Sanford’s Innovation and Impact Fund

Frequently Asked Questions

How many awards does the fund make each year?

To date, the I&I Fund has awarded over $300,000 to more than 20 proposals from faculty, students, and staff members. Each year, the fund can award up to $150,000 total.

What criteria do the committee consider in making awards?

Proposals should:

- Take an innovative approach
- That INCREASES engagement of Sanford with the policy makers and change agents AND/OR that INCREASES impact and visibility beyond the academic community of Sanford scholarship

What are some examples of proposals supported by the I&I Fund?

1. Professor X wants to create and disseminate to policy makers the first comprehensive state by state overview of WIC and SNAP programs and to develop a smartphone app for program participants who do not have a clear and easy to use way to understand the benefits available to them.
   - Innovative – YES
   - Increase engagement – YES
   - Increase impact and visibility - YES

2. Faculty members X, Y, Z ask for funding to support a pilot of a new data center in partnership with local community leaders. The center will provide Sanford researchers with access to new sets of data on local residents. The center will collaborate with local policy makers to identify research questions for which the community seeks answers and then complete research reports for these leaders.
   - Innovative approach – YES
   - Increase engagement – YES
   - Increase impact and visibility – YES

3. Students X, Y, Z seek funding to hold a Justice Reform Symposium and Action Roundtable at Sanford. The half-day summit will bring together students, faculty, advocates, and practitioners to discuss criminal justice reform in NC and build solutions that will have an impact in the state. The symposium will be more than a one off event and will include follow up sessions where participants draft letters to legislators, deliver letters in person to elected officials, organize a lobby day, form a ban the box task force, and develop client based projects for master's students in partnership with Legal Aid of NC and ACLU of NC.
   - Innovative Approach – YES
   - Increase engagement – YES
   - Increase Impact – YES
4. Staff member X seeks funding to pilot a program that will help undergraduates make connections in D.C. and connect with practitioners who will help students imagine careers in politics and policy. The program takes undergraduates to DC for an intense 3 day trip in the fall semester where they develop networking skills, learn about various career paths though panel discussions, and meet many alumni working in D.C.
   
   - Innovative Approach – YES
   - Increase engagement – YES
   - Increase Impact – YES

5. Staff members X and Y seek funding to pilot a series of podcasts that feature compelling stories of Sanford faculty, students and alumni.
   
   - Innovative – YES
   - Increase engagement – Maybe
   - Increase Impact and Visibility – YES

What are some examples of proposals NOT supported by the I&I Fund?

Note: In the examples below, committee members commented that the decision to not fund these proposals was not a reflection of the quality of the ideas proposed, but rather of the committee’s assessment that despite the merits of the proposals, the activities were not aligned with the fund’s criteria and purpose.

1. Professor X asks for support to develop a mobile application that will make it easier for researchers to collect data in field research studies, and to develop a webpage to disseminate the application for free to other researchers.
   
   - Innovative approach – YES
   - Increase engagement with change agents – NO. While the idea will help research collect more and better data, it does not, in itself, help researchers share findings with change agents.
   - Increase visibility and impact of work beyond the academic community – NO. The audience for the webpage and mobile application is other scholars not policymakers or change agents.

2. Professor X proposes to hold a conference that will bring together people from the academic community, as well as a few practitioners to discuss a timely and important issue that may identify current gaps in research.
   
   - Innovative approach – NO. The committee viewed the idea as too closely resembling a traditional academic conference, which while a vital part of scholarship, did not meet the criteria.
   - Increase engagement with change agents – NO.
   - Increase visibility and impact of work beyond the academic community – NO.

3. Student X seeks funds to pilot a new start-up venture based in Africa.
   
   - Innovative approach – YES.
   - Increase engagement of Sanford with change agents – NO. Note that the criteria focus on increasing Sanford’s connection to the world of practice in way that increases our overall impact in the world. Proposed projects need to be closely connected to the school. With a start up, the longer term goal is spin off such a project into its own enterprise. While this
can make a tremendous impact in the world, at this time the fund is not setup to fund start-ups.

- Increase visibility and impact of work beyond the academic community – NO.

Do you have other advice for how to strengthen my proposal?

- **Does it involve more than one person in the Sanford community?** Proposals that engage more of the Sanford community are more appealing to the committee.

- **Is it feasible?** The committee has received incredibly creative, ambitious proposals from our community, but the committee needs to be convinced that the project scope and outcomes are feasible.

- **Is the I&I Fund the appropriate vehicle?** The I&I Fund is meant to pilot new, often small scale projects to provide a proof of concept. Occasionally, we receive proposals to create new positions or start new centers. These types of decisions and longer term commitments are inappropriate for the I&I Fund committee. A more appropriate body to consider such strategic directions is the school’s Executive Committee. Additionally, proposals seeking support for conferences or major speakers should also approach the new committee charged with helping the school make the best use of its endowed speaker series funds.

- **If you are a student, the following additions will help your proposal:** 1) make sure to include your affiliation and year (e.g. PPS ’19); 2) include a faculty advisor and letter of support; 3) provide a one page appendix that helps that committee better assess your qualifications. Please note, these are not required, but they could make a difference. Example: students X, Y, Z submit proposal to create a new publication focused more in-depth, investigative journalism. The proposal does not include the students names, affiliations, qualifications, letter of support from a faculty advisor, or description of how the faculty member will be engaged in the project. The committee thinks the proposal has great potential and asks the students to revise and resubmit with these additions so they can better assess the project’s feasibility.