

Vilas Life Cycle Professorships: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I'm a/an (assistant professor/associate professor/full professor). Can I apply?

A: All ranks of faculty (assistant, associate, full) may apply, and all ranks have been funded in the past. Academic staff with permanent PI status (see <https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=35683> for a list of individuals) are also eligible. Because one main criterion for making an award is that the faculty member is at a “critical career juncture”, assistant professors often receive priority in funding compared to tenured professors. However, any rank of faculty member can be at a “critical career juncture”, so all ranks are eligible for the award. For associate and full professors, clearly articulate WHY you are at a critical career juncture in your statement of need when you answer the question “Why is this a critical juncture in your career?”

Q: Where in this application do I talk about my science/research?

A: The goal of the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship program is to further the *career* of a UW-Madison faculty member through funding of his/her research. The program is successful if faculty members get their careers back on track (e.g., they receive tenure, their next grant proposal is approved, their next novel is published, they stay at UW-Madison.) We make the basic assumption that ALL UW-Madison faculty are doing wonderful research, and that is why they are here and why we want to retain them. Thus, the application is not, except in rare occasions, evaluated on the basis of the scholarship of the applicant. That said, the funds are to be used ONLY for research expenses, so in your description of the use of the funds, some description of your research program is necessary. Most applicants write about their research in relation to their proposed spending—this usually appears in response to the question “How will the requested funds help you through the crisis and enhance your research program?”

Q: What should the title be?

A: The title can be anything. Most people use the title of their research project. We do not publish the titles of any applications or awards, to maintain the confidentiality of the recipients as much as we can.

Q: What is the “other funding” column for—do I fill in ALL of my project funding?

A: If you are proposing to use Vilas Life Cycle Professorship funding for an item that cannot be 100% funded by the Vilas funds, then the committee needs to know where the additional funding is coming from. For example, if you are proposing to use the \$40,000 Vilas funding towards the salary of a lab manager, but the lab manager costs more than \$40,000 to employ, then we need to know where the other sources of funding for that lab manager will come from. This is especially important when the applicant is proposing to partially fund a PA or RA; we need to know who we are splitting the tuition remission with for planning purposes.

Q: Can I switch my spending later?

A: Changes in budget allocation may be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Q: Can I have more than one year to spend the funds?

A: Funding is for a period of one year, and is subject to constraints imposed by the fiscal cycle which ends on June 30 each year. Be warned! For any award that straddles two fiscal years, we will request a revised budget splitting the funds between the two. Any funds requested for your first (partial) year not spent by June 30 will be lost. Consult with your department financial administrator(s) to be sure you meet all of the University spending regulations.

Q: Does the application need to be single-spaced? What should the margins be?

A: We specify a 3-page limit for the “statement of need” because most faculty can share their issues and describe their request in that amount of space. We do not intend this application process to be a burden. We have no requirements about the formatting—it can be double- or single-spaced, it can have wide or narrow margins—we are not picky.

Q: If I email the application, how do I send in my signature on the front page?

A: If you cannot append an electronic signature (e.g., a jpg of your signature), then please sign a physical copy of the front page and campus mail it to WISELI (3065 Mechanical Engineering Building). As long as the rest of the application is emailed by the deadline date, it doesn’t matter if the signature page arrives a few days late.

Q: What time is the application due on the deadline day?

A: If you are emailing the application, the deadline is 11:59pm of the due date (just so the date sent is the same as the deadline day.) If you are dropping off a hard copy, there is usually somebody in the WISELI office (3065 ME Building) until 4pm on workdays. To be fair to all applicants, please try to submit your application on or before the deadline day.

Q: My life/work event isn’t THAT bad—should I even apply?

A: If you feel that your research productivity has been impacted by a life/work event, and that your career is in serious jeopardy, then you should apply even if in the scheme of things, your event might not seem big. Do keep in mind, however, that in general we imagine that faculty will only be able to access these funds once. Be sure that this is the most advantageous time to apply. We are not saying that we will never fund people more than once, especially if the events are completely separate occurrences (see below); however, we will certainly give priority to faculty who have never applied before.

Q: What if my department chair can’t send a letter by the deadline?

A: If your chair can’t get a letter produced by the deadline, it is adequate to let us know that one is coming, and to have it sent later after the deadline. Please do let us know to expect a letter, however.

Q: What if I don't want my department chair to know what's going on?

A: Some faculty want their chairs to know what is happening in their lives, and other faculty do not want their chairs to know. For this reason, letters from chairs are not required, and applications that do not include letters from chairs are never disadvantaged because of it. All Vilas Life Cycle Professorship applicants should understand, however, that if they are awarded a grant then once the funding is set up in the department, the chair will know about the award because of the normal reporting procedures when a new 133 account is set up. Although the chair (and other individuals, such as the Provost and the Vilas Trustees) will know that you received a Vilas Life Cycle Professorship, only the four committee members who review the applications will know the reasons for the award, and they will keep the information confidential to the extent allowed by law.

Q: Why do you want to know about my other grant funding?

A: The committee must compare the level of need of each applicant, and part of the committee's determination of "need" includes whether the applicant has other resources upon which to draw. This is not to say that having other grants will necessarily disadvantage you; it is just one way that we have to compare applicants. Often, the committee has seen merit in the application, but because the current grant funding was adequate, the committee has recommended postponing an award, or asking the applicant to reapply if a pending grant is not awarded. We need to help as many faculty as possible with these funds, and spreading them out over time is one way we can achieve that goal.

Q: How do I report my startup funds?

A: If you have any startup funds remaining, please report this in your Current and Pending Support list. If you are an assistant professor and have depleted your startup funds, please note this somewhere in your application so that the review committee does not think that the startup was simply left off the list.

Q: I've already received a Vilas Life Cycle Professorship—can I apply again?

A: Yes, of course you can apply. However, we will not be able to fund an application for continued funding for the same "life event." Also, when comparing your (second) application to others in the applicant pool, we will likely give yours a lower priority. We receive about twice as many applications as we have funds to cover, so we try to make sure that many different faculty have access to these funds.

Q: Are there any types of research expenses you do not fund?

A: There are two main types of requests that we typically do not fund because there are other sources for those kinds of expenses on campus (e.g., Graduate School travel funds, school/college capital exercises). We typically do not fund any conference travel, and we very often will cut requests for new computers/laptops and general supplies such as paper, ink cartridges, etc. unless an extremely compelling case can be made why the new computer/general supplies are directly related to the research project at hand.