San José State University

SJSU RESEARCH FOUNDATION WORKSHOP

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HOW TO WORK WITH A PROGRAM OFFICER
(NIH, NSF other feds, state, foundations)
 Usually it’s just a smart idea

• When you are considering applying for any grant, if you are a new or an experienced investigator -- contact with program staff is always **highly recommended**
• Especially when there is request of a Letter of Intent (note most grants awarded are PI initiated)
• If you have questions about grant mechanisms or budget limitations or eligibility or ...(*talk to SJSU Research Foundation/Tower Foundation first!!!!!*)

Prior contact with a program officer will always save you time!

**Must I contact the P.O. before applying?**
Strategizing research career –
the P.O. your new best friends

- Writing your elevator speech/concept paper: my research idea and how it fits my career (1-2 pager)
- Networking (shmoozing) with P.O.s
- Seeking funding support – digging down or across
Organize your thoughts for productive discussion with a Program Official

(1-2 pages, sometimes 3)

• **Grant Purpose**  Briefly, you want a grant from which institute/agency to do what?

• **Problem/Background**  Explain why you think this topic needs study. Demonstrate you know the institute priorities.

• **Significance**  Explain why this is important to the field.

• **Question**  What hypotheses will you test and what model will guide your hypotheses?

• **Design/Analysis**  What is the study design that will enable testing your hypotheses? What statistical approach?

• **Team**  Who will be the key participants (co-investigators and organizations) on the project?

• **Miscellaneous**  Other issues that may be relevant to your plans

What is a Concept Paper?
Two more important reasons

• Develop a relationship with a potential program officer which often leads to information of future research directions of mutual interest

• Assure that your application has a home!!!!!!!

Contact before submission has benefits
A PO is a **science professional** and an **authorized government official** who maintains a grant portfolio based on scientific expertise.

The PO is an **advocate** for Investigators and helps set the agenda of research spending priorities.

The PO is often an expert in a specific science area and has access to the “latest-greatest.”

(aside—looking for a great place for a sabbatical)
PO Responsibilities

• Provides scientific stewardship and administration of grants and contracts
• Provides guidance on resources for research and collaboration
• Fosters excellent science and promote communication with the scientific community (can and does initiate conferences, special reports, interfaces with IOM etc)
• Identifies areas of scientific priority for the Institute/Division
Role of the Program Officer

Advise applicants

Attend and organize scientific Reviews

Make funding recommendations

Monitor awarded grants

Monitor grants

Advise grant applicants
- Fosters specific science through initiatives and meetings
- Talks to public
- Maintains his/her own scientific expertise
- Manages scientific research portfolio of grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements -- monitors deliverables
- Identifies opportunities and needs of science specific to an Institute’s mission
- Stimulates interest in scientific areas of emphasis for each Institute
- Communicates program priorities - actually writes/vets:
  - Program Announcements (PA)
  - Request for Applications (RFA)

More of what P.O. Does
A case in point!

SJSU Professor’s NIH Experience!!!!!

A PO redirected her to another funder/institute and helped her with adjusting her research idea to meet the funder’s interest
A case in point!

SJSU Professor’s NSF Experience!!!!!

A PO read materials in advance and made some concrete comments, accepted open-ended outcomes
A case in point!

SJSU Professor’s State Department Experience!!!!!!

A PO dialogues in advance, strong hint of what agency wants
A case in point!

SJSU Professor’s Foundation Experience!!!!!

National - A PO allowed a resubmittal, accepting review not accurate; Local – constant dialogue with P.O. – five page proposal
UNSOLICITED RESEARCH

• Help you determine good “fit” between your proposal and the Institute
• Type of funding mechanism
• Study section

SOLICITED RESEARCH

• Help you identify relevant program announcements (PAs)

Before Submission
Program Officers ... Give advice and encouragement!

The cape, Larry! Go for the cape!
(First,) do no physical or psychological harm during their participation.

Safeguard participants’ data.

Monitor data to ensure no harm and to find surprisingly better results!

Include your procedure in your application.

Protect people.
Protect their data.
Types of Awards
Different Interactions

Grant
- Financial assistance to carry out approved activities (e.g., research, training)

Contract
- Acquisition of goods or services

Cooperative Agreement
- Grant support that includes substantial Federal involvement
Guidance to Appropriate Grant Mechanism

- Training Grant – the NIH’s T’s and F’s
- Career Development Award – the NIH’S K’s
- Research Project Grant – the NIH’S R’s

What are the differences between PAs, RFAs, RFPs, FOAs?

Develop Your Application
NIH Award Mechanisms
SRO is in charge of review process **but the Program Official can:**

Convey to the SRO

- Requests to submit additional data
- Missing elements of your application
- Notification of accepted papers

**As You Submit Your Application**
• Represent an institute at the review

• Track applications that are assigned to specified institute as they go through the review, especially if assigned to the P.O.’s individual grant portfolios

• Take notes on the individual applications, noting the particular aspects of the review criteria and strengths and weaknesses of the application and how they respond to those review criteria.

• Be present, but not comment

At The Review
Assist Grants Management

Document Policy Compliance

- Animal and Human Subjects Approvals
  - Animal Welfare
  - Women, Minorities, Children Inclusions
  - Check Required Human Subjects Training
- Data and Safety Monitoring Plan
- Review Other Support
- Address Foreign Institution Requirements

After The Review - Award
Program Officers ...

Can help during Scientific Review

- Answer your questions about grant review
- Be a Liaison to the SRO
- Observe review group meeting
Review

**Just in Time (JIT) Documents**
- Other Support/Overlap
- Animal Welfare
- Human Subjects

**Before Award**
Discuss

• Score, percentile, and summary statement
• Issues raised during review
• Future submissions vs. new (avoid the virtual A2)

Help with revision

• Suggest ways to address reviewers’ concerns
• Read and comment

After Review
What Determines Which Applications Become Grants?

- Scientific merit (Review Group)
- Program Considerations (Program Officer, Advisory Council, IC Director)
- Availability of funds
PO may Observe Study Section Review
SRO is in charge of review process
but the Program Official can:

• Listen to panel discussion of your grant

• Listen to panel discussion of other grants
  • Helpful when an application is unscored

• Provide clarification of Program Initiatives (RFA, PA) if requested by SRO

As You Submit Your Application
Program Officers ...

Can help After Peer Review

- Priority Scores and Percentiles
- Study Section Review
- National Advisory Council Review
- Prepare Funding Recommendations
Do Priority Score and Percentile Indicate I Will Get Funding?

Important:
Nothing is Official Until You Receive the Notice of Award

After Peer Review
Program Officers ... Can Help After Peer Review

If funding seems likely:

Consult with applicant on key issues:
- Budget
- Human subjects
- Administrative requirements
Even if Going to be Funded
Discussions with Investigator

Negotiate Funding Amounts
• Study Section Recommendations
• NIH and Institute Guidance

Request Responses to Reviewer Concerns

After The Review - Award
• Review Type 5 Progress reports
• Help with supplement requests
• Advise about spin-offs (Big Grants, Program Projects, R34, SBIR)
• Transfer of Institution
• Grant Closeout (note SJSU and you, the PI, are responsible for the integrity of the grant from beginning to end)

After Award
Program Officers ...

Can Help After Peer Review

If funding seems unlikely:

Consult with applicant on possible next steps:

• Responding to reviewer concerns
• Revisions and resubmission
  - if on cusp, explore x-institute possibilities
Responding to Reviewer Concerns

- What is written in the Summary Statement
- What was discussed during Peer Review
- Be responsive to reviewer concerns!

After The Review - Revisions
Discuss with PO Changes to Application

- Develop Your Hypothesis
- Revise Specific Aims & Objectives
- Describe Experimental Approach & Design
- Should you request change in Reviewers or Study Section
- Should you change mechanism

After The Review - Revisions
Prepare Funding Recommendations to Institute Director

- Priority **Score** and Percentile
- Areas of **Scientific** Emphasis
- Council/Institute **Program Priority**
- **Portfolio** Balance

**After Peer Review**
... the INSTITUTE DIRECTOR makes the final Funding Decisions

Remember ...
Help Prepare Your Competing Renewal Application

Provide Technical Assistance to Grantees

• Process grant transfer to another institution
• Evaluate administrative supplement requests
• Facilitate collaborations
• Address tools or resource needs
• Explain grant policy
• Respond to emergency situations

Grant Oversight
Annual Non-competing Renewal Applications

Progress Reports

• Monitor scientific progress
• Confirm policy adherence
• Evaluate changes in key personnel or levels of effort
• Communicate your exciting results

Grant Oversight
Dear Dr. Fisher:
Enclosed please find five complete copies of my R01 application, “The best-ever relapse prevention intervention from What'samatter U.” This application involves the refinement and testing of a school- and church-based intervention; therefore, I request that you refer it to CLHP, the Community-Level Health Promotion study section. I request dual assignment to NIDA and NIAAA. Thank you for your attention to my application.
They are helpful, but have their limits

Here he comes, Earl. Be gentle but firm. We are absolutely, positively not driving him south again this winter.