



RESEARCH INCENTIVE AWARD (RIA) GUIDELINES¹ 2026 - 2027

Purpose: The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs is committed to increasing the amount of external funding obtained by the university to support faculty research, scholarship, and creative activities. Research Incentive Awards (RIA) are available to support faculty engaged in externally funded research, scholarship, or creative projects by granting course release to provide additional time to focus on their work.

Award Guidelines: RIA (maximum value equivalent to the replacement cost of a 3-credit hour course established by Faculty Personnel Services at the time of the award) is available to all regular faculty members who serve as either the Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI), and who carry a teaching course load, on an external grant or contract that meets the following conditions:

- A minimum of \$100,000 (direct and indirect costs combined) per year of grant or contract funding;
- Returns the full Facilities and Administrative costs (F&A/indirect) allowable per CMU's federally negotiated rate or the capped rate per a sponsor's written policy/guidelines and generates at least \$26,000 per year in F&A;
- Is approved by departmental Chair, Dean, and Vice President for Research and Sponsored Programs, or designee, **prior** to proposal submission.

Multiple year grants or contracts may qualify for RIA for each year of the award, provided the above criteria are met for each year (e.g., a ≥\$250,000 award may qualify for three RIA's provided the funding is ≥\$100,000 per year and the total F&A generated is at least \$26,000 per year). RIA may also be held concurrently with college-funded course releases provided this does not exceed the per-project or per year limits (see below).

Large awards may qualify for a maximum of two RIA per year where the grant or contract is ≥\$150,000 per year, meets the indirect cost requirements listed above, and returns a minimum of \$46,000 in indirect recovery. For example, a three-year grant for \$1.5 million (\$500,000 per year) could provide 2 RIAs for each of the three years.

The number of RIA awarded depends on the amount of funding, not the number of faculty participants in the project. However, where a grant or contract qualifies for multiple RIA these may be distributed between the PI and Co-PIs.

All externally-funded grants or contracts for programmatic and curricular activities are eligible under this program, with the following exceptions:

- Fee-for-service contracts
- Awards that include any other commitments of CMU match or supplements except for college-funded course releases
- No faculty member may receive more than 2 RIAs per year regardless of the amount of external funding
- RIA awards may be held concurrently with college-funded course releases; however, no faculty member can be granted more than 4 CMU-funded course releases in any one year regardless of the amount of external funding (this does not include course releases built into the direct costs of a grant).

Release time must be taken during the period of the grant or contract for which it is awarded and must be used for the research or programmatic activities supported by the external grant or contract. An RIA cannot be used to provide a release from teaching if the course is subsequently taught as an overload because this is inconsistent with the objective of providing additional time for research or creative work.

Final decisions regarding eligibility will be made by the Vice President for Research and Sponsored Programs.

¹These guidelines were revised on June 30, 2026 and supersede any previous versions. Previous RIA awards based on earlier guidelines will be honored, but all proposals submitted after June 30, 2026 will be based on the above guidelines.