Effective Communication

OSR-Evanston
Proposal Development Series

Friday, November 14th
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Elements of a Proposal

• Background
  – Introduction to Sponsors & Award Mechanisms
  – Reading and Evaluating the Solicitation
  – Administrative Shell
  – Developing Budgets

• Understanding the process and the concepts surrounding proposal development is necessary, but communication surrounding this process enables successful proposal development
Proposal Development – Context & Challenges

- Complex regulatory environment
- High stakes, inflexible deadlines
- Various processes and requirements
- Different perspectives, different roles & responsibilities
- Relationship element of proposal development is critical
- Strong communication a must between
  - PI and RA
  - RA and OSR
  - OSR and RA
  - OSR and other central offices
Internal Deadlines

• Initial proposal notification and timeline
• Administrative Shell
  – 5 business days prior to proposal deadline
• Complete Proposal
  – 2 business days prior to proposal deadline
• Administrative shell should be complete prior to OSR performing initial review of the proposal
• Timeline and internal deadlines are important, but recognize that the timeline is not as straightforward/linear as it may appear
Use of the Proposal Routing Form

• Serves as introduction to the proposal from the administrative perspective
• Flags relevant units (and OSR) on basic information related to proposal
  – Sponsor
  – Overall budget & project period
  – Effort commitments of involved investigators
• Also flags areas related to compliance & risk
• Notes section of the routing form
Principles of Communication

• Concepts of communication underlie all successful interactions
• Inherent feedback loop in all communication processes
• Basic elements of all communication
  – Sender
  – Receiver
  – Message
  – Medium
  – Context
Principles of Communication

• Medium & context can be the most variable – and critical – elements to successful communication in the proposal environment
• Knowing your audience
  – Understanding the roles of the sender vs. the receiver influences medium
• Context – the situation at hand
• Communication cycles
  – Each response/reaction influences the future responses/reactions
    – Ability to positively influence transactions
Mediums of Communication

• Spoken
• Written
• Visual
• Electronic
• What’s the best way to communicate? Must evaluate
  – Individuals involved
  – Nature of the information being shared
  – Complexity of information being shared
  – Level of formality or approval required
• Importance of listening
Elements of Strong Communication

• Understand what exactly you are intending to communicate
• Should be tailored to the recipient
  – What they do know about the subject
  – What they do not know about the subject
  – Anticipating the recipient’s questions and response
• Word choice
• Identifying questions, problems, or issues – as well as a proposed solution
• Accommodating different viewpoints – give and take
• Importance of repetition
  • Explaining inconsistencies
Roles and Responsibilities

• PI
• Department
• School
• OSR
• Understanding the different roles and responsibilities influences the manner in which you communicate with different groups
• Research administrator serves as the primary contact for both PIs and OSR – and those are two very different audiences
• OSR serves as the primary contact for RAs and the sponsor
• Balance between customer service and compliance
Communicating with Faculty

• Understanding what you need and how to get that information is critical for success

• Relationship element

• Medium and context become very important here

• Outlining what is needed, and when it is needed

• Preparing items in advance where possible – the partnership element

• Effectively asking questions that allow you to get to the bottom of any items that are outstanding

• KEEP IT BRIEF!
Different mediums of communication in proposal development

- When to call, when to email
- The value of the face-to-face interaction
- Importance of factoring in the timeline piece here
- Knowing your role and decision-making authority
- Considering the formality of the message being communicated
- Importance of the written record of decision-making
Evaluating Information

• Competing information
  – From PIs
  – From Chairs
  – From RAs
  – From OSR

• Importance of thoroughly evaluating all information received

• Taking information and developing a solution
  – Honing problem-solving skills
Dealing with Communication Breakdowns

• All roads lead to the relationship and understanding the person at the “other end of the line”
• Stressful situations, late (and late-breaking) proposal items
• Separating emotional responses from business information
• Focusing on the positive – diffusing the situation
• Working through the situation at hand
• Feedback loop to evaluate what happened, and how it can be prevented/go better in the future
  — The value of the appropriate time and place
Summary

• Understanding sponsor and internal guidelines and process is important, but it’s not the only part of proposal development that is relevant
• Effective communication enables all proposal development activities
• Understanding medium and context, as well as differing roles and responsibilities
• Feedback loops to evaluate communication breakdowns influence future successful interactions
• Communication skills are critically important to your professional skill set
Proposal Development Series

• Focused on the pre-award process for research administrators
• Covers topics relevant to successful proposal development and submission from the administrative point of view

• Future Series
  – Refresh on Proposal Development topics
  – Post-Award – Financial Accounting & Management

• We value your feedback!
Questions?

Thank you!