Common Errors, Slowdowns, and Mistakes on GoldSheets
OSPA Pre-Award Team - May 14, 2017

Proposal does not follow instructions in the guidelines: The most frequent and most preventable errors that OSPA encounters come from non-conformity with the guidelines. Specific examples include missing or incorrect forms; significantly less or more detail in the budget justification than required by the sponsor; and using the wrong budget template. OSPA recommends that the guidelines be reviewed by all staff involved in the proposal preparation process. FAQs, agency policy and procedure guides (often found as a link in the guidelines), and modifications to the original announcement may contain important information.

Untimely receipt of subrecipient documents: Subawards on a proposal add complexity and time to the proposal preparation process. OSPA cannot approve the GoldSheet and associated budget and budget justification until all documents have been received from the subrecipients.

Incorrect formatting of budget justification: Budget justification templates are used by many on campus to streamline budget preparation. Budget justifications need to be formatted to comply with the requirements of the specific sponsor or guidelines, and these formatting requirements are often overlooked.

Lack of monitoring - GoldSheet routing: Delays in GoldSheet routing often occur when no one is monitoring the progress of a GoldSheet through the approval routing tree. Co-PIs frequently overlook the notification email. Monitoring of the GoldSheet as it routes through the approval routing tree will prevent many slowdowns from occurring.

Multiple attachments of the same document to the GoldSheet: It is difficult for a reviewer to determine which version of a document is the most recent without explanatory notes on the GoldSheet or the use of a numbered/consistent file-naming convention. Emailing attachments to OSPA while the GoldSheet is still routing is discouraged and can make it difficult to determine which version is most recent. The preferred method is to email the revised documents to the current GoldSheet approver and request they be attached to the GoldSheet.

Participant Support Costs Budgeting Mistakes – Not following ISU Guidance: Items are often budgeted in this category in error (e.g., travel for ISU employees). See ISU's Participant Support Costs Guidance on SPA's website under Various Topics or details. For NIH proposals, Participant Support Costs should only be budgeted when specified in the FOA. As Participant Support Costs are exempt from IDC (F&A), it is important to follow the ISU guidance and the sponsor's guidelines when budgeting these costs.

Lack of GoldSheet Notes: Notes help downstream reviewers understand changes or unusual circumstances when reviewing the GoldSheet. As a general practice, OSPA checks the NOTES section as the first step of a GoldSheet review. Situations where notes are very useful include requests to update page 1 of the GoldSheet with any corrections, confirmation of the correct budget total amount if the budget has changed, indication of unique sponsor requirements, and requirements for specific budget forms to be included in the submission.