

Guidelines for PI approvals

(for aspiring PIs and co-PIs, Departmental Administrators, and the University Research Board)

What is PI status?

A Principal Investigator (PI) is an individual judged by the University to have the appropriate level of authority, expertise, and responsibility to direct a research project or program supported by a grant. There also may be multiple individuals serving as co-PIs who share the authority and responsibility for leading and directing the project, intellectually and logistically. Each PI/co-PI is responsible and accountable to the University for the proper conduct of the project or program. PIs are responsible for mentoring students involved in the project. They are also responsible for fulfilling the programmatic, management, and other requirements of the sponsoring organization.

Why is it ordinarily restricted to particular ranks?

The University takes the responsibilities inherent in the position of PI or co-PI very seriously. The PI/co-PI has full financial responsibility for the use of the sponsor's funds, and sole authority for the direction of the research. The University has determined, with advice from the University Research Board (URB), that the qualifications of members of the faculty and sufficiently senior ranks of the research and technical staffs automatically entitles them to serve as PI's or coPI's.

Why is it a good idea to have exceptions?

The University allows certain other individuals to apply for grants as a PI/co-PI when the individual is uniquely suited to take on the intellectual, logistic, and mentoring responsibilities presented by a particular grant. Researchers in ranks that do not automatically have the right to serve as a PI may request PI status on a grant application. Assignment of PI status usually depends on the qualifications of the individual, the specific grant opportunity, the research duties expected of the individual, and whether or not an individual eligible by rank is better suited to serve as the PI. One type of grant opportunity that is an appropriate exception for PI status is the NIH "Pathway to Independence" program. That program is designed to help make new postdoctoral scientists more attractive to academic research institutions by offering long-term commitments of scientific resources and funding. Other situations in which PI (or Co-PI) status may be granted include those in which professional specialists have a research component to their duties or visiting scholars or researchers conduct a project while at Princeton.

Who does NOT require URB approval to serve as PI or co-PI?

(PI Qualification Chart)

1. Ranks of tenure-track Faculty, full-time Lecturers and Senior Lecturers, Senior Research Scholars, Research Scholars, and Associate Research Scholars.
2. Senior Professional Specialists, if the appointing department specifically requests PI status at the time the appointment/promotion request is presented to the C/7,

- and it is approved by the C/7. In all other situations, Senior Professional Specialists must request special URB approval.
3. Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Research Associates do not need URB approval to apply for fellowships. However, a faculty member or other individual authorized to supervise graduate students must fulfill the appropriate advising responsibilities and be designated as the PI in internal records. (Requests to serve as PI or co-PI on a research grant do require approval.)
 4. Routine grants for telescope time (astrophysics) do not require URB approval per se, but do require notification to the URB.

Other than these specific ranks and situations, all others must request URB approval to serve as a PI or Co-PI on a grant.

NOTE: Some administrative staff members are eligible to serve as PIs if their appointment specifically includes research as a part of their job description. PI status for these individuals will require URB approval.

Procedure:

1. Requests should be submitted to the Dean for Research Stewart Smith (smithajs@princeton.edu) with a copy to Annette Tate (atate@princeton.edu).
2. Requests are specific to each individual grant application.
3. Approval to serve as a PI is granted only for the specific proposal identified.
4. The request should include:
 - a. letter of support from department or program chairperson
 - b. applicant's CV
 - c. designation of the agency/sponsor
 - d. specific program initiative to which the proposal is being submitted
 - e. title of the project
 - f. amount requested
 - g. deadline date for the proposal
 - h. on a co-PI request, the name and department of the PI and any other Princeton collaborators.
5. The URB meets during the academic year ([URB Meeting Schedule](#)). If the timing is such that a proposal must be submitted before the URB can fully consider the request, ORPA will normally grant preliminary approval to submit the proposal, pending full review and approval by the URB. Should the Board subsequently not approve the request, the proposal will be withdrawn.
6. The URB will notify the department of all decisions on PI requests.
7. URB or URB subcommittee approval letters are to be submitted by the department to accompany the proposal submission to ORPA.