External Research Funding Agreements: Procedure for Approval

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of these procedures is to outline the appropriate process for applying for and receiving research grants and negotiating and signing research contracts – known collectively as external Research Funding Agreements.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

2.1 Research Funding Agreements refers to agreements with the University to provide funding intended for research purposes, whether the agreement would be considered a grant, contract, contribution agreement, or whether the agreement takes any other form, and whether it is legally enforceable or not.

2.2 Research refers to an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry and/or systematic investigation.

2.3 Indirect Costs of Research refers to those costs which are real but not easily identifiable with a particular research project such as, but not limited to, utilities, the provision of institutional facilities, space, accounting, payroll and personnel services, or janitorial services.

3.0 PROCEDURE

3.1 Application/Proposal Stage

Before submission to an external sponsoring agency, every application or proposal for externally sponsored research must be approved internally. Internal approval requires that:
3.1.1 the application or proposal be signed in accordance with any applicable requirements;

3.1.2 the “Research Funding Approval Process” be completed and signed/approved by the required individuals (see 3.4); and

3.1.3 Conflicts of Interest be declared as part of this process, as outlined in Policy GP-37.

3.2 Indirect Costs must be included in the agreement budget as specified in “External Research Funding Agreement: Indirect Costs Recovery (Appendix A)”

3.2.1 With the exception of Tri-Agency grant proposals, budgets should be presented as a total “price” to the sponsoring agency with the indirect cost built into each budget line item, unless a sponsoring agency requires the indirect recovery charge to be presented as a separate line item. The indirect cost recovery will be automatically deducted from research accounts.

3.3 **Negotiation Stage**

If a contract is required, including those resulting from grant agreements, contracts staff in Research Services assume primary responsibility for negotiations, working with the Project Leader and the sponsoring agency.

3.3.1 Should financial terms fall outside acceptable norms, Research Accounting will be consulted.

3.3.2 The Project Leader and co-applicants are advised on progress and consulted on any decisions that affect the research proposal.

3.3.3 The Project Leader will also be responsible for advising the university members (including students) of the terms and conditions of the agreement applicable to such members and obtaining any necessary signatures (for example, when intellectual property is assigned to the sponsoring agency).

3.4 **Review and Signature Stage**

In the course of negotiating the contract, contracts staff in Research Services will complete the Risk Assessment Checklist Form and provide an overall assessment of risk in five categories. Based on this assessment and the procedures detailed in the Research Agreement Guideline, additional approvals may be required.

3.5 The procedures detailed in the Risk Agreement Guideline will govern financial risk assessment and subsequent approval steps, non-payment guarantees, and account opening.

3.6 The Research Services review includes the following components, as required:

3.6.1 Legal risk review, elevated where required to Research Legal Counsel or University Counsel. Examples where additional review may be required include contracts with entities from foreign jurisdictions, or contracts with potential of injury to persons, property or the environment.

3.6.2 Liability and indemnity and insurance review, involving the Risk Management Office.

3.6.3 Information and Privacy review, elevated where required to the SFU Information and Privacy Officer.
3.6.4 Policy risk review, focused on alignment with all other relevant SFU polices;
3.6.5 Reputational risk review; and
3.6.6 Financial risk review. As detailed in Appendix B, contracts deemed high risk (financial) or over $500,000 (life of project) will require a co-signature from the Vice-President Finance and Administration.

3.7 Research Services staff coordinate the contract signature process on behalf of the University in accordance with the Signing Authorizations Policy (B10.11).

3.8 The “Research Funding Approval Process”, managed by Research Services, is used to obtain signatures from all areas of the University sharing operational and administrative responsibility for the agreement and project. These normally include, but are not limited to:

3.8.1 **The Vice-President, Research and International**: indicates that the University will encourage the prosecution of the research to the extent that available facilities and resources permit, and that the University is prepared to administer funds received on behalf of the Project Leader;

3.8.2 **The Dean of the Faculty**: confirms the Dean’s approval regarding allocation of infrastructure or other resources within the Faculty for performance of the proposed research, approval of the proposed time commitment including teaching releases, teaching buyouts and outside activities, and indicates awareness of any declared Conflicts of Interest.

3.8.3 **The Department Chair or Director**: acknowledges the availability in the department of facilities, space, and resources required to carry out the project (in a non-departmentalized Faculty, the Dean’s signature is required);

3.8.4 **The Project Leader**: indicates their acceptance of the terms and their willingness to carry out the work within the established budget and the availability and sufficiency of the internal and external resources identified in the project description. Should the overall budget on a Research Funding Agreement be exceeded, it is the responsibility of the Project Leader to make arrangements for payment for the over-expenditure.

3.8.5 **The Vice-President, Finance and Administration**: (when required, as detailed in 3.6.6) signifies that financial risk has been appropriately addressed.

3.9 **Project Setup Stage**
Once an agreement has been fully executed, Research Services staff will provide the Project Leader with a copy of the fully executed agreement.

3.10 If financial risk is evaluated as “low” and all other compliance processes are complete, the project account will be opened on the project start date.

4.0 **ASSOCIATED FORM AND GUIDELINE**

4.1 [Risk Assessment Checklist Form](#)

4.2 [Research Agreement Guideline](#)