“Do I ask for what I think the funder will give me or what I actually need to do the project?” “Do funders routinely cut the budget, and should I put in a cushion so I will have enough to complete the work?” These are typical questions often asked by grant seekers, and the following answer works every time. **Know what your project will cost and ask for what you need based on real, justifiable costs.**

Establishing a workable budget for your research project may seem to be an insurmountable task. Just as the Project Narrative develops iteratively over time, the Budget also requires frequent modifications, especially as the scope of work changes. Previously funded researchers can provide valuable information on research costs based on their experience. In addition, many departments and schools have finance staff who can assist you as well. Be sure to consult with them early in the process. The staff can provide current rates, charges specific to your unit, samples, and other guidance to ensure smooth processing and institutional approval to enable you to meet agency deadlines. These staff may also have developed budget templates or know where they can find them specific to the funding agency you will be approaching.

The first step in developing a Budget is to read the agency guidelines to determine what is allowable. These guidelines can help set the parameters for your project. Next, become familiar with budget terminology and how the agency uses those terms. Secure quotes for “big ticket” items, e.g., Equipment and Consultants, to eliminate budget surprises later. Utilize budget preparation software provided by the University whenever possible. In some cases, the school finance staff will prepare these spreadsheets in consultation with you. In addition, the program officer at the funding agency may be willing to address questions that arise as you are preparing your Budget, given sufficient time. Ultimately, though, you are responsible for what appears in the Budget presented to the agency for consideration.

One final tip. Be sure to round off your budget numbers to whole dollars. Including cents sends the message that you may be a novice in the field of proposal development or that you are overly concerned with insignificant details and may miss one of the more significant points in project design while you are worrying with those little details.