

Grant Personnel Roles Guide

A quick-reference chart and definitions for classifying personnel on grant proposals to federal agencies (NSF, NIH, NASA, and similar) and nongovernmental funders.

How to use this guide: Personnel definitions and requirements vary by funding agency and by specific funding opportunity. Use the chart below to classify each person on your CAU project team, then confirm requirements against the agency's current proposal guide (e.g., NSF PAPPG, NIH Grants Policy Statement) before submission.

QUICK-REFERENCE CHART

Personnel Category	Key Personnel?	Typically Funded?	Biosketch/CV?	Notes for CAU Proposals
Principal Investigator (PI)	Yes	Usually	Yes	Designated by CAU as having authority and responsibility for the project and use of funds. Every proposal must name one PI; multiple-PI proposals must name a Contact PI for agency communication.
Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI)	Yes	Usually	Yes	Shares PI-level responsibilities on multi-PI proposals. Some agencies (e.g., NSF) cap the number of co-PIs; NIH does not recognize "co-PI" as a formal role — use multiple PD/PIs instead.
Co-Investigator (Co-I)	Yes	Often	Yes, if key personnel	Contributes expertise/capabilities under PI direction and has a continuing role. May be at CAU or a partner institution; unfunded Co-Is still submit a signed commitment statement.
Senior/Key Personnel (Faculty Associate)	Yes	Varies	Yes	CAU faculty who contribute substantively to the project's scientific direction but are not the PI. Required on NSF and NIH budgets; devotes measurable effort even if unpaid.
Postdoctoral Associate / Scholar	Sometimes	Yes	If key personnel	Holds a doctoral degree and is a major project contributor. May be identified by function only if hiring is contingent on the award; effort still appears in the budget and narrative.
Graduate Student (Research Assistant)	Rarely	Yes	If key personnel	Enrolled in an advanced CAU degree program and paid from project funds. Direct tuition support is allowed only when the funding announcement permits it.
Undergraduate Student	No	Yes, if paid	No	Enrolled in a CAU bachelor's program; effort and pay must be documented in the budget even if the student is not named.
Other Professional	No	Yes, if funded	Sometimes	Technicians, project managers/engineers, programmers, and similar specialists who support the project but are not Co-Is, postdocs, or students. Role must be described in the budget narrative.

Personnel Category	Key Personnel?	Typically Funded?	Biosketch/CV?	Notes for CAU Proposals
Consultant	Rarely	Fee for service	If key personnel (rare)	An outside individual paid a fee for specialized advice; not a CAU employee and not responsible for project oversight. Rate and time of consultation must be justified in the budget.
Collaborator	No	Unfunded	Recommended	Committed to a specific, focused contribution but not critical to the project. If any funding or travel is requested, the person must instead be classified in a funded category.
Other Significant Contributor (OSC)	No	No (0% effort)	Yes	NIH-specific category for contributors who commit to the project's scientific development but with no measurable person-months, e.g., mentors or unpaid advisors.
Support Staff (Technician/Coordinator)	No	Yes, if funded	No	Non-research staff such as research coordinators, animal caretakers, or administrative support; included in the budget regardless of degree status.

DETAILED ROLE DEFINITIONS

Principal Investigator (PI)

The individual CAU designates as having the appropriate authority and responsibility for the proper conduct of the project, including use of funds, compliance, and progress reporting to the sponsor. Every proposal must name a PI, regardless of whether that person receives salary support through the award. On multi-PI proposals, CAU designates one individual as the Contact PI, who is the point of contact for sponsor communication.

Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI)

On proposals with multiple PIs, Co-PIs share the PI's responsibilities for the scientific and budgetary direction of the project. Note that this designation is agency-specific: NSF permits a PI plus up to four co-PIs, while NIH instead uses multiple "PD/PIs" and does not recognize a separate co-PI role.

Co-Investigator (Co-I)

A team member — from CAU or a partner institution — who makes a critical, ongoing contribution of expertise or capability under the PI's direction. A Co-I may or may not be funded, but even unfunded Co-Is must provide a signed statement of commitment to participate. Some agencies allow a Co-I to be designated with added responsibilities, such as an "Institutional PI" for a subawardee organization.

Senior/Key Personnel (Faculty Associate)

Individuals — typically CAU faculty — who contribute in a substantive, measurable way to the scientific development or execution of the project, whether or not they receive compensation from the award. This category is required on NSF and NIH budget forms and generally does not include graduate students.

Postdoctoral Associate / Scholar

A holder of a Ph.D. or equivalent terminal degree who is a major contributor to the project and receives funding through the budget. If the position depends on a successful award, the individual may be identified by function rather than by name, but their effort must still appear in the technical narrative and budget.

Graduate Student (Research Assistant)

A student enrolled in an advanced CAU degree program who works on the project in a research capacity and is paid from project funds. Tuition support is allowable only when the specific funding opportunity permits it, and CAU must be able to affirm compliance with applicable federal cost principles for student aid.

Undergraduate Student

A student enrolled in a CAU bachelor's degree program who contributes to the project. Undergraduate students are usually not named in the proposal, but their pay and effort must be included in the budget.

Other Professional

Skilled personnel who support the project in a critical capacity but do not qualify as a Co-I, faculty associate, postdoc, or student — for example, a project engineer, project manager, professional technician, or programmer. This role and its contribution must be explained in the budget justification.

Consultant

An individual outside CAU who is paid a fee for specialized advice or services related to the project. A consultant offers guidance and expertise but, unlike a Co-I, does not hold responsibility for project oversight or completion. The proposal budget must itemize and justify all consultant costs, including any travel.

Collaborator

A person who provides a specific, focused contribution to the project but is not essential to its execution and is not requesting funding, including travel. If any compensation or reimbursement is requested, the person must instead be classified under a funded category such as Co-I, Other Professional, or Consultant.

Other Significant Contributor (OSC)

An NIH-specific category for individuals — such as unpaid mentors or advisors — who commit to the project's scientific development but with no measurable person-months of effort (typically listed as "0%" or "as needed"). OSCs still submit a biosketch but are not counted as senior/key personnel.

Support Staff (Technician, Research Coordinator, etc.)

Personnel who work on the project in a non-research capacity — for example, research coordinators, laboratory technicians, or administrative support — regardless of degree held. These individuals are included in the budget but generally do not require a biosketch or letter of support.

Questions about how to classify project personnel? Contact the CAU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) — requirements differ by agency and by specific funding opportunity, so always confirm against current sponsor guidance before submission.