

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Self-Help Tools for Proposal Preparation

Letters of Individual or Institutional Commitment

Most funding agencies **do not allow** general letters of support or approval but instead require letters of commitment that explicitly document collaborations of individuals or organizations not included in the budget. Such unfunded activity, resource, and expertise collaboration could include, for example: membership on an advisory board, access to a particular piece of scientific equipment, recruiting avenues for diverse students, sharing of key data, or performance of a technical task.

Consider...

- Anyone named in your proposal but not in the budget should have a letter of commitment to document their unfunded role.
- If you are submitting a National Science Foundation proposal, do not quantify commitments in terms of hours or dollars or else the agency will return your proposal without review
- When submitting to any other agency that allows cost share, do not quantify commitments in terms of hours or dollars – and therefore create auditable cost share – unless you have secured the appropriate institutional approvals.
- Check solicitation carefully for any specific instructions from the agency
- Letters should be less than one page and on letterhead
- If you are the lead institution, it is better not to draft a letter for your partners or collaborators in order to avoid nearly identical letters. Instead, provide clear bullet points of project information that partners can use to quickly compose a letter in their own words.

Institutional Letter



OFFICE OF THE
VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
April 30, 2012

Dr. Lynn Preston
Leader of the ERC Program and Deputy Division Director
Division of Engineering Education and Centers
National Science Foundation
Suite 585, 4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Dr. Preston,

I am pleased to express my enthusiastic support for the proposed Center for Sustainable Engineering Research and for the key institutional role to be played by Purdue University. Under the leadership of our Professor John Smith, and in strong partnership with the University of California-Berkeley, Harvard University, University of Maryland, and Notre Dame University, this strategic Engineering Research Center will address an area critical to our national's economic welfare and environmental sustainability. The Center's multidisciplinary team will create a first-time competitive environment where sustainable applications will enter the global marketplace as commodities for breakthrough advances in energy efficiency and environmental impact.

As an institution, Purdue University is fully engaged in the Center's goals and committed at the highest administrative levels to promoting and supporting this dynamic research and education effort. The Center for Sustainable Engineering Research draws on our campus strengths of top 10 engineering programs, the strategic emergence of a new sustainable engineering educational program, pioneering leadership in engineering education, and national models for cultural centers. We will support Center-wide efforts to accelerate transformational technical solutions that reflect social awareness and cultural competence.

In addition to leveraging our successful Discovery Park management model for large-scale interdisciplinary research and education projects, we will support all phases of project planning, implementation, and translation. Purdue buildings will be accessible to serve as testbeds for researchers and students. We fully embrace collaborations between the Center and Purdue physical facility staff in support of the research effort. The new 68,000 square foot Herrick Laboratory facility with a state-of-the-art Living Laboratory will serve as a highly visible Center headquarters and allow first-time testing of impacts of sustainable technologies. We will assist the Center in leveraging additional critical campus resources such as novel cyberinfrastructure, technology transfer pipelines, and Discovery Park expertise in launching large interdisciplinary research collaborations.

The outstanding partnerships and alliances fostered in the Center for Sustainable Engineering Research have the potential to catalyze breakthroughs that will meet a grand challenge of our global society. On behalf of the Office of the Vice President for Research, I look forward to demonstrating our strong institutional dedication to ensure the highest level of Center progress and impact.

Sincerely,

Richard O. Buckius
Vice President for Research

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Annotations

1. Address your institutional letter to the program officer of the sponsoring agency.
2. Express your commitment at outset.
3. Identify project title or program/center name.
4. Identify Purdue team leader, Purdue's institutional leadership role, and center partnership
5. state center/program vision
6. communicate enthusiasm and how the project can advance the institutional mission in an exciting way.
7. Mention why Purdue is so qualified as an institution to perform and strongly support this work.
8. Could include, for example, documented institutional strengths such as program rankings, unique resources, expertise, or history of successful collaborations in related area.
9. Most funding agencies DO NOT ALLOW general support letters but instead require a letter that actually commits activity, resources, and expertise.
10. Be specific about leveraged resources without creating quantifiable (and therefore auditable) cost-share issues. You cannot promise, for example, number of hours of access to a machine or commitment of percentage salary.
11. Continue to point to institutional commitment
12. Convey excitement about participating in the project and emphasize the ultimate impacts of such a successful collaboration
13. Signed by appropriate institutional authority such as Vice President for Research, Executive Director of Discovery Park, Provost, President

If you are reading a printed version of this self-help tool, you may read the annotations on the sample letters at:

www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschdev/SecureDocs/insti_ltr.pdf

Individual Letter



April 30, 2012

Dr. Lynn Preston
Leader of the ERC Program and Deputy Division Director
Division of Engineering Education and Centers
National Science Foundation
Suite 585, 4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Dr. Preston,

I am writing to confirm my commitment to collaborate with the proposed Center for Sustainable Engineering Research under the leadership of Professor John Smith from Purdue University and in partnership with the University of California-Berkeley, Harvard University, University of Maryland, and Notre Dame University. I believe the Center vision for sustainable applications entering the global marketplace as commodities for breakthrough advances in energy efficiencies and environmental impact will deliver transformative tools and technologies.

My role as a collaborator with the Center will provide a guest research program that would encourage cross-institutional efforts to share expertise and facilities. Guest researchers from the Center for Sustainable Engineering Research will have access to unique energy management testbeds at the Technical University. This collaboration will leverage a history of successful sustainable engineering research collaborations with Professor Smith and also provide additional opportunities to recruit a diverse representation of graduate students into Center initiatives.

I look forward to working with the Center partners to integrate our fundamental research in sustainable engineering and, upon Center funding, commit to all administrative obligations as outlined in the proposed submission.

Sincerely,

David Johnson
Professor of Sustainable Engineering
Director of Minority Engineering Programs

Annotations

1. Use official letterhead from your institution
2. Address your institutional letter to the program officer of the sponsoring agency
3. Express your commitment and not just your general support
4. Identify director from lead institution as well as partners
5. Identify name of Center or title of project
6. State enthusiasm for vision of proposed project and emphasize ultimate impacts of a successful collaboration.
7. State specifically what you are going to do on this project and why you are qualified to do it. For example, mention efforts on related projects, any specialized resources or equipment, or any history of successful collaboration with team members.
8. Convey enthusiasm for participating in the project.
9. Include a general statement that, upon funding, you are committed to fulfilling our research, leadership, or administrative obligations as outlined in the proposed submission.
10. Signed by individual collaborator

If you are reading a printed version of this self-help tool, you may read the annotations on the sample letters at:

www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschdev/SecureDocs/indv_ltr.pdf