

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

TO: Council of Principal Investigators

FROM: Keith A Maggert, Ph.D.
Council of Principal Investigators
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SUBJECT: Bridge Funding

At the last meeting of the Council of Principal Investigators, I presented a plan to codify the administrative framework for Bridge Funding at Texas A&M University. With support of the CPI, I have enumerated a draft proposal below. I now solicit comments from members of the CPI, on behalf of their constituency, in order to alter or append these ideas to make Bridge Funding appropriate for all research faculty at Texas A&M, regardless of the source or style of their funding.

Once comments are collected, discussed, and incorporated, the CPI will take the proposal to the Vice President for Research for evaluation and potential adoption.

Summary

Bridge Funding is defined as a short-term, non-renewable source of internal funding whose purpose is to support research and research personnel during periods when external sources of funding have been *temporarily* suspended, or funding is *likely* and *imminent* yet has not been granted.

The recent negotiation of the Indirect Cost Return (ICR) contract with the Texas A&M Research Foundation has enhanced ICR to TAMU by approximately 10%. These funds have not been earmarked for specific purposes and, since they are ultimately of "research" origin, it is beneficial that they remain directed towards support of research within the University. Evaluation of research programs of peer Universities shows that Bridge Funding would be attainable and beneficial at Texas A&M University.

Definition and Purpose of Bridge Funding

Bridge Funding is internal funding provided to active research faculty during brief periods when competitive external funding has not been acquired or has been suspended, and available evidence suggests that funding will be acquired imminently. Award amounts are not meant to supplant external competitive grants, and are thus to be modest, limited in type of allowable expenditures, and non-renewable.

Bridge Funding would:

1. Provide a funding buffer against fluctuations in federal, state, and private funding of research
2. Decrease the probability of research faculty forced to abandon incipient or fruitful lines of research
3. Protect research programs from losing key support personnel due to temporary suspension of funding
4. Provide a mechanism for research faculty to do research when it is most required: when a large grant requires a modest amount of work in order to receive continued funding

Sufficient programs exist for seed funding, equipment funds, Program or Training Grants, and others, and Bridge Funding should stay entirely separate from these other funding mechanisms.

The spirit of Bridge Funding is to provide faculty who have a track-record of fundability to remain active in research, and acquire new grants on their merits, despite inevitable fluctuations in federal or private granting agency largess or research productivity. One may object that Bridge Funding appears as “research welfare,” and it will be important to administer the funds in such a way as to avoid both the appearance and possibility that Bridge Funding will be used for purposes other than those outlined above. Specifically, it is critically important that Bridge Funding be limited to individuals who have the need for such funding, and moreover to limit Funding to those who have a demonstrable ability to receive competitive funding.

Examples of Bridge Funding at other Universities

Bridge Funding is established and formalized at other state Universities in the United States, including some with enrollment and research programs of size similar to Texas A&M University. Two of these Universities – Georgia Institute of Technology and the University of California System – are specifically identified as “Peer” institutes to Texas A&M University. Although the processes for application and administration differ, the process and goal of Bridge Funding remains similar at these Universities (Table 1).

Universities with existing Bridge Funding Programs:

- University of Kentucky
- Drexel University College of Medicine
- Emory University School of Medicine
- Louisiana State University
- University of Connecticut
- San Diego State University
- University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center
- Georgia Institute of Technology
- University of California (all campuses, but administered separately; includes satellite and associated Institutions)

Table 1. A selection of Universities where Bridge Funding exists, along with an indication of how many applicants, successfully-awarded Bridge Funding applications, and cost to the University. Starred campuses are identified as TAMU “Peer” Universities.

University	Typical Applications <i>per year</i>	Success Rate	Awarded Funds <i>per application</i>
University of California, San Diego* (includes School of Medicine and Scripps Institution of Oceanography)	6 – 8	~ 100%	\$25,000
Georgia Institute of Tech- nology*			
University of Texas*, MD Anderson Cancer Center	6 – 10	~ 95%	\$100,000 – \$150,000
University of Connecticut	0 – 3	100%	
University of California, Irvine	~ 20	80%	\$35,000 – \$50,000
Emory University School of Medicine	0 – 3	100%	\$50,000

Proposed Administration of Bridge Funding

Eligibility

- Bridge Funding will be limited to research faculty whose University title is Distinguished Professor, Full professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, or Visiting Professor
- Bridge Funding will be limited to individuals who have demonstrated the ability to acquire external funds, and should therefore be limited to Principle Investigators who have had active competitive research grants within the last five years
- Denied grants may be eligible for Bridge Funding if:
 - The priority score falls within 5 points of the payline
 - The priority score falls within 10 points of the payline and the Principal Investigator is an Assistant Professor
 - The priority score falls within 10 points of the payline and is the only source of funding for the Principal Investigator
 - The grant may be resubmitted according to the rules of the original funding agency

Comment [1]:
Consider active grants to include only external sources?

Should funding have been continuous?

Should this period be three years?

Comment [2]:
Apart from Paylines, what other types of feedback are given by granting agencies?

Application

- Bridge Funding must be requested within 6 months of official notification of denial of a grant
- Bridge Funding amounts should be limited to 50% of the direct cost requested for a 9-month period of the grant that has not been awarded, or 50% of that amount for a grant that has lapsed without renewal, to a maximum of \$50,000
- Application should include:
 - Cover letter explaining request

Comment [3]:
Are these fair amounts – too generous or too little?

Some Universities use matching funds between VPR, College, and/or Department.

- Biographical sketch of Principal Investigator, including past funding history and other grants under review or being prepared
- Original proposal of research
- List of potential funding sources for the research described
- Nine month budget
- Summary of Review from funding agency, including reasons for denial and recommended improvements
- Documentation of how shortcomings or concerns of the denied grant application will be addressed
- Memo of support from Department Head, including critical input and analysis of likelihood of funding
 - Review by the Departmental Head will be seriously considered during review and should be a fair and critical assessment
- Memo of support from Dean of College

Review and Granting

- Office of the Vice President for Research will form a 2 – 3 member Review Committee comprised of senior research faculty with knowledge in the area of the proposal, and at least one of whom should have received a competitive grant from the denying agency
- Committee will review the proposal, and make a recommendation to the VPR regarding quality, likelihood of success upon resubmission, and Bridge Funding budget request
- VPR will evaluate recommendation and make final decision regarding success and funding amount, and notify the Dean, Department Head, and Principal Investigator
- Since Bridge Funding is mean to provide “emergency” funds, funds should be made available immediately after the VPR’s decision

Comment [4]:
Obviously, these details are up to the VPR; these are merely recommendations based on Bridge Funding systems at other Universities

Administration

- Bridge Funding may only be used for salaries that could not be paid in another way (e.g., postdoctoral fellows who do not have fellowship awards of their own), and are limited to the level during previous periods of active granting, or the Departmental average for comparable positions
- Bridge Funding may pay for minor research equipment, consumable supplies, contracted services, animal care, and travel to research sites (e.g., museums, field sites)

- Bridge Funding will not pay for faculty or graduate student salary, travel to meetings, consultation services, large equipment ($\geq \$5000.00$), office equipment or supplies, computers or computer equipment
- Exceptions to these restrictions may be requested by inclusion of specific items in proposed budget and accompanying justification
- Should external funding be acquired or the investigator leaves Texas A&M University, the unused portion of the Bridge Funds will be returned to the VPR
- Bridge Funding may be granted for periods of nine months, and may not exceed 18 months
- Unused portion of Bridge Funding may be forwarded to the second Bridge Funding period, provided the application for extension is successful

Perspective

After the presentation to the CPI by Mark Smock on December 14, 2005, it became apparent that renegotiation of the Texas A&M Research Foundation contract for Indirect Cost Return would yield significant return of funds to Texas A&M University. Specifically, renegotiation would yield a decrease in RF indirect from 29.0% to approximately 20.0%, over four years.

According to Vice President for Research Richard Ewing, the increase in money returning to TAMU would be divided between Research Administration (approximately 25%), dispersal to Colleges (for administration by Deans), or held by the VPR. VPR allotment would be used, with input by Deans, principal investigators (including CPI), and Department Heads, for improving the research environment at Texas A&M. Potential uses include new faculty startup, large research equipment (e.g., magnets, microscopes), and other uses. Bridge Funding would be a beneficial use of VPR funds that would enhance the research environment for two reasons. First, Bridge Funding would be available to all existing programs on campus, and not just to Colleges or Departments engaged in hiring. Second, Bridge Funding would be a use of funds for all research faculty, and not limited to only those research programs that utilize large equipment.

In a 2001 report of the Task Force for Strengthening the Arts and Sciences at Texas A&M to Dr. Ronald Douglas, then-Executive Vice President and Provost of Texas A&M, the members reported that Bridge Funding should be instituted for the College of Geosciences, whose funding is "soft" and sees a very high level of uncertainty. This goal is laudable, and should be extended to all research funding, since many grants are currently as difficult to attain as the College of Geoscience's funds once were.

Progress Towards Bridge Funding

I request input from the CPI concerning this proposal to assure that it is simple, fair, and universally applicable to all research faculty at TAMU, regardless of discipline or College. Comments should be sent to me for inclusion. If possible, I ask that you send comments to me prior to the May 10 meeting of the CPI, or deliver them to me at that time. However, I acknowledge that not all relevant opinions may be heard by this time, and I encourage you to send me comments as you receive them.



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5 July 2006

MEMORANDUM

To: Executive Committee
Council of Principal Investigators

From: Dr. Keith A. Maggert (kmaggert@tamu.edu)
CPI Member, College of Science Representative
Assistant Professor, Department of Biology

Dr. Susan A. Bloomfield (sbloom@tamu.edu)
CPI Member, College of Education Representative
Associate Professor, Department of Health & Kinesiology

Subject: Bridge Funding Initiative

Definition and Rationale

Bridge Funding is defined as a short-term source of internal funding whose purpose is to support research and research personnel during periods when external sources of funding have been *temporarily* suspended, or funding is *likely* and *imminent* yet has not been granted. Award amounts are not meant to supplant external competitive grants, and are thus to be modest, limited in type of allowable expenditures, and short-term.

The recent negotiation of the Indirect Cost Return contract with the Texas A&M Research Foundation is projected to enhance Indirect Cost Return to Texas A&M University. These funds have not been earmarked for specific purposes and, since they are ultimately of “research” origin, it is beneficial that they remain directed towards support of research within the University. Bridge Funding would fill a gap by providing support for research when more conventional granting mechanisms will not.

Bridge Funding would:

- Provide a buffer against fluctuations in federal, state, and private funding of research
- Decrease the probability of faculty being forced to abandon incipient or fruitful research
- Protect research programs from losing key personnel due to temporary suspension of funding
- Provide a mechanism for research faculty to concentrate on research when it is most required: when a large grant requires a modest amount of work in order to receive funding

Chair Tom Blasingame, Engineering- 845-2292 ■ Vice-Chair David Russell, Science ■ Past-Chair Jim Sacchettini, COALS ■ Architecture Donald House ■ Business Joobin Choobineh ■ COALS Jeff Chen, Alan Love, Rosana Moreira, Suresh Pillai, Dorothy Shippen, David Stelly ■ Dave Burnett, Don Russell, Engineering ■ Geosciences Sarah Bednarz, Lisa Campbell, Mahlon Kennicutt ■ Health Science Center ■ Geoffrey Kapler, Marty Scholtz ■ Liberal Arts Howard Kaplan, James Grau ■ Science Deb Bell-Pedersen, Keith Maggert, Michael Weimer ■ TEES David Boyle ■ TTI William Eisele, Katherine Turnbull ■ Veterinary Medicine Bhanu Chowdhary, James Derr

Other programs exist for assist faculty with seed funding, equipment funds, Program or Training Grants, and other programs. However, Bridge Funding serves a different need and should stay entirely separate from these other funding mechanisms.

The spirit of Bridge Funding is to insulate faculty who have a track-record of fundability, to allow them to remain active in research, and acquire new grants on their merits, despite inevitable fluctuations in federal or private granting agency largess or research productivity. One may object that Bridge Funding appears as “research welfare,” and it will be important to administer the funds in such a way as to avoid both the appearance and possibility that Bridge Funding will be used for purposes other than those outlined above. Specifically, it is critically important that Bridge Funding be limited to individuals who have the need for such funding, and moreover to limit Funding to those who have previously received competitive funding from an extramural source.

Consistency with Goals of the Vice President for Research, Texas A&M University, and Vision 2020

Bridge Funding is consistent with the mission of the Office of the Vice President for Research, and with Texas A&M University’s dedication to elevate Texas A&M to a premier public research University, as outlined in Vision 2020.

Goals included in the Mission Statement of the Vice President for Research are: “ ... to provide leadership and coordination in the development, implementation, operation, and assessment of programs that support... sponsored research throughout Texas A&M University.” Bridge Funding will help the Vice President for Research attain these goals by highlighting the importance of funded research, and demonstrating dedication to assuring support for research faculty.

According to Vice President for Research Richard Ewing, the increase in Indirect Cost Return to Texas A&M would be divided between research administration, dispersal to Colleges (for administration by Deans), or held by the Vice President for Research. The Vice President for Research allocation would be used, with input by Deans, Principal Investigators (including the Council of Principal Investigators), and Department Heads, for improving the research environment at Texas A&M. Potential uses include new faculty startup, large research equipment (*e.g.*, magnets, microscopes), and other uses. Bridge Funding would be a beneficial use of Vice President for Research funds that would enhance the research environment for two reasons. First, Bridge Funding would be available to all existing programs on campus, and not just to Colleges or Departments actively engaged in hiring new faculty. Second, Bridge Funding would be a use of funds for all research faculty, and not limited to only those research programs that utilize large equipment.

One goal of Vision 2020 is to improve University competitiveness and stature, which will not be possible without increasing the competitiveness and stature of the research environment. Bridge Funding will be a powerful tool to bolster extant research programs and faculty, and to help recruit exceptional faculty from other institutions.

In a 2001 report of the Task Force for Strengthening the Arts and Sciences at Texas A&M to Dr. Ronald Douglas, then-Executive Vice President and Provost of Texas A&M, the members reported that Bridge Funding should be instituted for the College of Geosciences, whose funding is “soft” and sees a very high level of uncertainty. This goal is laudable, and should be extended to all research funding, since many grants are currently as difficult to attain as the College of Geoscience’s funds once were. As with seed grants, Bridge Funding should be a moderate cost to administer and fund, but should see large return in the form of extended substantial research granting, retention of active research faculty, and recruitment of new research faculty.

Examples of Bridge Funding at other Universities

Bridge Funding is established and formalized at other state and private Universities in the United States, including some with enrollment and research programs of size similar to Texas A&M University, including the University of California System which is specifically identified as a “Peer” institute to Texas A&M University. Although the processes for application and administration differ, the goal of Bridge Funding remains similar at these Universities.

University	Typical Applications (per year)	Success Rate	Awarded Funds (per application)
University of California, San Diego (includes School of Medicine and Scripps Institution of Oceanography)	6 – 8	~ 100%	\$25,000
University of Texas*, MD Anderson Cancer Center	6 – 10	~ 95%	\$100,000 – \$150,000
University of Connecticut	0 – 3	100%	\$20,000 – \$30,000
University of California, Irvine	~ 20	80%	\$35,000 – \$50,000
Emory University School of Medicine	0 – 3	100%	\$50,000

other Universities with Bridge Funding:

- University of Kentucky
- Drexel University College of Medicine
- Louisiana State University
- San Diego State University
- University of California (all campuses, but administered separately; includes satellite and associated Institutions)

At Texas A&M, *ad hoc* funds have been granted to faculty, for a use similar to the Bridge Funds that we envision here. However, these grants have been intermittent and informal. Currently, the burden to support research during gaps in funding falls onto Colleges and Departments, who typically lack adequate resources. The establishment of a formalized program for Bridge Funding using new financial resources from indirect cost recovery would demonstrate the commitment of Texas A&M to research. These Bridge Funds should be administered through the Office of the Vice President for Research, thereby elevating its stature both intra- and extramurally.

Proposed Administration of Bridge Funding

Eligibility

- Bridge Funding shall be limited to research grant proposals submitted by Principal Investigators through the Office of the Vice President for Research

- Bridge Funding shall be limited to individuals who have demonstrated the ability to acquire external funds, and shall therefore be limited to Principal Investigators who have had active externally-funded research grants within the last three years
- Bridge Funding shall be limited to individuals who will be entirely without research support due to loss of, or failure to receive, external funds
- Individuals whose grant proposals have been denied may be eligible for Bridge Funding if:
 - The likelihood of funding is demonstrable
 - Specific metrics for “likelihood” will understandably vary between different funding agencies or mechanisms. It is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate reasonable likelihood. Examples may include:
 - *e.g.*, (for National Institutes of Health) a priority score within 5% of the payline, or within 10% of the payline for Assistant Professor applicants
 - *e.g.*, (for National Science Foundation) a rating in the highest categories (*i.e.*, “excellent”)
 - *e.g.*, a letter from a Grants Officer of the funding agency expressing optimism and encouraging retooling and resubmission
 - The proposal may be resubmitted according to the written rules of the original funding agency

Application

- Bridge Funding must be requested within two months of official notification of denial of a renewal proposal
- Bridge Funding amounts shall be limited to 50% of the direct cost requested for a 6-month period of the grant that has not been awarded, or of that amount for a grant that has lapsed without renewal, to a maximum of \$50,000
- Application shall include:
 - Cover letter explaining request
 - Biographical sketch of Principal Investigator, including past funding history and other grants which are active, under review, or in preparation
 - Original proposal of research
 - List of potential funding sources for the research described
 - Six month budget
 - Review of denied grant from funding agency, including reasons for denial and recommended improvements
 - Documentation of how shortcomings or concerns of the denied grant application will be addressed
 - Memo of support from Department Head, including input and analysis of likelihood of funding
 - Memo of support from Dean of College

Review and Granting

- Office of the Vice President for Research will form a 3 – 5 member Review Committee comprised of tenured research faculty with knowledge in the area of the proposal, at least one of whom should have received a competitive grant from the funding agency to which the faculty member will be applying

- Committee will review the proposal and memos of support from Department Head and Dean, and make a recommendation to the Vice President for Research regarding quality, likelihood of success upon resubmission, and Bridge Funding budget request
- Vice President for Research will evaluate recommendation and make final decision regarding success and funding amount, and notify the Dean, Department Head, and Principal Investigator
- Since Bridge Funding is meant to provide “emergency” funds, funds should be made available immediately after the Vice President for Research makes a decision
- Suggested timeline for the entire process is thirty days (one week to identify and recruit committee, two weeks for review and report, one week for Vice President for Research office to evaluate and make final decision)

Administration

- Bridge Funding shall only be used for salaries that could not be paid in another way (*e.g.*, postdoctoral fellows who do not have fellowship awards of their own), and are limited to the level during previous periods of active granting, or the Departmental average for comparable positions
- Bridge Funding may pay for minor research equipment, consumable supplies, contracted services, animal care, and travel to research sites (*e.g.*, meetings with collaborators, museums, field sites)
- Bridge Funding will not pay for faculty or graduate student salary, travel to symposia, consultation services, large equipment (\geq \$5000.00), office equipment or supplies, computers or computer equipment
- Exceptions to these restrictions (*e.g.*, faculty summer salaries, “buy-out time” to alleviate teaching load, graduate student salaries) may be requested by inclusion of specific items in proposed budget and accompanying justification
- Should external funding be acquired, or the investigator leaves Texas A&M University, the unused portion of the Bridge Funds shall be returned to the Vice President for Research
- Bridge Funding shall be granted for a period of six months, renewable once, and shall not exceed twelve months total
- Unused portion of Bridge Funding will be forwarded to the second Bridge Funding period, provided the application for extension is successful

Renewal

- Recipients of Bridge Funding may request a single six-month renewal
- Renewals shall be requested by submitting a letter describing justification for a renewal and a description of what progress towards external funding has been accomplished
- Renewal requires only the approval of the Vice President for Research

Recommendations

The Council of Principal Investigators recommends that the Vice President for Research accept this proposal, formalize the administration of Bridge Funding application and review processes, earmark funds to be used as Bridge Funds, and announce the procedures and details of the program to research-active faculty. Moreover, we recommend that the office of the Vice President of Research track important statistics concerning number of inquiries, applications, and granted Bridge funds to use as metrics to gauge the effectiveness, burden, and utility of the program. Finally, the Vice President for Research should evaluate these metrics after six years and determine if continuation of the program is warranted.



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6 October 2006

To: Executive Committee
Council of Principal Investigators

From: Dr. Keith A. Maggert (kmaggert@tamu.edu)

Subject: Bridge Funding Initiative, Summary

Bridge Funding is meant to be a short-term source of internal funding whose purpose is to support research during periods when external sources of funding have been *temporarily* suspended, or funding is *likely* and *imminent* yet has not been granted.

Purpose and Benefit:

- Provide a buffer against fluctuations in research funding
- Decrease the probability of faculty being forced to abandon incipient or fruitful research
- Protect research programs from losing key personnel due to temporary suspension of funding
- Provide a mechanism for research faculty to concentrate on research when it is most required: when a large grant requires a modest amount of work in order to receive funding
- Increase stature and competitiveness of TAMU research environment
- Make research funds available to all existing programs and researchers on campus

Source:

- Expected increase in indirect cost return from TAMU-TAMRF contract negotiation

Application and Administration:

- Formalized program will define eligibility, provide mechanism for application, and standardize review
- Limited to Principal Investigators with demonstrable granting history
- Application requires budget, support by Department and College, and description of how shortcomings of denied/suspended grant will be addressed
- Reviewed and supplied through Office of VPR (and thus limited to grants originally submitted through that office)
- Short term — 6 months, with one 6 month extension possible
- Limited amount — 50% of denied/suspended grant, or \$50,000
- Limited expenditures — small equipment, consumable supplies, animal care, travel to research sites; exceptions may be requested