



Guidelines for Submitting a Research Proposal

Thank you for your interest in the Action Research Exchange (ARX) program of SFPIRG. We are very excited to work with you and provide support for your research needs.

Please review the following guidelines carefully.

Framing the Research Question

The student should have a clear understanding of the question or task they are expected to engage with and the purpose that their work serves in the larger organizational or community context.

The vast majority of ARX student researchers are undergraduate students so smaller-scale projects are more likely to get matched. If you have a large project in mind, we advise that you divide it up into smaller ones so different students can do different parts. For instance, you can break up a large project into a few phases: literature review, survey design, data collection and analysis, final report.

Be Specific About Deliverables

Please specify the format(s) in which you want the project results to be presented. Here we offer some examples for each project type. A project may also fit into more than one format.

- Formal research: literature review, theoretical analysis, historical inquiry, interviews or focus groups
- Organizational development: grant research and proposal, organizational analysis, program evaluation, business/communication planning, workshop development
- Creative: performance, film, media presentation, pamphlet, blog
- Survey: survey design, data compilation and analysis, inventory
- Computer-related: website design, database development

What students can offer you

Different types of students can offer different levels of commitment for your project.

- Undergraduate students doing regular courses can commit approximately 3-4 hours per week for 5-6 weeks; the workload should be roughly equivalent to a 15-20 page paper for each student.
- Undergraduate students doing directed studies can commit approximately 4-5 hours per week for 12-13 weeks; the workload should be roughly equivalent to a 35-40 page paper for each student.
- Graduate students doing regular courses can commit approximately 4-5 hours per week for 5-6 weeks; the workload should be roughly equivalent to an 18-25 page paper for each student.

In certain classes, a project may be undertaken by a group of students, in which case you can expect more work to be done.

What you need to offer students

Commitment of at least 2 hours per week to touch base and provide support, depending on the nature of the research. We encourage you to schedule regular communication with the student at the initial meeting.

What happens if the project proposal is accepted?

After we look over your initial proposal, we might suggest some changes that would to make it more likely to be taken up by a student and for that student to get her or his professor's approval. We will discuss the changes with you and when the project is ready to be posted we will email you with a link for your reference.

How do students find out about project proposals?

Aside from posting the projects online, we outreach on campus to students at the beginning of the Fall (i.e. September and early October) and Spring (i.e. January and early February) semesters. This includes an extensive targeted classroom speaking campaign. We also outreach to faculty, who can encourage their students to take on ARX projects and put the option in their course outline.

What is the process for students?

Students can apply to take on a project until the 6th week of the 13-week term. Students take on projects as part of their class, often as a large (30-50% of their mark) final project.

The student application process consists of two stages:

- i) Students need to get their professor's approval to do an ARX project for their class. The professor agrees to supervise the research and they sign off on the ARX contract. The supervising faculty is responsible for ensuring that the student conducts the research process in accordance with course requirements and the SFU policies on research ethics and academic integrity.
- ii) Students meet with the community organization and the ARX Coordinator to clarify the research project. Together decisions are made about timelines, communication methods and deliverables. This meeting is facilitated by the ARX Coordinator of SFPIRG. Both student and community organization sign off on the ARX contract once agreement has been reached (the ARX contract is signed by the faculty, student and community organization).

Projects requiring SFU ethics review

Some projects – particularly those involving interviews, focus groups and on-site consultations – may need to go through the SFU ethics review process. The student, in conjunction with their supervising professor, is responsible for getting this ethics clearance from the Office of Research Services and/or the Research Ethics Board.

The research ethics review process takes at least 2 weeks [usually longer] and a project proposal may have to undergo revisions before it gets passed. On projects such as these, we encourage the supervising faculty and the community organization to work closely together.

If your project requires this type of ethics clearance, it will be discussed in the initial meeting.

What does it cost to participate?

There is no financial cost to participation in the ARX program, for either you or the student.

If the community organization is not able to, SFPIRG can cover minimal expenses incurred by the student researcher, for things such as public transportation and food costs for focus group meetings.

What happens when the project is completed?

When the project is completed, the student is responsible for turning in one copy each to you, their professor and SFPIRG.

What about publishing the research?

Certain completed projects may be featured on the ARX website and in the SFPIRG library as examples and for outreach purposes. In order to publish these projects, ARX requires the consent of both the student and the community organization. This is outlined in the contract.

However, the student retains the right to publish the completed project in other media (e.g. academic journals) and the community organization needs the student's consent in order to publish the completed project in whole or in part in their organizational media (e.g. newsletter, website, etc.). In all cases, SFU has to be credited as the sponsoring institution for the research project. These are the academic guidelines of research dictated by SFU. We are currently developing a creative commons policy to give community organizations more freedoms in terms of what you can do with ARX research projects.

SFPIRG does not bear any liability for the research projects produced by SFU student researchers for community organizations. Our role is solely that of a facilitator.