Sponsored Project Funding at UC

The University of California’s research and social service missions are supported through contracts and grants awarded by a diverse combination of federal, state and private sponsors. These sponsored projects support a wide range of research and service activities, spanning all fields of inquiry, increasing our knowledge and understanding of the world and contribute directly to the well-being of communities throughout the state. During 2016-17, UC received about 27,000 sponsored project awards worth over $6 billion from 3,300 sponsors — federal and state agencies, local governments, domestic and international corporations, non-profit organizations and other research universities. While most of these awards were for targeted research projects, about one-sixth of the total supported training and statewide social service programs.

UC’s sponsored project funding has generally kept pace with the growth of the University, but has also been affected by the national economy and federal budget policy. At the turn of the millennium, during 2000-01, UC received about $3 billion in contracts and grants, before considering inflation. The annual total has grown to $6.1 billion in 2016-17.

The role of Federal Funding

The University of California is the nation’s largest academic recipient of federal funding for research and related projects, and the majority of UC’s sponsored projects involve federal funds. Changes in federal budget policies, therefore, have a major impact on UC’s contract and grant funding. The recession of 2008-09, the Recovery Act, the Federal Sequester and the budget bills of 2013 and 2015 have all affected UC’s award funding. During 2016-17, about 55% of the $6.1 billion UC received in sponsored project funding came from the federal government, and most of that from just two agencies, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF).
In addition to the $3.3 billion that federal agencies provided directly during that year, UC also received over $700 million in federal funds in the form of subawards, or flow-through funds, from non-federal sponsors with their own federal contracts and grants. Nearly three-quarters of the project funding that UC received from other research universities originated with the federal government. These flow-through funds brought the true total of federal funding to over $4 billion, or two-thirds of UC’s contract and grant funding for 2016-17.

**Five-year funding summary**

Over the last five fiscal years, 2013 through 2017, UC received about $28.7 billion in sponsored project funding from all sources. More than half of the total comprised federally funded projects.

Between 80-85% of all award funding is specifically targeted for research, including clinical trials. UC also receives sponsored project funding for training, public service and to establish new programs or research centers. These awards often include research components. Public service awards, representing 7% of the award total, frequently result in published research papers, and training awards, representing about 5% of the total, often support graduate and post-doctoral training in research methods.
Sponsors vary considerably in the mix of project types that they support.

Federal agencies primarily support basic, fundamental research through both individual project awards and long-term program grants. California agencies support research on the state’s regional issues, such as transportation infrastructure and health, and also partner with UC to manage and deliver a wide range of social services. Corporations focus on research projects that can help develop marketable products from fundamental scientific discoveries, with increasing support for clinical trials of new therapies and medical devices. Non-profit organizations, by contrast, are strongly mission-driven in their partnerships with UC, funding research, instructional programs and institution-building efforts that promote their issue areas. Academic sponsors resemble the federal government in the mix of project types because most of their awards to UC are federally funded subcontracts. Local government awards, most of which are from California municipalities, counties and regional administrations (such as power and water districts), focus on service awards that benefit their communities.

Sponsor profiles
The four Topic Briefs referenced in the links below present detailed profiles of the types and amounts of projects supported over the past five fiscal years by federal, state, corporate and non-profit sponsors. These sponsor profiles describe a complex mosaic of projects that are separately funded but nonetheless interconnected. Through publications, conferences, collaborations and collegial communications, these research projects connect with work done at other research institutions and government agencies, and to the vast body of independent research and innovation that is not funded by external sponsors, but that is driven by the inherent curiosity of the university community.

Federal Project Funding Profile
State Agency Partnerships
Corporate Project Funding Profile
Non-Profit Project Funding Profile