

The Research Express

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The Research Express

June 2014 Summer Supplement

Volume 3 Issue 6

Travel to NSF is a Worthwhile Endeavor

by Daniel Gleason, Director, James H. Oliver Jr., Institute for Coastal Plain Science and Professor of Biology

On April 28th and 29th, I had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. with Charles Patterson, Vice President for Research and Economic Development, and Karin Scarpinato, Associate Dean of Faculty and Research Programs in COSM, to meet with program directors at the National Science Foundation. Over two days, we met with five different program directors, including Gisele Muller-Parker, Division of Graduate Education; Steve Klein, Division of Integrative and Organismal Systems; and Larry Weber, Kandace Binkley, and Michael Lesser, all from Division of Ocean Sciences. The programs visited spanned a range of funding initiatives from infrastructure development to graduate education.

As researchers, we are constantly told that face-to-face visits and telephone calls with program directors increase our chances of being awarded funding. As I have developed NSF proposals over the years, I have followed this advice, discussing my proposal ideas with program directors over the phone, serving on review panels, and attending grant writing workshops. However, this two-day trip to NSF was one of the most productive I have ever had in terms of focusing my ideas and getting guidance on where to expend my limited time resources. The keys to this productive visit were 1) setting up meetings with directors from several programs rather than meeting with one program director about a single research idea and 2) approaching each program director with targeted, summarized ideas for research or developing initiatives.

I would encourage any of you seriously pursuing NSF funding to allocate the time and funds to travel to Washington and conduct a similar visit. If you are like me, you have no shortage of research ideas. Unfortunately not all of these ideas, even though you may think each one is of Nobel Prize winning significance, are of equal interest to NSF. Additionally, you cannot always glean the nuances of the program priorities by reading the proposal guidelines. Nothing is more frustrating than wasting valuable time meticulously writing a proposal that will not even go to panel because it includes components that are not a priority in the particular program to which you have applied.

If you do plan to shop research ideas around at NSF, remember that the program officers are extremely busy. Never forget this fact! I found that by doing my homework up front and entering their offices with 1-2 page summaries of my research ideas, including preliminary data if available, quickly focused the conversation and led to the most productive visits. This is not a trivial point! Your level of organization at this stage gives the program director a first and potentially lasting impression of your abilities as a researcher.

I hope relaying my recent experience at NSF is helpful and I wish you the best of luck in your pursuit of grant funding!



Writing an NSF Grant Proposal: A First-Timer's Perspective

by Philip Guo, Assistant Professor of Computer Science

“In my ongoing [training to become a professor](#), I spent my winter break working on my first grant proposal. This experience was like training for and running a marathon for the first time. I managed to cross the finish line (submitting a legit-looking proposal), but my performance wasn't stellar (chances of winning are slim). In the process, though, I learned enough about NSF grants that my next submission attempt will be less arduous. This article is a reflection on the past eight weeks of my life immersed in grant-writing mode. It's most useful for other first-time applicants, especially for NSF grants. It's useless for experienced applicants since you already know all of this by now. (But maybe it's fun to laugh at my naivete!)

Disclaimer: This article is not meant to be a definitive advice guide. I have never won an NSF grant, so what I say might be bogus. These are just my unfiltered thoughts at the moment.”

View the full article at <http://pgbovine.net/NSF-grant-proposal-first-time.htm> (Reprinted with permission of the author.)

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