

Step 1: Ask the FAQs of Yourself

Before beginning the proposal process, ask yourself:

- Is my idea viable?
- Is this a university priority? Will my department chair and dean support me?
- Are there collaborators, within Bentley or externally, with whom I might work?
- Do I have time to complete a competitive proposal?

Talk to your colleagues and get their input. Being able to answer with a strong “yes” to each of these questions will be immensely helpful when you create your proposal and seek funding. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact the Foundations Relations team.

If you decide to seek a grant, get in touch. Together, we’ll begin the search for a potential funder.

Step 2: Search for Funding

Identifying funding to support your specific interests is, in some ways, the most difficult and time-consuming part of the process. Contact Foundations Relations for:

- Access to the [Foundation Directory Online](#), home to thousands of corporate and private foundation profiles

Also, watch your email for periodic “Funding Opportunities” that are sent to all Bentley faculty, specific departments/groups or targeted individuals.

Along with professional journals, your colleagues at Bentley at other institutions can provide leads to potential funders. Ask them who they’ve considered for submission. Another option is to check the [Duke University Office of Research and Support's database of funders](#).

Once you’ve decided whom you’d like to ask for funding, carefully read their Request for Proposal (RFP) (below).

Foundations with which Bentley has a history:

The Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation

[Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](#)

[The American Council of Learned Societies](#)

[The American Philosophical Society](#)

[The Davis Foundations](#)

[Russell Sage Foundation](#)

Other foundations to consider:

[Alfred P. Sloan Foundation](#)

[Andrew Mellon Foundation](#)

[Carnegie Corporation](#)

[Howard Hughes Medical Institute](#)

[John Templeton Foundation](#)

[Pew Charitable Trusts](#)

[Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)

[Samuel Rubin Foundation](#)

[Smith Richardson Foundation](#)

[Spencer Foundation](#)

[William K. Kellogg Foundation](#)

Step 3: Read the RFP

Foundations generally issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) as the first step in making grants. The RFP will contain the basic information about the grant program, and it will help you decide whether or not the funder is a match for you. Typically, the RFP will include:

- Background on the funder
- Background of the specific program (most foundations have multiple programs)
- Restrictions, e.g. rank, citizenship or intellectual area (business, humanities or social sciences)
- A timeline for submission, including interim and final deadlines
- Whether a Letter of Inquiry ([LOI](#)) is required first (see below)
- Format and length requirements and restrictions
- The range of the grant amount
- A timeline for completion of the project, and reporting requirements
- The necessary components, e.g. budget narrative, supporting material from the university
- Whether the foundation will entertain questions in advance of submission

Read the RFP carefully and ask us any questions. The Foundations Relations team has many years experience with RFPs and is happy to review them with you.

Step 4: Get Internal Approval

Before you submit your proposal you must secure approval from your department chair, dean or the provost, if necessary.

The university's academic leadership needs to be aware of any potential budgetary implications of your project. For example, if you are seeking a course release or will need to hire a research assistant, these may affect the university budget, even if they are supported by the award.

At the outset of the process, you are not likely to know all the details of what your project will entail. For this reason, an informal email or conversation with your chair or dean letting him or her know the broad outlines of what you have in mind should suffice. Once the proposal is more mature and the budget is developed, formal approval will be necessary. If the project is over multiple years with a large budget, approval from the provost may be required. Foundation Relations can help you secure formal internal budgetary approval.

Institutional Review Board

You may also need approval by the [Institutional Review Board](#) (IRB), a committee formed to ensure the safe and ethical treatment of human participants in research at Bentley University. Federal and university regulations stipulate that all faculty, staff and student research projects, involving human subjects, are reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their initiation.

Step 5: Write Your LOI

Though not always required (check your funder's requirements), more and more foundation funders are asking applicants to first submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI), usually electronically. An LOI is a brief letter outlining your project, the organization's activities and your request for funding. Foundations use them as a first step to determine from whom they will seek a full grant proposal.

The LOI helps many applicants hone and focus their thinking, and the draft can be revised and submitted to multiple recipients with minimal editing. Typically two to three pages long, it should loosely follow the format of a full proposal, but be very concise. For examples of an LOI, please contact Foundations Relations.

Step 6: Prepare Your Proposal

Foundations include proposal requirements in their guidelines and, in many cases, will have specific instructions for presentation. No matter the length, your proposal should be clear and concise.

The typical proposal includes:

Cover Letter

Very briefly introduce your program and sponsoring organization, with the actual "ask" (requested amount for funding and descriptive phrase specifying purpose) appearing early in the letter.

Executive Summary

An extremely succinct summary covering the main points and sections of the proposal

Organizational Overview

Many funders require some basic information about Bentley—its history, mission, enrollment size and demographics; programs and degrees offered; executive leadership and governance; financial condition; alumni population; etc. Foundation Relations can readily supply a standard overview or specific information that may be required.

Statement of Need

Sometimes part of the main narrative (below), the statement of need describes the unfulfilled intellectual area or service that the project/program will address. This is an opportunity to discuss what others accomplished and if any organization is currently running a similar project/program.

Main Narrative

This details the goals and objectives, expected outcomes and, often, tasks or specified action steps. An effective way to approach writing this section is to begin with the general description, stating the overall goals. Then describe the specific project objectives followed by expected outcomes and tasks, writing these last two sections in the same order as the goals. This way, you clearly link each goal with an outcome and related objectives.

Distinction is important in this section. Describe how the project/program is different or unique (Does it do innovative work in an area previously not studied? Does it include an overlooked population? Is it the next step in development of a profession? Etc.). Consider timeliness, scope, impact, originality and innovation.

Evaluation and Outcome

How will success of the project be measured—by a book? An article? A new program or course? If it's a program or service, make sure that you have the time and resources to conduct the proposed evaluation, whether it's a survey, individual interviews, focus groups, skill assessment or another method. Samples of surveys, interview questions and other materials can serve as a valuable appendix.

Dissemination

Sharing results is often important to foundations that invest in Bentley. Dissemination offers the ability to show the value of the project/program, and offers the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge in the specified field or topic area. This evidence also increases Bentley's ability to leverage its assets when pursuing other grants and partnerships for faculty, staff and campus-wide initiatives. Consider a report, scholarly article, conference presentation or guidebook for other similar organizations.

Budget and Budget Narrative

A detailed budget that explains expenditures and expected revenues is a crucial component of any proposal. This is an opportunity to illustrate institutional contributions to the budgets, justify unusual expenditures and demonstrate fiscal suitability through planning. The budget itself usually appears in an appendix (below).

Appendix

The appendix may include various documents, depending upon the proposal type and funder. Some funders do not require appendices, or specify a few specific items and discourage the addition of more appendices. The most common appendices in foundation proposals include the IRS certificate of tax exempt status (501c3 letter), a list of university trustees, audited financial statement and projected revenue and expense statements, all of which Foundations Relations can supply. You may also be asked to include your resume/CV, a list of publications and past grants, honors and awards.

Supporting Letters

Most foundations will require one or more reference letters in support of your application. The authors of these letters will typically be asked to address the intellectual viability of the project and your capacity to successfully complete it. These could include a letter from your dissertation advisor and colleagues from other colleges who know you and your work. One may be required from Bentley (for example, from your department chair or dean) that attests to the institution's support of the project. It is critical to allow plenty of time for the authors to draft and submit the letter. Contact them as early in the process as possible.

Questions? Contact Susan Richman at srichman@bentley.edu or 781-891-2660