

UAH Framework for Sponsored Research Submissions — Frequently Asked Questions

UAH is an internationally recognized, comprehensive research-intensive university that produces important discoveries, provides an outstanding education, and serves the workforce needs of Redstone Arsenal, the greater Huntsville area, the state and beyond. UAH is fully committed to complying with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, or other protected characteristics. The evolving landscape of laws and regulations regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion also requires heightened awareness within the UAH community, as faculty and staff must remain in compliance with relevant laws and regulations. The following guidance is intended to help the UAH research community maintain compliance while continuing to advance the institution's vital mission.

As the legal interpretation and enforcement around research institutions evolve and additional federal administrative communications, court orders, and interpretive guidance from professional associations and higher education institution networks become available, this framework will be updated.

Where can I find written policies and/or context regarding academic freedom at UAH?

UAH supports academic freedom — as codified in the AAUP Statement and Comments on Academic Freedom and Tenure, UAH Faculty Handbook, and the Use of Outdoor Areas of Campus Policy — and compliance with federal and state laws, regulations, and policies, including those related to anti-discrimination.

How do state or federal laws or directives regarding diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) affect UAH research?

In general, faculty have freedom to pursue the research questions or topics where their disciplines, data, and professional discretion guide them. This includes research questions and topics focused on race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, and national origin. Faculty cannot, however, discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin.

Can UAH impose restrictions, preferences or limitations related to race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, and national origin for an educational or employment benefit?

No. UAH cannot make rights, privileges, engagement with, or access to education or employment opportunities offered by the institution based on race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, and national origin.

Does the prohibition against education and employment opportunities based on race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, and national origin include things like PI selection, student scholarships or training programs?

Yes. UAH cannot allow eligibility for positions, scholarships, or participation in a service or training program to be based on race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin.

What are some examples of acceptable criteria for education or employment opportunities?

So long as criteria is not used as a proxy for a legally protected characteristic (e.g., race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin), a privilege or benefit can be based on criteria such as

GPA/test scores, rank (e.g., junior faculty), first generation college student, living in a rural area or graduating from an under-resourced high school, eligibility for Pell grants (e.g., students), or major or study/research interests.

Can UAH conduct research for which the awarding entity requires unlawful DEI standards (e.g., and education or employment opportunity based on protected class)?

No. UAH must comply with state and federal requirements and cannot agree to application or award terms or conditions that require it to apply discriminatory criteria or maintain unlawful DEI standards or programs. The Office of Sponsored Programs can review funding announcements and requests for proposals and support faculty with guidance based on the circumstances.

Should PIs use generic terms in describing research activity?

No. Generic terms could allow for incorrect interpretations that could be perceived as discriminatory and imply noncompliance in intent or practice. In developing and conducting research and other activities, UAH faculty and staff are encouraged to be precise and avoid the use of undefined or otherwise imprecise terminology.

What is an example of undefined or imprecise terminology to avoid?

Stating that a sponsored program will bring together scientific experts from “multiple academic disciplines” is clearer and more precise than simply stating it will convene a “diverse group,” which could be misinterpreted as applying impermissible criteria.

Can I continue to partner with other institutions of higher education that traditionally serve certain populations?

Yes. Partnerships with colleges and universities remain permissible, including those like HBCUs and colleges for women or men that traditionally serve a particular population.

Can PIs continue to partner with third-party organizations to conduct research?

Yes, provided that the activity is compliant with applicable laws and regulations. However, UAH is unable to propose, conduct, or implement research initiatives or programs funded by third-party organizations that require UAH to represent, certify, or agree to administer or advance DEI standards that are deemed unlawful. The Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development (OVPRED) can provide advice and work with faculty and the third-party organization.

What process does the Office of Sponsored Programs use to review for compliance?

As part of its critical function within the University, OSP reviews requests for proposals, research proposals, progress reports, and other documents prior to submission to sponsors. Where questions arise regarding a research or sponsored project related to researcher eligibility, terms and conditions, and evolving federal standards, OSP will immediately engage the principal investigator, appropriate unit leader(s), and administrative officials to apply this framework in the context of the specific submission and consider potential opportunities for greater alignment and success.

If I have remaining questions or concerns, what should I do?

For research-related questions, contact the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development (rscompliance@uah.edu) for support and guidance.