TENNESSEE TECH | OFFICE OF SPONSORED PROGRAMS

Project Management in Post Award



Project management practices for managing sponsored awards at Tennessee Tech

Mark Lynam | November 11, 2026

You are already a project manager



A project is a "temporary endeavor to create a unique product, service, or result."

PMBOK Guide



An award fits the definition

Fixed period of performance, approved scope, approved budget, named key personnel, and required deliverables.



Policy 720 names the PI

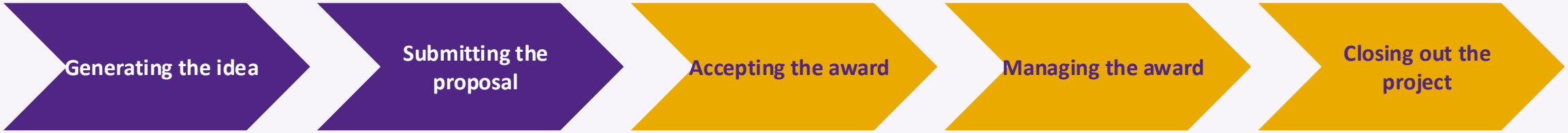
Primary individual responsible for preparing, conducting, and administering the project, with scientific, technical, and fiscal leadership.

Project Management isn't just for post-award...

Project management



Sponsored award



This session covers the last three award stages: accept, manage, close. The proposal is the pre-project work and most of the planning, so award management is executing a plan the PI already wrote.

Project Management Phases & Post Award

Focus area	On a sponsored award	TTU step or document
Initiating	Award notice reviewed; award accepted; contacts identified	Notice of award to OSP; DocuSign approval; Award Kickoff Checklist
Planning	Spending plan by budget period; reporting calendar; hiring, purchasing, subaward plans	Kickoff discussion items; subaward request forms
Executing	Research performed; personnel appointed; purchases and subawards issued	Policy 720 (PI duties); Policy 721
Monitoring and controlling	Monthly reconciliation; effort certification; prior approvals; progress reports	Policy 722; OSP request for project revision
Closing	Final technical, financial, property, and invention reports; records retained	Policy 725; project closeout form

Not strictly sequential: monitoring runs the whole award, and planning recurs at each budget period.

Roles & Responsibilities
PI, co-PI, and senior personnel

Role	Policy 720 definition	Accountability
Principal investigator	Primary individual responsible for the preparation, conduct, and administration of the project	Ultimate responsibility; scientific, technical, and fiscal leadership
Co-principal investigator	Key personnel with responsibilities similar to the PI	Performs agreed duties; ensures compliance; no ultimate responsibility
Senior personnel	Key personnel in a support role	Supports project objectives without PI or co-PI responsibilities

The award team: who does what
The PI is ultimately responsible…

Activity	PI	Project administrator	Grant Accounting	OSP
Review award terms; send notice	Leads			Receives notice
Manage work to statement of work	Leads			
Spend within approved budget	Leads	Reviews invoices and expenditures	Enforces accounting principles	
Monthly reconciliation	Monitors budget	Leads		
Cost transfers (be careful)	Aware	Submit within 90 days of discovery		
Effort certifications	Completes	Assists with student timesheets	Generates	
Sponsor invoices and financial reports	Aware	Confirms	Leads	
Technical reports and deliverables	Leads			
Scope, budget, end-date changes	Initiates	Prepares budget revisions		Approves
Closeout	Leads	Completes closeout form	Completes closeout form	

Write a name under each column for your award. Tasks can be delegated. Accountability cannot.

...and by responsible, that means Things the PI Cannot Delegate

Compliance and funds

Every award term and condition, spending within the approved budget, and professional completion.

RCR (CITI) training

Required for every project team member.

Presence

Disengagement over 3 months, or a 25% time reduction, needs sponsor prior approval (2 CFR 200.308(f)(3)).

Compliance notices

Written notice to OSP when COI, human subjects, animal use, export control, or foreign influence status changes. Also, some budget changes (participants, cost transfers, etc.)

Read the award: it is your project charter

- Period of performance and budget periods
- Approved budget and restricted categories
- Applicable terms and conditions
- Reporting schedule
- Prior approval rules
- Cost share and key personnel commitments

Tennessee Tech steps

- Send the notice of award to OSP
- Review the award for agency requirements
- Secure chair or dean approval for institutional resources, if needed
- Approve the award documentation in DocuSign

Terms differ by agency and award date. Do not assume the last award's rules apply.

Write an award plan…
though this *should* carry over from your proposal.

Purpose
The aim in one sentence

Scope
What the award funds and does not

Requirements
Award terms that bind the work

Approach
Methods and division of labor

Milestones
By budget period

Deliverables
Reports, data, products owed

Constraints
Budget ceiling, end date, restrictions

Communication
Who talks to whom, how often

Change control
Who requests prior approval

Assumptions
e.g., a student recruited by month 3

Roles
Team and stakeholders



Recommended practice: a living document. Most entries can be lifted from the funded proposal.

If that's too much…
Set three baselines

Scope baseline

The funded statement of work broken into tasks, each with an owner: a simple work breakdown structure.

Schedule baseline

Budget periods, report due dates, protocol renewals, subrecipient reports, budget-change deadlines, end date.

Cost baseline

A spending plan by month or quarter for each budget category.

Prepare for take-off
….and (try to) keep a cadence

Checklist meeting

TTU's Award Kickoff Checklist walks the PI through 21 items: sponsor requirements, budget restrictions, dates, data plan, RCR, IRB/IACUC, IP, export control, effort, cost share, purchasing, subawards.

Team kickoff

Cover the work: scope and what is out of scope, milestones, budget, roles, and report dates.

- Sponsor contact: program officer for technical matters
- OSP, Project Administrator, (rarely) grants officer for administrative ones
- **If in doubt, OSP**.

Standing cadence

Regular meetings with your project administrator, plus a regular team progress meeting.

Push (email), pull (shared folder or dashboard), interactive (meeting). Interactive is preferred.

What an operating cadence might look like

Frequency	PI action	Grant accountant	Grant administrator
Weekly	Review tasks, experiments, blockers and immediate decisions	Usually only for urgent financial matters	Usually only for urgent administrative matters
Every 2 to 4 weeks	Review Agile backlog or rolling work plan	As needed for resource implications	As needed for scope or milestone implications
Monthly	Review technical progress, budget forecast, staffing, procurement and risks	Lead financial reconciliation and forecast discussion	Review emerging award, reporting or change issues
Quarterly	Conduct milestone and risk review	Validate spending against progress	Evaluate deliverables, prior approvals and sponsor communications
Before a Stage-Gate decision	Evaluate evidence and decide whether to proceed, revise or stop	Assess financial effect of the decision	Assess scope and sponsor-approval implications
90 to 120 days before end date	Determine whether work can be completed on time	Prepare final spending and payroll forecast	Assess extension, final-report and closeout requirements
At closeout	Complete work, reports, invention disclosures and final deliverables	Reconcile costs and complete financial reporting	Coordinate sponsor and institutional closeout

Communicate and understand from the outset

1

Important dates

Review the important performance dates recorded on the checklist.

2

Roles

Roles and responsibilities of the PI, bookkeeper, Office of Research and Grant Accounting.

3

Requirements

University and sponsor requirements as they pertain to the project.

4

Budget restrictions

Direct costs must be reasonable, allowable, allocable and consistently treated. Any special expenses?

5

RCR training

Review responsible conduct of research requirements (CITI).

6

Contract modifications

Key personnel, subawards, rebudgeting, NCE. Complete the Request for Budget or Project Revision Form and route it for signatures.

Most of what you'll manage breaks down into three groups People, Purchases and Partners

Personnel and effort

Appoint employees to the correct account and period; align payroll with actual work; complete effort certifications; monitor salary caps; check assistantship, tuition, stipend and fringe treatment.

Procurement and property

Supplies can be routine but start long-lead procurements early; follow competition rules; never split purchases; document sole-source justifications; tag and inventory equipment; track federally owned property separately.

Subawards and consultants

Classify subrecipient vs. contractor at the outset; no work without an executed agreement; check progress before approving invoices; amend before changing scope, funding or period.

Distinguish employees, students, consultants, participants and subrecipients correctly.

Maintain straight & level flight control cost



The prudent person test

- Is the cost necessary for the technical scope?
- Is it reasonable?
- Does it benefit the project?

Allowable, allocable, reasonable, consistent, documented.

- Each month, reconcile requisitions and purchases to expenditure reports; compare spending to the cost baseline.
- Submit cost transfers as soon as possible, within 90 days of discovery.
- Complete timesheets and effort certifications on time.
- Review purchases planned for the last 60 days.
- Unsure how to categorize a cost? Ask your project administrator before charging it.
- Spending rate is a signal both ways: overspending risks disallowance; underspending suggests delayed work.

Avoid bad weather manage risk

Response	Meaning	Sponsored award example
Escalate	Raise it to the office with authority	Publications, Inventions, Possible export control, COI, or foreign influence question goes to OSP
Avoid	Do not take the action	Removing students to supplement another aspect of the award; attempting to purchase equipment that cannot benefit the project toward the end of award period
Transfer	Place work with a better-suited party	Issue a subaward with defined deliverables; monitoring duty stays with the PI
Mitigate	Reduce likelihood or impact	Cross-train a second person; order long-lead items early; reconcile monthly
Accept	Proceed and monitor	Pursue a method that may fail, with a documented fallback



Possible Project Terminators (AVOID): unallowable costs; late-award spending; effort not matching salary; subrecipient underperformance; PI absence; undisclosed inventions; lapsed protocols or training; funding termination.

Do what the controller says control change: ask before you act

Sponsor prior written approval is needed for (2 CFR 200.308(f)):

- Change in scope or objectives
- Change in key personnel named in the award
- PI absent over 3 months, or 25% effort reduction
- Costs requiring prior approval under cost principles
- Moving participant support funds
- Subawarding work not in the application
- Change in approved cost sharing
- Need for additional federal funds
- No-cost extension beyond the one-time extension



One-time extension

Up to 12 months where terms allow.



Tennessee Tech route

Tell OSP early about any end-date change.

Research and regulatory compliance



For each area

- Get approval before regulated work begins
- Cover the current protocol, personnel and location
- Track expiration and renewal dates

Sponsor funding is not regulatory approval.

- Confirm whether the project involves:
- Human subjects, vertebrate animals, biosafety or recombinant/synthetic nucleic acids, controlled substances, radiation or hazardous materials.
- Export controls, controlled unclassified information, research security, foreign involvement or foreign talent recruitment programs.
- Conflicts of interest and commitment; responsible conduct and research misconduct requirements.
- Data-use agreements; personally identifiable or protected health information.
- Environmental, health or safety requirements; tribal, cultural-property or archaeological considerations.
- Report incidents, deviations or unanticipated problems promptly, and notify the appropriate office before changing regulated procedures.

Course correction needed variance triggers

1

Unexpected transaction

Investigate any unexpected transaction.

2

Category variance

Discuss a variance above about 10% of the category or $5,000, whichever gives the more meaningful review.

3

Pace vs. plan

Develop corrective action if projected spending is more than about 10% ahead of or behind the time-phased plan.

4

Projected deficit

Escalate immediately if the account is projected to end in deficit.

5

Final 90 days

Review all significant purchases planned during the final 90 days.

6

120 days out

Begin formal closeout forecasting at least 120 days before the end date.

Things may get a bit bumpy keep the accountant informed

Tell the grant accountant promptly	The PI should not
A person has left, changed effort or changed funding	Treat the account balance as available to spend without considering commitments and future payroll
A major purchase is delayed or canceled; an experiment or field season is delayed	Approve costs without understanding their project purpose
A subrecipient is not invoicing as expected	Ask the accountant to move unsupported costs to the award
A no-cost extension may be needed; funds may remain unspent; the project may overspend	Wait until financial-report submission to dispute charges
A cost is on the wrong account; cost sharing is not being captured	Assume an available balance makes a purchase allowable, or direct spending merely to exhaust funds
A sponsor payment or increment is delayed; a milestone delay will affect spending; the PI wants to rebudget	Rely only on informal spreadsheets when the institutional financial system shows different information

Turbulence ahead
warning signs that need immediate attention

1

Money

Projected deficit; large unspent funds with little time left; an unsupported expense; incomplete cost sharing; payroll that does not match actual work.

2

Milestones and partners

A subrecipient is not performing or invoicing; a key milestone will be missed; the scientific direction may materially change.

3

Compliance

Regulated work began before approval; a compliance incident, integrity concern or data breach; a foreign component not in the approved project.

4

Information and IP

Sensitive information possibly disclosed improperly; an invention publicly disclosed before institutional review.

5

People and equipment

The PI expects to leave or be absent for an extended period; equipment cannot be received or used before the award ends.

6

Sponsor and reports

Sponsor instructions inconsistent with the award; a report's technical information conflicts with financial progress.

What should I do?! Don't panic.
Before you contact the Program Officer
Contact an administrator first



Changing the award

Budget revision; scope or objective; key personnel; committed effort; a major deliverable or milestone; no-cost extension; carryforward.



Adding or moving

A subrecipient; work at a new institution or location; a foreign component; supplemental or incremental funding; revised award terms.



Communicating

A material project problem to the sponsor; an invention, property or final report; a sponsor compliance inquiry; anything that may create an institutional commitment.

Before the sponsor hears about a material problem, contact the grant administrator.

….but it doesn't have to be on everything… Separate science from administration



The PI may discuss

- Science and program progress with the program officer

BUT---- Never sign an amendment, agreement, certification or assurance without contacting OSP.

- An authorized institutional official submits or approves official requests affecting scope, budget, award period, key personnel, terms and conditions, certifications, IP commitments and financial obligations.
- Copy the grant administrator on material sponsor correspondence.
- Save sponsor decisions and approvals in the official award record.
- Confirm consequential verbal guidance in writing.
- Do not rely on informal program-officer approval when grants-management or contracting-officer approval is required.

We've begun our final approach… Close out is also a process

When	Action	Basis
120 days before end	Decide on extension; confirm final purchases will benefit the project; alert subrecipients	Recommended practice
60 days before end	Start subaward closeout review; review late purchases; set salary end dates	Subrecipient SOP; Kickoff Checklist
10+ days before end	Written notice of one-time extension reaches agency	2 CFR 200.308(g)(2)
End date	Stop spending; close p-cards and POs; remove encumbrances	2 CFR 200.403(h)
Within 90 days after	Subrecipients submit final reports and settle obligations	2 CFR 200.344
Sponsor timeframe; 120-day federal limit	Final technical, financial, property, and invention reports; closeout form	Policy 725; 2 CFR 200.344

Closeout checklist

Area	Actions
All projects	Review purchases in the last 60 days closely for possible disallowance; stop spending by the end date; submit technical/progress and final reports on time
Expenses	Complete and reimburse all travel; close purchase orders and remove encumbrances; reconcile the pro-card; decide where capital equipment goes (return, or request transfer of title); fund cost share requirements
HR	Monitor salary obligations and set up end dates in Payroll; plan to move personnel to a new project, if appropriate
Subs / contracts	PI confirms all collaborators and subs have finished and invoiced; close subawards with the final report and final invoice; PI or bookkeeper completes the Subrecipient Contract Monitoring Form and forwards it to the Office of Research

Auditors flag purchases in the last 60 days as a risk indicator: encumber them and explain the timing in the justification.

A list of things to keep in mind
Required vs. best practice: manage (1 of 2)

Practice	Really? Who says?	Basis
Comply with all award terms; manage funds within the approved budget	Required: federal and TTU	Policy 720 and 2 CFR 200.403
Charge only allowable, allocable, reasonable, consistently treated costs	Required: federal and TTU	Policy 722 and 2 CFR 200.403–200.405
Monthly reconciliation of requisitions and purchases to expenditure reports	Required: TTU (PI/project administrator)	Post Award Management roles document
PI's monthly comparison of spending to a spending plan	Recommended	PMBOK cost control
Cost transfers as soon as possible, within 90 days of discovery	Required: TTU	Post Award Management roles document
Timesheets and effort certifications	Required: federal and TTU	PI Roles and Responsibilities; 2 CFR 200.430
Sponsor prior approval for changes in scope, key personnel, PI effort, and other listed items	Required: federal	2 CFR 200.308
Chair, dean, and Office of Research approval of a statement of work change	Required: TTU	PI Roles and Responsibilities

A list of things to keep in mind
Required vs. best practice: manage (2 of 2)

Practice	Really? Who says?	Basis
Phase-gate check that a prior approval request is complete before sending	Recommended	NCURA
Review subrecipient reports; verify each invoice against work performed	Required: federal and TTU	Policy 721 and CFR 200.332
Immediate notice to Office of Research of subrecipient noncompliance or audit	Required: TTU	Policy 721
Technical reports and deliverables on the award's schedule	Required: federal and TTU	Award terms; 2 CFR 200.329
Notice to sponsor of significant developments between reports	Required: federal	2 CFR 200.329
Invention Disclosure Form for inventions with possible commercial value	Required: federal and TTU	Policy 732 and 37 CFR 401.14
Written notice to OSP when compliance status changes	Required: TTU	PI Roles and Responsibilities
Risk register; assumption, issue, and change logs	Recommended	NCURA

Consider this the Nutshell

1

Read the award

Summarize its terms on one page.

2

Name your team

Write a name beside every role. We can help you with this.

3

Set baselines

Scope, schedule, cost; review the budget monthly.

4

Ask OSP first

Before changing scope, people, effort, or restricted budget.

5

Verify and disclose

Check subrecipient invoices; disclose inventions before publishing or ‘if in doubt’.

6

Start closeout early

Begin 120 days before the end date.

What's the best project management framework... It Depends



Hybrid by design

- Fixed award baseline
- Adaptive short-term planning

Most federally sponsored research fits a compliance-centered hybrid.

- Predictive governance for scope, budget, compliance, deliverables and reporting.
- Rolling 90-day planning for scientific and engineering work.
- Kanban or Agile practices for current tasks and technical execution.
- Stage-Gate reviews for major engineering or translational decisions.
- Logic model and evaluation measures where the award promises human, organizational or societal outcomes.
- Formal change control for any possible departure from the approved award.

Resources and questions



TTU documents

Policies 720, 721, 722, 725, 732; PI Roles and Responsibilities; Award Kickoff Checklist



Federal rules

2 CFR 200 on eCFR; the sponsor's policy guide and award terms

Questions?