Research Development Fund – FY2015 Request for Proposals

SUMMARY The Research Development Fund (RDF) was established as a mechanism to enable one-time, large investments in shared research infrastructure, to enhance competitiveness for multi-project extramural funding requests, and to facilitate new capabilities or technologies for Texas A&M campuses in Brazos County. For example, this fund may be used to support formation of new core facilities or other shared research capacity. This first request for proposals initiates an exciting opportunity for researchers to help shape and improve the direction of the Texas A&M research enterprise.

Proposals will be accepted 3 times per fiscal year, with initial evaluation conducted by a faculty advisory committee (RDF-AC). The fund is jointly administered by Texas A&M University (TAMU), Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES) and Texas A&M Health Science Center (TAMHSC). Details of the RDF structure and history, submission and evaluation process, updates, frequently asked questions, and the outcome of fund utilization are posted at: http://rdf.tamu.edu.

Requests likely to be funded from the RDF
The RDF derives revenue collected from a portion of the Facilities & Administrative earnings from sponsored grants and contracts awarded to Principal Investigators in Brazos County. Initial funds to seed the RDF were contributed by TAMU, AgriLife Research, TEES, and TAMHSC. The fund is intended for strategic investment in the Texas A&M research enterprise. Thus, the RDF will be utilized for large investments that are considered “game changers” with respect to Texas A&M competitiveness. These investments will provide over-arching benefit to multiple scientific and technological disciplines.

Because this fund is expected to result in the acquisition of new resources, the development of new facilities, upgrades of heavily used technology and instrumentation, or improvement of shared research resources for a large number of researchers, awards are likely to be in the range of $500k to a few million. Ultimately, the RDF presents an opportunity for significant enhancement of Texas A&M’s research capabilities.

Successful requests must demonstrate potential for significant impact, such as:

- Strategic investments in core research resources and equipment, with a desired outcome of benefit to numerous departments and colleges;
- Strategic investments in the acquisition of equipment for existing facilities or creation of new shared facilities (both equipment-based and organism-based), including potential renovation of said facility;
- Strategic investments in research development, and support for other creative investments that will make substantial impact on the Texas A&M research enterprise.

Alternative Resources
It is anticipated that the RDF will be utilized for large investments that will put a program “over the top” with respect to Texas A&M’s competitiveness. Alternative resources may exist for smaller requests, or requests beyond the scope of the RDF program. Application to extramural programs that support equipment purchases should also be considered by investigators. Submissions to the RDF program may be redirected to alternative programs or resources, as deemed appropriate.
Requests that are not likely to be funded from the RDF
The RDF is intended to be utilized for one-time requests that will make significant improvements to the overall Brazos County research enterprise. Examples of non-responsive requests include:

- Permanent salary lines for faculty or staff, or training grants;*
- Items or funds of limited scope or only incremental benefit, or for support of an individual investigator’s program;
- Smaller requests that are more appropriate for other existing programs or funding sources.

*It is recognized that in some cases, recurring costs may exist, especially in the cases where new personnel, specific technical expertise, or service contracts may be required. Such costs may be included in the request, but the applicants must provide detail as to how these costs will be accommodated beyond the funding period.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE
Applications will be accepted with 3 closing deadlines per year (tentatively May, September, and January). Applications will be due by 5 PM on the due date. See the website for additional information.

FOR THIS FIRST ROUND, APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY 5PM CDT, MAY 8, 2015, and should be submitted in PDF format to RDF@tamu.edu. Questions should be directed to RDF@tamu.edu.

The application should be typed, with a minimum of 11 point font and 1 inch margins, and will consist of the following components: 1) Cover Page, 2) Project Description, 3) Management Plan, 4) Budget and Budget Justification, and 5) Biosketches. A proposal template can be downloaded from the website.

Contents:

1. Cover Page (1 page)
   - Title
   - Lead contact information (name, department, e-mail address and phone number) for the individual or lead, in the case of proposals from multiple investigators
   - Participating units
   - Team members or co-investigators
   - Total $ amount requested
   - Executive summary of request

2. Project Description (3 pages maximum)
   Describe the overall scope of the request, including the requested item(s) and required renovation or infrastructure support needed. Address the following considerations as appropriate:
   - Describe how funding of this request will make a substantial impact on the Texas A&M research enterprise. Be specific. Explain how research and research training will be improved.
   - Explain clearly how this resource will result in increased competitiveness for extramural funds, and describe current and planned funding applications related to this request.
   - Specifically describe who (e.g., faculty, departments, students, staff) will be the major users of this resource. Include only those who will most actively and immediately utilize this resource for research on a regular basis. A table of anticipated users or other supporting evidence may be included in the Appendix, if appropriate.
• If space, infrastructure, or renovation is required, describe the requirements and the proposed location and/or scope. Specifically denote what, if any, administrative support has already been obtained for the required space or renovations. If so, please provide a letter of support from the cognizant administrative contact (e.g. dean, department head). Would the project benefit from any reorganization of existing, facilities or infrastructure, including virtual siting?
• Describe similar resources that exist locally (if any) and why they are inadequate.

3. **Management and Sustainability Plan (1-2 pages)**
   Describe the overall management plan and structure including:
   • Oversight and technical management, user training or supervision, allocation of usage, documentation of usage, planned recruitment of users;
   • Prior experience in managing, supporting, and evaluating major equipment resources or facilities;
   • Sustainability of the operation and maintenance/service of the requested resource beyond the initial investment from the RDF.

4. **Budget and Justification (1-2 pages)**
   Provide the anticipated scope of the request and as much budget detail as possible, with justification (as appropriate, quotes and related materials may be included in Appendix):
   • Itemized costs of equipment, instrumentation, or other items to be purchased;
   • Initial service contracts;
   • Additional anticipated costs and technical expertise requirements;
   • Renovation or installation requirements.

5. **Biosketches (maximum 2 pages each)**
   Provide biosketches for lead and supporting investigators, as appropriate.
EVALUATION PROCESS
At the interval dates posted on the RDF website, applications will be reviewed by the RDF Advisory Committee, according to the evaluation criteria. The committee may request additional information. All applications will be forwarded to the RDF Management Committee for award selection.

Please note that the RDF proposal process is different from a typical proposal, and may include interaction between the applicant and the RDF Management Committee. Appropriate evaluation of these proposals may also require the committees to request clarification of proposal content, or consultation with external reviewers, and/or internal stakeholders.

Evaluations and input from the RDF-AC will be provided to the Management Committee within 4-6 weeks of the deadline. Feedback on submitted proposals will be provided, with award notification expected within 8 weeks of submission.

Evaluation Criteria
Successful requests must demonstrate importance for use by the greater research community. The overall vision and plan proposed will be evaluated with respect to the impact and sustainability of the project. Note that cost sharing is not required, but is encouraged, especially when large infrastructure resources are being requested, or support is being requested for instrumentation that will require future staff hires. Requests will be evaluated on:

- The overall benefit to the Texas A&M research enterprise;
- The degree to which this request adds important new technology or resources to Texas A&M; or expands/upgrades heavily-utilized resources;
- The potential to transform the ability of Texas A&M researchers to conduct “cutting-edge” research;
- The ability to which the project positions Texas A&M to be more competitive for federal or other funding requests;
- The importance and value of having the technology or resource locally, as opposed to outsourcing;
- The extent of multi-departmental support for the request as an over-arching technology and/or shared resource;
- The strength of the management plan;
- The plan for sustainability beyond the RDF support.