call. Carefully choose the subject line, giving the PO some context to your message before he or she reads it.

Begin your email with a few sentences describing your central question and the hypothesis you are proposing to test, so that the PO has easy access to the context of your work. Note in this brief introduction that you have attached a project overview to the email.

### Project Overview (Elevator Pitch/Concept Paper):

The goal of this précis is to leave a good first impression and encourage further discussion. Your overview should:

- Be written in jargon-free language, and no longer than one page in a readable font (12 point Times New Roman).
- Introduce the topic of the project in a way that is clearly related to the sponsor/program objectives and mission.
- State the problem or opportunity the project addresses and its significance.
- Explain how you plan to solve the problem or realize the opportunity.
- Explain the expected outcomes of the project, again thinking of how the outcomes relate to the sponsor's/program's mission.
- Highlight the ways your project is unique/innovative.

Then, move to your relevant question(s), phrased as clearly and briefly as possible. Your most important question will be about the sponsor's potential interest in your project. Relevant questions include (be *certain* these questions are not already answered in published materials):

- *Does the proposed project match the sponsor's/program's current priorities?* If not, ask for suggestions to alter the project or about other programs that might be a better fit.
- *What can be done to improve the chances of a favorable review?* The PO knows this is why you are contacting them, so you do not need to be shy.

**Dana Natale**

Pre-Award  
Services Manager,  
OSP

*Continued on next page*

- *What are the most common reasons proposals are rejected?* This exposes some of the underlying/lesser understood considerations of a review panel.
- *Are there any emerging interests within the program?* Again, this exposes underlying review considerations.
- *Is the award amount expected to change compared to the previous year?*
- *What is the anticipated success rate for the coming grant cycle?*

Finally, thank the PO and ask if you can contact them via phone to discuss the viability of your project and the questions you included in your email. List your available dates and times as a courtesy, and ask for specific dates and times that work for them and the number you should call.

Give the PO a week to respond before sending a gentle email reminder. A delayed response does not mean he or she is disinterested—remember that POs are busy. On the other

hand, some POs are more difficult to engage than others. It is possible you will encounter an unresponsive PO, but do not fret: there are typically numerous contact names for an opportunity. Simply move on to another name. If you are referred back to the unresponsive contact, you can reply: "Thank you. I have been unsuccessful in getting in touch with \_\_\_\_\_. Can you help me get in touch or advise me on how best to reach \_\_\_\_\_?"

**How about the Phone Call?:** The desired result of an email is a phone call with the PO. When that happens, there are a few things you should do to ensure you get the information you need and want:

- Have your questions written down.
- Send any documents/white papers at least 24 hours before the call with a confirmation email.
- Be ready to state the goal of your project and give your elevator pitch.

## NEED SOME TIPS?

### DO:

- *Read the agency and funding program web pages, the RFP (more than once), and any FAQs or supporting documentation.*
- *Show passion for your project.*
- *Communicate directly and briefly.*
- *Have your questions prepared.*
- *Be ready to LISTEN to the PO (especially for any information that does not appear in the RFP and that addresses funding objectives or priorities).*

### DO NOT:

- *Wait until a week or two before your proposal is due to contact a PO!*
- *Cold call—you should email first, requesting a follow-up phone call.*
- *Ask questions you could have easily answered yourself by looking online or at materials provided by the sponsor.*
- *Speak disparagingly of your colleagues or competitors.*
- *Try to force-fit your interests to the grant program objectives.*
- *Try to tell the PO what you think they should be funding.*
- *Focus on yourself or your past/future greatness.*
- *Overwhelm the PO with papers and materials.*
- *Deliver a lengthy monologue about your project.*

### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Can We Talk? Contacting Grant Program Officers](#)

[One Program Officer's Candid Tips for Grantseekers](#)

# Awardee Profile: Glen O'Neil

Dr. Glen O'Neil of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry is MSU's most recent recipient of a National Science Foundation CAREER award, in the amount of

\$500,280, as well as a \$100,000 Cottrell Scholar award from the Research Corporation for Science Advancement. As part of our *Awardee Profile* series, we asked Dr. O'Neil to share his insights about the proposal submission and award process.

## **What are the major aspects of your awarded projects?**

These two projects deal with a type of sensor called "Light addressable electrochemical sensors," which we are developing for measuring neurotransmitters. The focus of the NSF CAREER award is to

develop a platform for taking chemical images of single-cells that we hope will enable a better understanding of neurotransmission. The focus of the Research Corporation for Science Advancement Cottrell Scholar award is to perform a detailed investigation of the sensors themselves—what drives the response, how can we improve their sensitivity. We plan on doing that work using two scanning electrochemical probe techniques that allow us to investigate the sensors at the microscale and nanoscale.

## **What were your first thoughts after having received the news that you were awarded?**

I was absolutely shocked. I thought I had <1% chance of getting either award and only submitted them after my wife offered support. For the NSF award I had gotten a cryptic email from the program officer, which I thought was good news but couldn't be sure of. It took about two months between that initial email and the confirmation email, over which time I compulsively checked FastLane to see if the proposal status had changed. For the Cottrell award, I got a call out of the blue from the program officer telling me that my proposal was selected. It still seems a bit surreal, because both awards are very competitive.

## **What are some of the challenges involved in projects like yours? How are you tackling these?**

The projects are very multidisciplinary, incorporating bits and pieces from chemistry, physics, biology, and engineering. Getting students to learn all of these is tricky, so dividing the work into bite-sized pieces that a student can master in a year or two is the major challenge. The measurements are also quite tricky and require lots of manual dexterity, so making sure students have the confidence to try experiments and not be afraid of failing is also a challenge. It's great fun though. Working with students is the best part of my job.

## **How would you advise colleagues interested in submitting a grant application?**

My wife gave me this advice when I was struggling with these proposals: "You definitely won't get funding if you don't apply for it," and she is right. The nature of proposal writing is that we fail way more often than we succeed, so learning from each failed proposal is important. Also, it helped me to dedicate a fixed amount of time per day for writing. It can be tough to carve out time with all the other responsibilities we have, but I think it's so important that we prioritize proposal (and manuscript) writing. Finally, I think spending a lot of time making sure that the project is a good fit for the funding agency is definitely worth it.

## **What, if anything, do you believe MSU can do to make grant submission and management more appealing and less intimidating?**

I think you guys do a great job. For my research, obtaining funding is critically important because I need to purchase supplies and pay students, so I don't have much of a choice!



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# Matchmaking Your Research to NIH

If you talk to anyone in the Office of Sponsored Programs regarding the first steps toward external sponsorship for your research, the advice that you will consistently hear is that you should:

1. Find a relevant funding opportunity,
2. Break down your research idea into a three- to four-sentence summary, and
3. Reach out the funding opportunity's program officer.

However, when you are approaching the largest biomedical research agency in the world—consisting of twenty-seven separate institutes and centers—finding the right match can be daunting.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) added Matchmaker as an extension of their RePORTER website to enhance its ability to provide easy access to information about NIH-funded research. The interface is very simple—it is just a large text box with a 15,000 character limit. You can copy and paste any relevant information into this box, including: keywords, manuscript abstracts, research bios, the abstract of a grant or conference presentation, a dissertation chapter, or any other scientific text. Once you have pasted in the text, you have a choice of selecting one of two reports: Similar Projects or Similar Program Officials. Matchmaker then analyzes your text for key terms and concepts.

The Similar Projects option generates three charts—Institute/Center, Activity Code, and Study Section—that give an easy-to-reference visual of the top six funded options in each category. The bar charts are fully interactive and will allow you, for example, to focus on only R01 projects or those

funded by NIGMS. Below the charts, Matchmaker supplies a list of up to five hundred awarded projects with similar concepts, sorted in descending order of relevance as indicated by the Match

Score column. This list includes important information, such as: the awarded project's activity code; the title, PI, and institution (this will be helpful if you would like your OSP pre-award officer to reach out for a copy of the awarded proposal); the institute or center that funded the proposal; and a button to display similar projects. All the hyperlinks for a project will go to its RePORTER record, which will display the complete information, including critical items like the project's Abstract and Public Health Relevance Statement.

The other option—Similar Program Officials—is focused on helping you find the NIH program officer who can answer questions about your proposal. It also employs the interactive Institute/Center and Activity Code charts, but the generated list focuses on program officers, showing their name, institute or center, a link to contact information, and a link to a list of projects they have funded. The results for both Similar Program Officials and Similar Projects can be exported as a .CSV or Excel file for offline use.

While this extension of NIH's online reporting tool can help you find the right recipient for your three- to four-sentence "elevator pitch" and give you an idea of what to put on your PHS Assignment Form, it can also be a way to find new collaborators. If you find any more uses for Matchmaker, your OSP pre-award team would love to hear about it!

**Sam Wolverton**  
Pre-Award and  
Outreach  
Specialist, OSP

## Featured Awards

Dr. Mark Clatterbuck of the Department of Religion received an award of \$30,000 from the Louisville Institute for his project "Faith on the Frontlines: Religious Eco-Activism in an Age of Climate Crisis." It will explore the role that religion plays in the current wave of grassroots environmental activism sweeping across the United States.

Drs. Nicole Lytle (Social Work and Child Advocacy) and Jason Dickinson (Psychology) were awarded \$366,469 by the National Science Foundation for "Reliability of Evidence and Testimony in Child Maltreatment Cases." Their project will develop the first set of evidenced-based and theoretically driven recommendations for conducting investigative interviews with fresh complaint witnesses in cases of suspected child maltreatment.

# Federal Post-Award Management in the Current Environment

Grants.gov defines post-award as follows: “The post award phase comprises a significant amount of work over the duration of the award dates, which includes implementing the grant, reporting progress, and completing the closeout requirements. The federal agency that makes the award to you is also there to assist and ensure you or your organization complies with the grant terms and conditions. Your job is to faithfully and diligently carry out the grant program.” Although the definition is straightforward, principal investigators may encounter a variety of issues while “implementing the grant.”

Grant proposals and proposal budgets are plans and many times research/programs do not go according to plan for a multitude of reasons. This has certainly been the case during the current public health crisis. As just one example, many principal investigators are finding they are no longer able to travel, whether it is travel to conferences to present their findings, to sites to collect data or to meet with collaborators.

Fortunately, even during the current situation, federal awards remain guided by 2 CFR 200, better known as Uniform Guidance. Uniform Guidance are the governing rules and regulations awardees follow when implementing federal awards. If principal investigators determine that a budget or program revision is needed, Uniform Guidance remains in effect. Typical requests such as no-cost extensions are still available. In addition, universities continue to have “expanded authority” which assigns the university the authority to approve some changes that require prior approval.

In response to the current crisis, on March 19, 2020, the Office of Management and Budget released a memorandum providing federal sponsors flexibility with how they might manage their awards. For example, federal sponsors have been provided the option to extend financial, performance, and other reporting. In response to OMB’s Memorandum,

federal sponsors have provided specific information on how their agencies are implementing the greater flexibility on their websites.

**Catherine Bruno**  
Post-Award Officer,  
OSP

In summary, federal sponsors are “open for business” and federally funded research/programmatic award activities can continue as planned as long as those activities are in compliance with Montclair State University, the State of NJ, and other restrictions, e.g., social distancing. If a principal investigator finds that their research/program is significantly affected, they should reach out to the Office of Sponsored Programs to discuss the situation and together, determine the best way to proceed.

Be safe!

### **Examples of Budget or Program Revisions that require prior approval**

- Rebudgeting of participant costs budget
- Addition of a new subawardee
- Principal investigator’s disengagement from the project for more than three months
- Change in key personnel

### **Expanded Authority Prior Approval Matrix**

[https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/fedrtc/appendix\\_a.pdf](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/fedrtc/appendix_a.pdf)

### **Office of Management and Budget’s Memorandum**

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/M-20-17.pdf>

# Managing Research Continuity in an Emergency

## ***What have we done to preserve research continuity?***

First, the Office of Research established a research continuity and planning document within the first two weeks of the pandemic. Led by Dean Scott Herness and the Directors within the Office of Research, this shared document established the need and necessities for research continuity. By reaching out to each Dean on campus, the plan established those labs and individuals that needed to maintain research for a variety of reasons.

This University-wide plan ultimately compiled an inventory of sensitive research that required continued support during a disruption and prepared a plan to provide that support with essential personnel to maintain research-related processes, such as feeding animal subjects, maintaining samples and related research materials, securing equipment, or securing protection and access to confidential/protected data. Shared with key stakeholders—including Dean's Offices, Researchers, Environmental Health and Safety, Facilities, Police and others—each group was given the opportunity to give guidance.

Secondly, the plan established key research personnel lists and started building justifications for their presence on campus during the emergency. These lists allowed us to issue several dozen Essential Research Personnel Letters to employees and students within days if not hours after Governor Murphy issued travel restrictions. This, in fact, prevented loss of key research activities.

In addition to the steps taken above, the plan outlines key expectations for research infrastructure units. OSP and Research Compliance continue to conduct all key functions and duties, albeit remotely from home locations.

## ***Where are we?***

The events that transpired over the last two months within our University labs and research programs, have no doubt taken a serious toll. Most of our PIs or research teams fall into the following three categories:

- *Group 1: Operating at minimum use or very limited research activity.* For example, only taking care of key live specimens, securing data, and/or maintaining animal husbandry.
- *Group 2: Completely closed research labs.* There are researchers who depend on specialized equipment to

collect data. As such, they cannot conduct research without risking social distancing.

- *Group 3: Fully transitioned or transitioning to remote research activities.*

We have seen a number of PIs modify IRB protocols or securely move research data for remote access and ongoing research activities. The IRB is giving priority to these types of submissions.

Beyond notifying Department Chairs or Deans, PIs and research teams in Group 1 or 2 should be considering what other individuals need to be notified regarding their research operating status. We know that students may be impacted due to lack of research opportunities, or they may have concerns about completing theses or dissertations. The OSP post-award team or your Grants Accounting contact may need to understand your challenges. These conversations may already be happening now and will only help you plan your next steps.

## ***Takeaways and success stories***

The Office of Research would like to hear from researchers University-wide who are unsure about next steps and have any questions regarding research continuity and planning. As the University looks toward a time of when our campus will be open again, there is no doubt everyone will rally to invigorate our Research Enterprise.

OSP and Research Compliance are here to offer you our support. Please reach out to schedule a time to meet virtually. Encourage your Student Researchers to join the IRB Open Labs at <https://www.montclair.edu/institutional-review-board/openlabs/>.

The Office of Research and key stakeholders will keep a research continuity document relevant and ready year-round with particular attention to flexible and agile sub-plans specific to the emergency (e.g., pandemic, storms).

Finally, researchers should continue to track COVID-19 related expenses and charges related to research in accordance with the guidelines distributed by Finance.

***Special thanks to those supporting units and Essential Research Personnel helping the University during these challenging times. We see you and appreciate your sacrifices!***

**Hila Berger**  
Director of  
Research  
Compliance

# MSU Digital Commons: 80,000 Downloads Later

Since its public launch, Montclair State University Digital Commons has grown exponentially, from 2,500 downloads on our initial launch date on April 25, 2018 to currently over 80,000. Our University’s research continues to reach a global audience with downloads coming from 179 countries, ranging from New Zealand to Iceland.

Besides serving as a place to showcase and house the University’s scholarly output, the repository also serves as a collaborative tool for faculty and students to peruse the research being done at MSU, and to connect with professors and colleagues regarding specific research interests.

### Digital Commons background

Sprague Library helps faculty manage datasets and meet grant reporting requirements through our Digital Commons publishing platform. The datasets generated by our faculty and researchers can be collected, preserved, hosted, and made accessible within the MSU Institutional Repository (<https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/>).

Typically, there are three scenarios where our faculty need to share their data within the repository: they have data related to an article or monograph, they need to comply with a grant funder’s requirements, or they have data related to a research project. The advantages of using the repository for hosting data are: it is an open access platform, there are no storage limits, it supports all file types, the cost is free for the researcher, there are access control options, and high search engine visibility. Some additional features include: customizable metadata, shareable links, automated usage reports, and reliable data backups.

Further, the MSU Institutional Repository supports the policies and guidelines for publishing and sharing data established by the Office of Sponsored Programs. Sprague librarians can also help faculty and research staff manage datasets by making recommendations for disciplinary repositories where

appropriate (see <https://montclair.libguides.com/digitalcommons/>) and by advising on metadata. In sum, Sprague Library, through the use of the repository, helps to save faculty time by streamlining data management workflows and eliminating the need to search for suitable hosting solutions.

### Next steps

A future project involves creating profiles on the repository for our University experts who have been identified by our marketing and communications division. All of our experts will have in-depth profiles created on Digital Commons, highlighting their expertise and their research publications. It should be noted that a fair portion of our downloads on the repository originate from our scholarly profiles, and all faculty are strongly encouraged to create a profile in the repository. In addition to showcasing scholarly research, creating a profile is an excellent tool that can be personalized with teaching materials, video clips, scholarly blog posts, news items, etc.

If you would like more information, or to set up an appointment please contact Karen Ramsden, repository coordinator, at extension 5276 or [ramsdenk@montclair.edu](mailto:ramsdenk@montclair.edu). You can also send any questions or request assistance by using utilizing our general email at: [digitalcommons@montclair.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@montclair.edu).

**Karen Ramsden**  
Research and  
Projects Specialist,  
Sprague Library

**Denise O’Shea**  
Head of Access  
Services and  
Technical Services,  
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### BY THE NUMBERS

April 28, 2018	April 30, 2020
2,500+ downloads	81,400+ downloads
1,500+ works posted	4,600+ works posted
228+ institutions	4,100+ institutions
80 countries	181 countries



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