RESEARCH & CREATIVE ACTIVITIES PROGRAM (RCAP)
2026 Guidelines

> ### *Important Notes:*
>
> - **Applicants are limited to one application submission as Principal Investigator but may serve as Co-Investigator on multiple projects.**
> - **Principal Investigators who received funding in the previous application cycle (FY25) are not eligible to apply as Principal Investigator during this cycle.**
> - **Project period dates: May 15, 2025 – August 15, 2026. Final reports due February 15, 2027.**
> - **Project spending prior to the start date will not be reimbursed.**
> - **Applications must be completed through the SPIRIT website.**

I. Program Description

RCAP funding is provided by the Office of Research and Creative Activity (ORCA) to encourage faculty to develop individual or collaborative projects leading to the pursuit of external funding sources and the promotion of research, scholarly, and creative scholarship. RCAP targets all disciplines and academic pursuits, including international activities, entrepreneurial efforts, and innovative scientific or artistic endeavors. All projects should aim to incorporate undergraduate and/or graduate students, regardless of whether expenses for student research assistants are included in the budget.

Category Type
Applications must be submitted for one of two categories of funding:

- **Category I** funds are considered "seed" monies and will be awarded to Principal Investigators (PIs) to enhance the competitiveness of a subsequent submission of a new or renewal proposal for external funding.
  - Awards up to **$16,000**
  - Funds target ALL disciplines
  - Awardees are required to submit a proposal for extramural funding as a result of RCAP support no later than the next sponsor deadline.

- **Category II** funds support the general development, expansion, or enhancement of faculty research and scholarly activity, and/or the creative and performing arts. Category II funds may also support projects leading to external funding.
  - Awards up to **$8,000**
  - Funds target ALL disciplines
  - Awardees are required to either submit a proposal for extramural funding by the next sponsor deadline or attend an external sponsor's training or workshop to learn more about applying for external funding by the RCAP final report deadline.

RCAP awardees in both categories are encouraged to work with the Office of Sponsored Programs and their Associate Dean for Research (or college-level equivalent) to identify outside funding sources in support of their RCAP-funded project. Additionally, these offices may help identify a WKU grants mentor to assist the PI during the external grant proposal process.

II. Project Period

The project period for awards is **May 15, 2025 – August 15, 2026**. Project spending prior to the start date will not be reimbursed. RCAP funds must be expended by the project end date. A final outcomes report will be due by February 15, 2027.

III. <u>Eligibility</u>

Principal Investigator: All full-time faculty and instructors at all campuses who have independent programs of research or creative scholarship are invited to apply.

Applications may include multiple investigators, but one investigator must be designated as the Principal Investigator (PI); other investigators are to be listed as Co-Investigators. In each funding cycle, a faculty member may serve as Principal Investigator on only <u>one</u> RCAP application and as Co-Investigator on multiple RCAP projects. Principal Investigators who received RCAP funding in the previous application cycle (FY25) are **not** eligible to apply as a Principal Investigator during the current RCAP application cycle (FY26).

Pivot Profile: [Pivot](#) is a comprehensive resource for identifying external project funding and potential collaborators. All individuals designated as the Principal Investigator are required to both <u>create</u> a Pivot account and <u>claim</u> their profile prior to applying. Applicants are required to indicate their status within the application.

IV. <u>Compliance</u>

If the project involves human subjects, animal subjects, export control issues, rDNA/RGZ microbe, or bio-hazards, appropriate institutional approval(s) must be obtained from the Office of Research Integrity (ori@wku.edu; http://www.wku.edu/compliance/) before the project and any subsequent expenditures may begin. Documentation must be sent to internal.grants@wku.edu. Spending that occurs before required compliance approvals are obtained will not be reimbursed by RCAP funds.

V. <u>Budget Information</u>

Although ORCA intends to fund projects in full, it reserves the right to alter budgets.

Allowable Costs

- Part-time personnel salary and fringe benefits (all personnel costs must be detailed and justified):
  - Graduate assistant(s) or graduate student(s)
  - Undergraduate student(s)
  - Technician(s)
- Project supplies and materials
- Computers (must demonstrate how it is essential to the project, not otherwise available and retained at WKU)
- Equipment (single items which cost more than $2,000 – all equipment must be permanently housed at WKU)
- Travel essential to conduct the project or accomplish proposed objectives
- Participant Support costs and/or Human Subjects payments
- Other project costs, including but not limited to:
  - Research animal care and maintenance
  - Performance/Production costs (Creative and Performing Arts only)
  - Payment for services conducted by a non-WKU employee (i.e. consultant, evaluator, or contractor)*
    All non-WKU employee services must be approved by the WKU Purchasing Department prior to providing services.

Unallowable Costs

- Any spending that occurs outside of the project period
- Any spending that occurs prior to obtaining compliance approval, if applicable (IRB, IACUC, etc.)
- Faculty/staff/investigator/post-doc salary and fringe benefits
- Memberships/Dues
- Costs in connection with faculty degree requirements
- Travel to professional meetings or conferences (including associated presenting costs)
- Tuition costs for students
- Publication costs, including indexing and editing services (exception: performing arts production costs)
- Presentation costs, including poster printing
- Meals (exceptions: allowable travel per diem, participant support stipends)

VI. Application Instructions

Applications must be completed in SPIRIT. Only applications using the SPIRIT system will be reviewed. Within the SPIRIT system, see the Project menu, select RCAP from the dropdown, then select "create RCAP proposal."

The following documents are required attachments within the application: Budget Justification, Narrative, and CV/resume for all PI and Co-PIs. A citations document (References) may also be uploaded separately if applicable to your application. Attachments must be PDF documents. If any page limits are exceeded, or if extraneous materials are submitted, these will not be considered for review. *Narratives should be easily understood by faculty peers across disciplines.*

Complete applications include the following elements:

1. **RCAP Application**

   a. Complete and save the required information within the SPIRIT RCAP portal.

The following pieces must be uploaded to the SPIRIT application record as separate attachments:

2. **Proposal Narrative** (limited to 3 pages, Arial 11-point font, half-inch margins) including the following sections:
   a. Background and significance of the project, including its relation to the present state of knowledge in the field
   b. Project description, methodology/strategy, goals and objectives
   c. Expected accomplishments and specific outcome(s) of the project (book, journal article, presentation, grant proposal, etc.) and a brief statement addressing how the project outcome(s) will impact the investigator's career, scholarly reach, and enhance(s) the reputation of WKU
   d. Description of necessary resources (i.e. existing facilities, equipment, etc. that will be available to the project)
   e. Detailed timeline of project tasks
   f. An outline of each investigator's role, and if applicable, how the inter-collegiate or inter-institutional collaboration adds to the project
   g. A discussion of potential external funding sources and how RCAP funding will improve chances of obtaining external funding (required for Category I proposals and optional for Category II proposals)

3. **CV/Resume/Biographical sketch for each investigator (**limited to 3 pages each, Arial 11-point font, half-inch margins):
   a. Include education, experience, relevant publications, and current and pending research/project support from both external and internal funding sources. Include links to any professional/scholarly electronic profiles (ex. a professional website, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, MyNCBI, etc.). The biographical sketch may follow NIH, NSF, or other standard agency formats, but must adhere to the three-page limit.

4. **Budget Justification** (limited to 1 page, Arial 11-point font, half inch margins)

5. **References or Works Cited – include if appropriate** (no page limit; Arial 11-point font, half inch margins)

VII. Submission Instructions & Deadlines

RCAP Approval Process in SPIRIT: (Click here for the detailed RCAP Approval Flow Document)**:**

- The application must receive approval from the Department Chair and College Approver (Associate Dean for Research or College-Level equivalent) before it can be submitted to ORCA.
- Approvers have 3 options: Approve, Approve with Comments Included, or Return for Revisions. After an option is selected, the record will progress to the next step based on their selection.
- Application routing will be communicated via email generated by SPIRIT. The PI may also log in to SPIRIT to check the status of their application.
- The PI will have the ability to edit the application after approvals are received so they may address any comments made by approvers.
- The PI must select the "Submit to ORCA" button to submit the final, approved application to ORCA. This button is not available until the two approvals (Department Chair and College Approver) are received.

Deadlines

February 7, 2025 – Submit to the Department Chair via SPIRIT approval flow.
February 14, 2025 – Submit to College Approver for review and approval within SPIRIT.
February 28, 2025, 11:59 p.m. – **It is the applicant's responsibility to submit the final application to ORCA by the deadline**. *SPIRIT will have this noted as March 1 at 12:00 a.m.; submissions will not be accepted after this time.*

VIII.   Notifications

Applicants will be notified of funding decisions in early May. Please do not contact the Office of Research & Creative Activity prior to this date to inquire about the status of your proposal. Project spending prior to the start date will not be reimbursed.

IX.   Other Resources

View Frequently Asked Questions on the RCAP Website

Assistance with Pivot Profile

X.   Review Process

Applications that are complete and responsive to this announcement will be evaluated for merit by the RCAP Review Committee comprised of faculty representatives. The Committee will then provide a prioritized list of funding recommendations to the Office of Research and Creative Activity based on the quality of the proposals per the review criteria below. All criteria may not apply to all proposals.

Note: The applicant's prior award history, including project outcomes, award management, and adherence to prior award conditions will be considered. Special consideration will be given to potential first-time awardees. All RCAP awards are subject to the availability of funds.

Review Criteria

I.   **Proposal Narrative**
- *Background / Significance*
  - Is the significance of the project established?
  - Does the project address an important problem, need, or barrier?
  - Does the proposal provide a compelling argument for the research or creative activity?
  - Does the proposed project represent a significant contribution to the investigator's field of study?
- *Strategy / Methodology / Goals & Objectives*
  - Does the proposal provide a clear statement of overall project objectives?
  - Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale?
  - Are the overall strategies and methodologies appropriate to accomplish the project objectives?
- *Impact / Outcomes*
  - Will the project lead to further scholarly activity?
  - Will there be publication(s), public dissemination, or public performance(s)?
- *Project Timeline / Feasibility of Work Plan*
  - Is a detailed and feasible project timeline included?
  - Does the applicant convey that the proposed activities will be completed within the project period?
  - Are there adequate resources available to support proposed activities?
- *Project Team / Qualifications*
  - Does the applicant have the appropriate qualifications and experience needed to execute the project?
  - If the project is interdisciplinary or collaborative, is the collaborative nature/benefit and the role of collaborators clearly explained?
- *Follow-on Proposal (Category I only)*
  - Does the applicant include a plan to submit a subsequent proposal(s) for extramural funding?
  - Does the proposed project improve chances for funding from external sources?

II.   **Budget & Justification**
- Is the budget a considered and economical use of resources rather than a claim for maximum possible funding?
- Is the budget appropriate for the proposed activities and does it follow RCAP budget guidelines?
- Does the budget narrative provide a sound justification with clear and specific budget information?

III.   **Supplementary Documents**
- Were biographical sketches, or CVs, with the requested details, included for each member of the project team?

- Do the biographical sketches, or CVs, convey that the project personnel have the expertise necessary to successfully complete the project?
- Were only allowable supplementary documents included: Biographical Sketches & References (if applicable)?

IV. Overall Assessment
- Did the applicant follow the application instructions?
- Is the text of the proposal well-written and understandable by faculty from different disciplines?
- Does the project enhance the scholarly impact and overall reputation of WKU?