Tips and Tricks to Aid with Proposal or Budget Preparation

All guidance below is provided by members of the UC Davis Research Administration community to facilitate your preparation of proposals and/or budgets.

- To update incorrect/out-of-date guidance, or to add additional helpful guidance to this page, please write SPOTraining@ucdavis.edu.

IMPORTANT: ALWAYS CONSULT THE SPONSOR for definitive guidance on completing their required forms and spreadsheets.

- Information below is provided as an additional resource only.
- Email any questions on content below to SPOTraining@ucdavis.edu.

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Excel tip: Goal Seek

The desktop version of Microsoft Excel has a function called **Goal Seek** that helps you **find the answer to a "what if" question**. It changes one number in your spreadsheet until you get the result you want.

Imagine you want to know **how many cookies you need to sell to make $100**.
You know:

- Each cookie costs $2.25.
- You want $100 total.

Instead of guessing, Goal Seek will figure it out for you.

How to use Goal Seek (Step by Step):

1. **Set up your math in Excel.**
   Example:
   - In cell B1, type Price per cookie → $2.25
   - In cell B2, type Number of cookies → 1 (start with any number)
   - In cell B3, type Total → =A1*A2 (this multiplies price × number)

2. **Open Goal Seek.**
   - Click on the **Data** tab.
   - Find **What-If Analysis** → Click **Goal Seek**.
3. **Fill in the boxes:**
   - **Set Cell:** Click the cell with the total (B3).
   - **To Value:** Type the goal you want (100).
   - **By Changing Cell:** Click the cell with the number of cookies (B2).
4. **Click OK.**
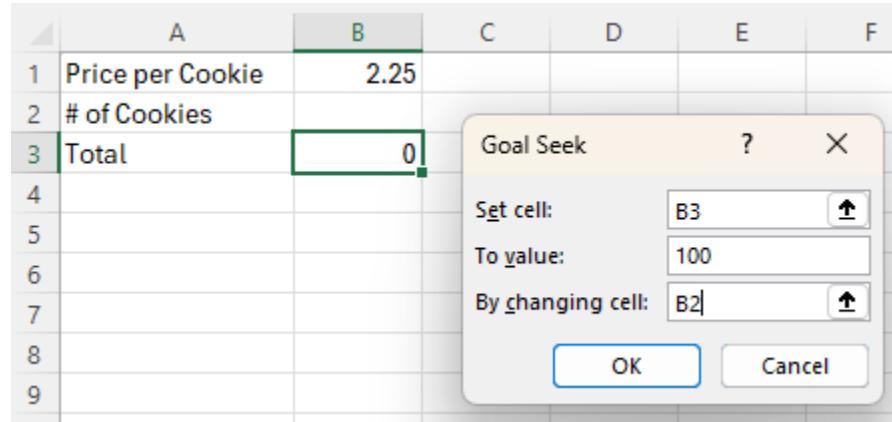
	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Price per Cookie	2.25				
2	# of Cookies					
3	Total	0				
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						

Goal Seek ? ✕

Set cell: B3

To value: 100

By changing cell: B2

OK   Cancel

Excel will change the number of cookies until the total is $100.

Result:
Excel informs you that you need to sell **44.4 cookies** to make $100.

	A	B
1	Price per Cookie	2.25
2	# of Cookies	44.44444
3	Total	100

Travel Worksheet for Budgets

Add a Travel worksheet to an OR Budget Template as an additional tab (at bottom).

Request | F&A Details | Personnel Reference | Travel
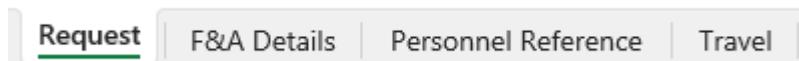
- This helps reduce errors when detailing every component of a trip for the budget justification and for making last minute changes.
- By linking cells, a minor adjustment in the travel rolls through to the project budget.

Sample:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1		Conference attendance					
2		rate	nights	days	Total		2 attendees
3	Registration	650			650		1300
4	airfare	1100			1100		2200
5	Hotel	275	3		825		1650
6	Meals	79		4	316		632
7	Local transportation	50		4	200		400
8	airport parking	35		4	140		280
9					3231		6462
10							
11	Meet with Experts						
12		rate	nights	days	Total		
13	Registration	0			0		
14	airfare	1100			1100		
15	Hotel	275	2		550		
16	Meals	79		2	158		
17	Local transportation	50		2	100		
18	airport parking	35		2	70		
19					1978		
20							

< >   Request   F&A Details   Personnel Reference   Travel   +

Budgeting for Academic Merits and Promotions

Having access to **Job Data in UC Path** is a great help in this process but is not necessary.

1. Identify the **Academic Employees** in your budget (with the exception of GSRs and Postdocs - that is a separate process).
2. Ask your Academic Personnel Office (or Payroll Office or check Job Data in UC Path) for the following info:
   a. When was the last time each individual received a merit or promotion?
   b. What is their current pay rate AND STEP?
   c. What is the normal number of steps to budget for?
      i. This may differ by pay title and/or department.
3. For each individual in the budget, **pull up the correct pay scale**.

a. Each Academic Pay Title has a **Salary Scale** available on the Academic Personnel website: https://academicaffairs.ucdavis.edu/step-plus-salary-tables.

b. Make sure you use the **Step-Plus tables** and pay attention to the difference between **AY** vs **FY** appointments.

c. Note the value in the **"Normal Years at Step"** column.

4. Calculate the individual's **off-scale** component by identifying the pay rate at their current step and subtracting it from their current rate.

   a. The amount they are paid above their current step is their off-scale.

5. Count the normal number of steps up from their current step.

   a. When the pay rate is higher than the rate at the lowest step of the next pay title, jump to the equivalent step in the next title (unless you receive more precise information from the academic personnel office).

   b. Add this pay rate to their current off-scale and use this value in the budget for the period at the normal years at step after their last merit/increase.

Example:

Professor X became an Assoc Prof-AY, Step 1.5 on 10/1/2024, with a current pay rate of $104,200.

- This means that the off-scale is $104,200-$102,200 = $2,000.
- The department normally budgets for 1.5 step increases for all merits/promotions.

STEP PLUS SYSTEM - TABLE 1
FACULTY-LADDER RANKS-PROFESSOR SERIES*
ACADEMIC YEAR

Rank	Step	Normal Years at Step	Salary Scale 10/1/2025 Annual	Salary Scale 10/1/2025 Monthly	Annual Step Plus Increment†	Monthly Step Plus Increment†
Assistant Professor	1		$80,800	$6,733.33		
	2		$84,900	$7,075.00		
	2.5		$87,200	$7,266.67	$2,300	$191.67
	3		$89,400	$7,450.00		
	3.5	2 years	$91,900	$7,658.33	$2,500	$208.33
	4		$94,400	$7,866.67		
	4.5		$97,000	$8,083.33	$2,600	$216.67
	5		$99,500	$8,291.67		
	5.5		$102,100	$8,508.33	$2,600	$216.67
	6		$104,700	$8,725.00		
	6.5		$107,500	$8,958.33	$2,800	$233.33
Associate Professor	1		$99,600	$8,300.00		
	1.5		$102,200	$8,516.67	$2,600	$216.67
	2	2 years	$104,800	$8,733.33		
	2.5		$107,600	$8,966.67	$2,800	$233.33
	3		$110,300	$9,191.67		
	3.5		$113,400	$9,450.00	$3,100	$258.33
	4		$116,500	$9,708.33		
	4.5	3 years	$121,000	$10,083.33	$4,500	$375.00
	5		$125,500	$10,458.33		
	5.5		$130,400	$10,866.67	$4,900	$408.33
Professor	1		$116,600	$9,716.67		
	1.5		$121,100	$10,091.67	$4,500	$375.00
	2		$125,600	$10,466.67		

		Proposed:	Awarded:			
Start Date:		1/1/2026		**NIH**	**Title:**	
End Date:		12/31/2030			**PI(s):**	
Change estimates based on awarded dates?			Yes		**Notes:**	

Personnel — Enter effort either in Person Months (top section) or % Time (bottom section)

	Name/Role:	Appt. Type	Effort Type	Base Salary	Months or %:	Per 1	Per 2	Per 3	Per 4	Per 5	Escal
						Person Months					*
1	Prof X (Assoc Prof, Step 1.5) / PI	9/12	AY	104,200	Months	6.00					3%
2	Prof X (Assoc Prof, Step 3) / PI	9/12	AY	112,300	Months	3.00	9.00	6.00			3%
3	Prof X (Prof, Step 1.5) / PI	9/12	AY	123,100	Months			3.00	9.00	9.00	3%
4		12/12	CAL		Months						3%

Note: Keep the 3% escalations because those are applicable to the annual range increases.

	Proposal Due Date:	9/1/2025

12 Months	12 Months	12 Months	12 Months	12 Months	60 Months
				Escalation:	**Multi**
Period 1	**Period 2**	**Period 3**	**Period 4**	**Period 5**	**Total**
1/1/26-12/31/26	1/1/27-12/31/27	1/1/28-12/31/28	1/1/29-12/31/29	1/1/30-12/31/30	1/1/26-12/31/30
69,467	0	0	0	0	69,467
37,433	115,669	79,426	0	0	232,528
0	0	43,532	134,515	138,550	316,597
0	0	0	0	0	0

Michael J. Fox Foundation: Benefits

Their locked budget spreadsheet requires a single, combined fringe benefit rate in column R for all project periods:

	I	J	K	M	N	O	R
roject	Year 2 Annual Salary per FTE	Year 2 Allocation (use decimal)	Year 2 Months on Project	Year 3 Annual Salary per FTE	Year 3 Allocation (use decimal)	Year 3 Months on Project	% Benefits
12.00	$ 143,170.00	0.25	12.00				27.37%
12.00	$ 160,680.00	0.50	12.00				41.71%
12.00	$ 61,800.00	1.00	12.00				25.39%
12.00	$ 81,370.00	0.50	12.00				1.81%

- The formula that solves this issue is:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Total Personnel Costs (for individual)}}{\text{Averaged annual effort} * \text{Sum of all Base Salaries (for individual)}} \right)^{-1}$$

- Example: An individual is committing 25% effort and their total salary and benefits committed to the project equal $89,853. This individual has a base salary of $139,000 in Year 1 and an escalated base salary of $143,170 in Year 2.

$$= \left(\frac{89,853}{0.25 * (139,000 + 143,170)} \right)^{-1}$$

$$= \left(\frac{89,853}{70,542.50} \right)^{-1}$$

= 1.273743 -1

= 0.273743, or 27.3743%

- Possible Excel formula (for row 99): =ROUND(89853/(F99*(E99+I99))-1,6)