

## **Faculty Improvement Grants: Information and Guidelines for Faculty**

The Faculty Improvement Grant (FIG) funds come from MNSCU in accordance with Article 19, section A of the IFO contract. The SMSU Professional Improvement Committee (PIC) awards FIG grants in order to assist faculty in improving their performance in relation to the following two professional development criteria: “scholarly or creative achievement or research” and “continuing preparation and study.” Professional study and travel funds awarded under Article 19, section B of the IFO contract are considered unrelated to the FIG grant funding process.

### Basic Information for Applicants

*Eligibility:* All faculty members except adjunct faculty are eligible to receive FIG grants, including when they are on sabbatical leave. A faculty member may apply for no more than one award per application round.

*Award Amounts:* A faculty member may receive up to \$800 in any two-year period corresponding to the biennial contract between IFO and MNSCU.<sup>1</sup> A faculty member who receives less than the maximum amount in one application cycle may submit another request in a later cycle, so long as the total amount of the two grants does not exceed \$800.

*Competitive Funding:* The university does not receive enough funding for every faculty member to receive the maximum potential amount each biennium. As a result, FIG grants are competitive in nature and the PIC committee must sometimes pro-rate awards depending on the amount of funding available and the number of qualified grant applications.

*Deadlines:* Faculty have two opportunities to submit FIG grants every school year: once in the fall semester and once in the spring semester. Due dates are proposed by administration through the meet and confer process. Late applications are not accepted. However, retroactive requests can be submitted if the proposal is submitted during the first application cycle following the activity. Award recipients have one year from the date of their award notification to use the funds, after which time any unspent money will be returned to the FIG account. Any faculty member on a fixed-term contract who receives a FIG grant must complete his/her proposed activity within the contract year.

### The Application Process

*Selecting a Professional Improvement Category:* An applicant must specify whether she/he is requesting funding for an activity related to “scholarly or creative achievement or research” (SA) or for “continuing preparation and study” (CP). Any faculty member who requests funding to attend a conference at which he/she will make an academic presentation should select SA. Any faculty member who requests funding to attend a conference without making a presentation should select CP.

*Preparing and Submitting an Application:* Applications must meet ordinary standards of professional preparation for a university setting. The committee expects brief, clearly written requests that include: 1) a description of the activity, including the location; 2) a rationale for the

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<sup>1</sup> The MNSCU biennial contract operates on an odd-year cycle.

activity and 3) a detailed budget including estimated amounts for all expenditures. In calculating budget amounts for food and mileage reimbursement, applicants should use the most recent MNSCU reimbursement rates. To avoid potential bookkeeping problems, applicants are encouraged to consult with their department secretary to make sure they are using proper account numbers, especially for contractual travel. Applications must be submitted online using the Faculty Improvement Grant Application Form located on the SMSUFA page on the university website.

*Hiring of Research Assistants:* The committee may approve grants that include the hiring of one or more research assistants so long as the applicant can demonstrate such personnel are integral to the proposed activity.

*Purchase or Rental of Equipment:* The committee may approve grants that include the purchase or rental of specialized equipment and/or supplies if the applicant can demonstrate that the items are integral to the proposed activity. Supplies and equipment funded with FIG monies shall become the property of Southwest Minnesota State University.

*Revising Applications:* A FIG grant is made for the specific activity described in the proposal. Grant recipients must request the approval of the PIC committee in advance if they plan to make any significant revisions to the funded activity. Approval of revisions is not automatic.

*Follow-up Reports:* FIG grant recipients are required to submit a follow-up report upon completion of the funded activity. Reports must be submitted online using the Faculty Improvement Grant Final Report Form available on the SMSUFA page on the university website. Faculty with missing follow-up reports are ineligible to receive future grants.

## **Faculty Improvement Grants: Professional Improvement Committee Procedures**

### Administration and Committee Responsibilities

*Administration Responsibilities:* The university administration shall be responsible for:

1. Notifying faculty through the meet and confer process of the upcoming FIG grant application process and deadlines. Dates for such notifications are to be determined in the semester before the applications are due.
2. Gathering grant applications online and distributing them in a timely manner to the Professional Improvement Committee (PIC).
3. Maintaining the FIG account, authorizing payment to grant recipients, and providing the PIC committee with regular reports on the FIG account.
4. Collecting follow-up reports online after completion of grant activity.
5. Making final decisions about the awarding of FIG grants.

*Committee Responsibilities:* The PIC committee shall be responsible for:

1. Reviewing, categorizing, and evaluating all FIG grant applications.
2. Determining which applications are eligible for funding, subject to final approval by the university president.
3. Distributing funds on an equal percentage basis to the eligible applicants, subject to final approval by the university president.

4. Keeping adequate records of procedures, recommendations, and explanations.
5. Passing on such records to subsequent committees.

### Committee Procedures:

*Committee Membership:* The PIC committee shall consist of five appointed members plus the elected chairperson. The chairperson shall be elected by the Faculty Assembly in accordance with the SMSUFA constitution. The other five members shall be appointed by the SMSUFA Executive Committee. Should not enough volunteers be found for adequate representation, the committee chair shall be authorized to seek additional members, with final appointment to be made by the Executive Committee. Any PIC committee member who submits a FIG grant proposal shall not vote on her/his own proposal.

*Evaluation of Grant Applications:* The PIC Committee will evaluate each grant proposal according to the following criteria:

1. Evidence of professional preparation
2. Clarity and quality of the description of the activity
3. Strength of the rationale in support of one of the following criteria:
  - a. Scholarly or creative achievement or research: For the purpose of committee review, such proposals have an implied product that can be shared with the larger professional community. Presenting a paper at a conference falls into this category.
  - b. Evidence of continuing preparation and study: For the purpose of committee review, such proposals demonstrate participation in a professional development activity that may not include a final product that can be shared with the larger professional community. Attending a conference without presenting a paper falls into this category.
4. Strength of a budget that includes an itemized listing of estimated expenses

*Opportunities for Revision:* Whenever possible, the PIC committee will give an applicant whose proposal does not conform to one or more of the criteria outlined above an opportunity to revise the application. The applicant shall then have five working days to revise the application or provide additional information to the committee. If the faculty member does not submit a suitable revision of the application or fails to satisfy the committee's concerns, the committee may reject the application.

*Disapproval of Grant Applications:* A proposal will not be funded if:

- a. The PIC committee determines it does not conform to one or more of the criteria outlined above.
- b. An applicant fails to revise an application after being given an opportunity to do so by the PIC committee.
- c. In the opinion of the PIC committee it does not meet ordinary standards of professional preparation, even after an opportunity to rewrite has been given.

*Allocation of Funds:* The PIC committee will allocate funds in each award cycle to requests in both categories. Each approved request from either category will be funded at an equal

percentage of the approved request, with the percentage depending on total available funds.

*Notification of Approved Applicants:* Once the committee has reached a consensus on the approval of applications and the allocation of funds, it will:

1. Forward the names of approved applicants and the amount of approved funding for each to the administration. The university president will then be responsible for the final approval of applications and for notifying faculty of their awards.
2. Providing a written explanation of the committee's decision to any faculty member whose application was rejected.

*Responsibilities of the Committee Chair:* The chair of the PIC committee shall be responsible for:

1. Calling and scheduling committee meetings.
2. Conducting meetings in accordance with the guidelines for committees and boards as described in the most recent edition of *Roberts Rules of Order*.
3. When appropriate, communicating with administration and faculty regarding decisions of the committee.
4. Maintaining detailed records of committee proceedings and forwarding them to future committees.

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