

NORDP Annual Research Development Conference



When Research
Development Is Just
One Part of Your
Job Description

Your Presenters

- Northern Illinois University

- Andrea Buford
Senior Research Development
Specialist
Office of Sponsored Projects
- Kellie Dyslin
Assistant Director, Proposal
Support
Office of Sponsored Projects



- University of Colorado Boulder

- Michael Spires
Senior Proposal Analyst
Office of Contracts and
Grants



Overview

- Objectives
- Definitions
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Best Practices

Objectives

- Participants will:
 1. Gain an understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in positions that blend research and proposal development;
 2. Understand how blended positions are different from separate, full-time research development roles; and
 3. Gain tools for enhancing one's ability to conduct research and proposal development as only one responsibility among many.

Definitions



Research Development

- Working with investigators (individually or in teams), before a proposal is on the horizon, to help with:
 - Positioning
 - Development of a research arc/agenda; white papers, letters of inquiry, etc.
 - Identifying and connecting with likely funders
- Find or facilitate larger, multi/interdisciplinary initiatives on your campus or via building relationships with other institutions/organizations
- Can sometimes be used synonymously with career development, faculty development, or funding development
- What does research development mean to you?

Proposal Development

- Development work focused on a specific project (collaborative or not)
- Development specialist's role is to help maximize quality (and therefore, hopefully, the chances of getting it funded)
- Advising on mission match
- Can involve some or all of the following:
 - Reading, editing, and critiquing of drafts and proposal sections
 - Writing proposal sections (usually, though not always, limited to non-technical portions of the proposal)
 - Facilitating internal consistency and single voice
- What does proposal development mean to you?

Research Administration

- The “standard” sponsored research office tasks, such as:
 - Monitoring internal & external deadlines
 - Budget development or review
 - Format and guideline compliance checks
 - File conversion and uploading
 - Submission of the proposal
 - Routine post-submission duties (e.g., budget revisions, file updates, just in time information)
 - Translating “grant-speak” for PIs (both from sponsors and internal departments with grant functions)
- What does research administration mean to you?

Challenges and Opportunities of the Blended Model



Challenges

- PROCESS (AND SUBMIT) ALL THE THINGS!
- Finding time to do development work
- Institutional knowledge
- More great ideas than time
- Work-life balance



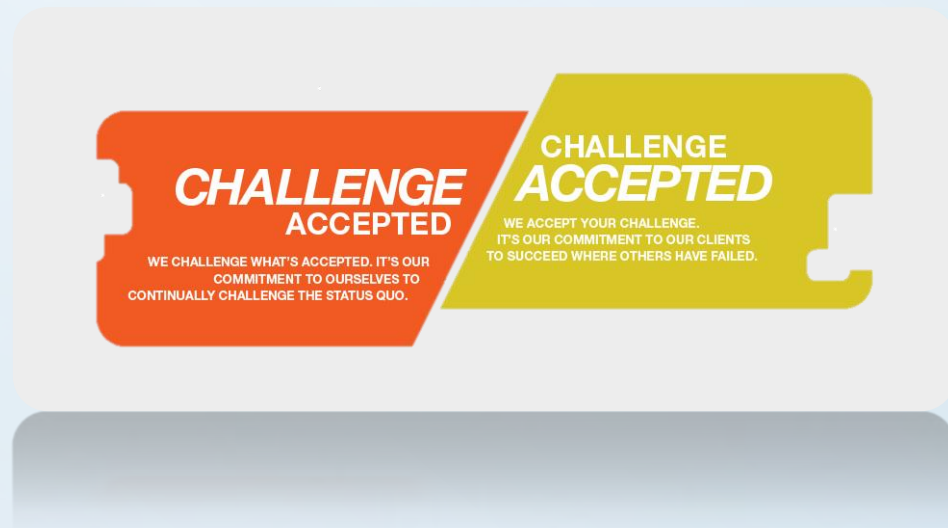
Opportunities

- Watching & helping a project grow from the idea stage through proposal (and award)
- Meaningful participation in discovery
- Being the voice of calm
- Helping investigators remember



Challenges

- Documenting & measuring intangibles
- Succession planning (may be difficult and time-intensive to hire and train new staff)
- Letting the perfect be the enemy of the good



Opportunities

- Facilitating connections & making PIs aware of campus resources
- Educating PIs about making guidelines and procedures work *for* them, and setting themselves up for post-award success at proposal stage
- Building trust & relationships with investigators



Challenges

- Becoming invested in the success of investigators and proposals
- Creative thinking
- Lack of professional development and formal training for blended positions
- Favoring or prioritizing one function over the other
- Favoring or prioritizing PIs who are more development-oriented
- What else?



Opportunities

- Becoming invested in the success of investigators and proposals
- Creative thinking
- Inspiring others to see possibilities they hadn't noticed or thought of
- Increased external funding activity or success
- Role in enhancing research activity
- What else?



Best Practices



Stop the Glorification of Busy

“Between stimulus and response, there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

– Victor Frankl



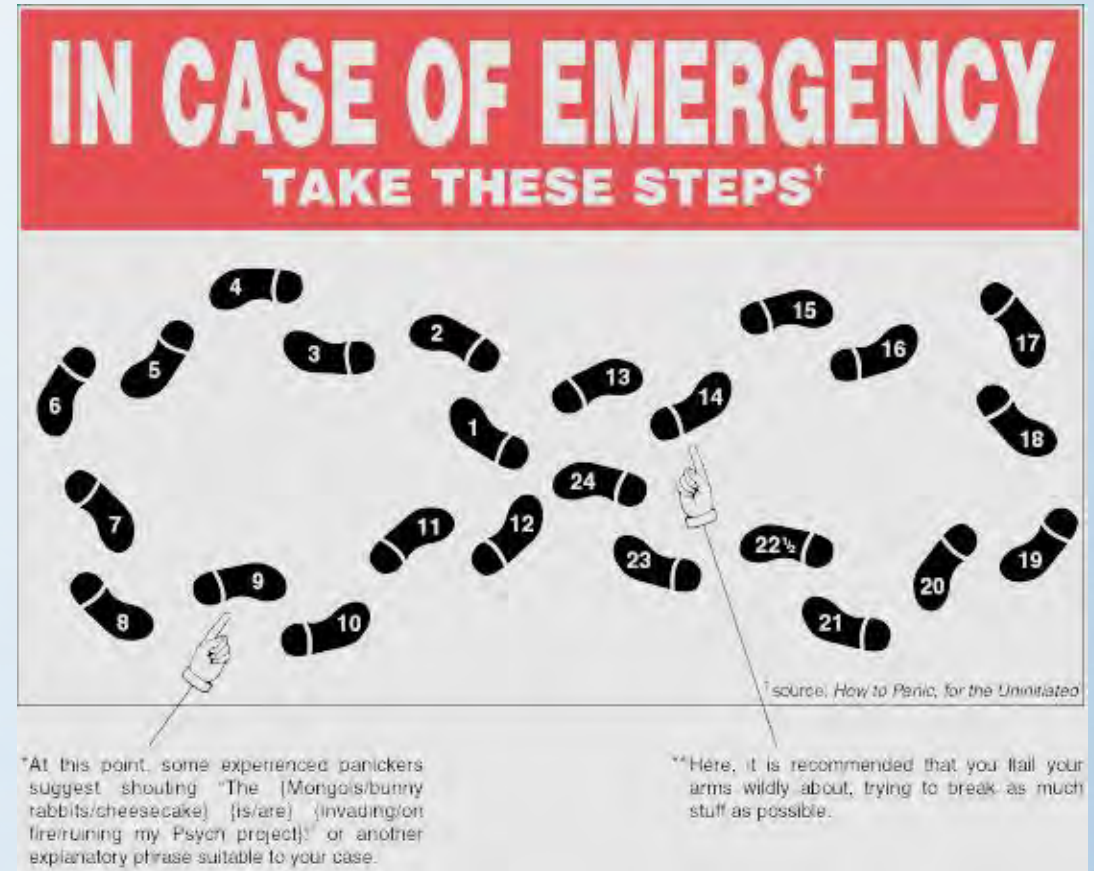
Stop the Glorification of Busy

- Schedule time for thought and reflection, and self-care
- Establish one day per week free of meetings to focus on those proactive, thoughtful activities that need more time and undivided attention
- Turn off (or at least reduce the footprint of) automatic email notifications.



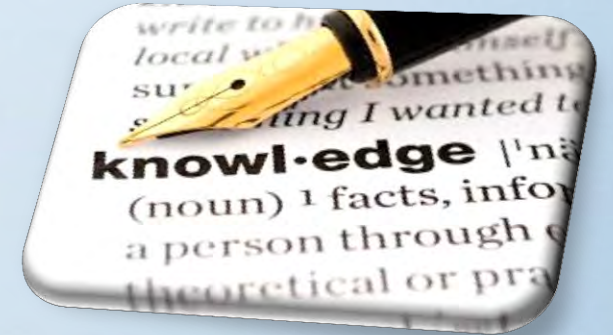
Ditto for Emergency or Crisis Mode

- “Red alert” mode should be a very occasional necessity – not a default setting
- Manage expectations carefully - set both reasonable and realistic availability
- Know when to let go of making something better and get it off of your desk



Know What You Know

- Don't pretend to know more than you do – but even more importantly, don't pretend to know less than you do
- You **are** an expert in things that investigators aren't, so own that (respectfully and professionally)
- Cultivate that expertise:
 - Serve as a proposal reviewer (where you can)
 - Get involved in professional organizations
 - Publish
 - Present at conferences
- What do you know?



Network, Network, Network

- To quote a colleague of ours, “You can network, or you can not work.” It’s that simple.
- This is how you get (and stay) connected to all your various constituencies.
 - Use technology creatively
- Learn from each other
- Again, if needed, build this time into your calendar, and enforce it.
 - Set aside “protected time” to engage in those tasks that otherwise will not get done



Be Present

- Attend functions and presentations in the departments or units you support
 - Helps you build relationships, trust
 - Demonstrates your interest in PI's work, and their situations, problems, and needs
 - You may become less of a bureaucrat and more of a colleague in the eyes of investigators
 - It may help you to better understand their work and therefore be better able to edit and critique their proposal documents



Co-Locate

- If at all possible, get an office in or near the place(s) where most of your investigators work
 - It helps “familiarize” you – seeing you in their world on a regular basis makes you more approachable and less of an “other”
 - It becomes more likely that investigators will come to you with ideas and questions early
 - Much easier for you to find them when you need to, and to drop in and check up on how things are going
 - Easier to arrange meetings (or do them on-the-fly), make it to presentations, events, & functions



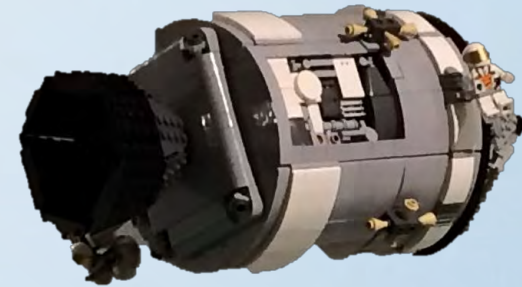
Help With Hiring

- If you can, get yourself added to the schedule when one of your departments is interviewing new faculty candidates
 - You may be able to offer insights and advice if asked
 - This helps you get a better sense of departmental priorities and directions
 - Highlights a higher level of support for external funding at your institution – a possible selling point for (strong) job candidates
 - Lets you and the new hires hit the ground running: you already know something about their research, can better help with transferring projects or early applications



Work to Protect Yourself from Murphy

- There are tons of moving pieces, and it's ~~difficult~~ **impossible** to keep all of them in view at the same time
 - There just isn't one system/tool/technique that will work for everyone – so find one(s) that work for you, and make sure to use it (them)!
 - Find (or build) something that fits well with your workflow and that of your office



Train, Train, Train – And Keep Training

- What we do is tremendously complex, and can be frightening to someone who's never done it before
- Use protected meeting time to discuss case studies and lessons learned
- Save marked up proposal documents to use as training examples
- Pair experienced development staff with new hires to form mentoring teams
- Work through development activities together
- What do you do for training?



Encourage Some Specialization

- By school or department
 - Long term faculty relationships can enhance research and proposal development
 - Where time allows, may facilitate increased general disciplinary knowledge, leading to more insightful proposal review
- By sponsor
 - “Sponsor specialists” may communicate the latest developments to campus (via social media or other communication tools)
 - “Go-to” person for development staff and investigators who have issues or questions regarding a particular sponsor

Encourage Some Specialization

- By task
 - Assign according to strengths and interests to benefit the office and the employees
- Are there other types of specializations?



But Also Cross-Train

- Even in a one-person shop, what happens when that one person is out sick or on vacation?
- Assign more than one sponsor or task specialist
- Have some means of providing backup when someone is out of the office or overloaded
- Use large, multi-disciplinary/cross-college proposals to introduce development staff to investigators outside of their assigned departments and vice-versa



Think About the Future

- Yes, we live in a deadline-driven world. We still have to plan ahead.
- To recruit and retain top-quality people, they need to know there's a future they can look forward to:
 - Promotional lines
 - Succession planning
 - Professional (and personal) development opportunities
- Even more crucial for one-person (or fairly small) offices
 - This means that current employees need to be up-front about retirement plans.



Document, Document, Document!

- We do this all the time with proposals – why is it seemingly so hard to remember to do it with other areas of our professional responsibilities?
 - It's physically impossible to keep everything in mind at once, so document it for your own well-being, if for no other reason
 - If someone has to step in for you at the last minute, would they be able to figure out what's going on in your world?
- What tools do you use for this?



Contact Us



- Andrea Buford
Senior Research Development
Specialist
Office of Sponsored Projects
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
(815) 753-9283
abuford@niu.edu

- Kellie Dyslin
Assistant Director: Proposal
Support
Office of Sponsored Projects
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
(815) 753-7090
kdyslin@niu.edu

- Michael Spires
Senior Proposal Analyst
Office of Contracts and Grants,
572 UCB
University of Colorado Boulder
Boulder, CO 80309-0572
(303) 492-6646
michael.spires@colorado.edu