

# UC Merced goes to Washington

## *Strategies to maximize faculty engagement with federal agencies*

Interaction with federal research funding agencies is an important strategy to increase the competitiveness of faculty proposals for research grants and contracts.

To enhance faculty interaction with federal funding agencies, the Office of Research Development Services (RDS) collaborates with the Federal Director in the Office of Governmental and Community Relations (GCR) at the University of California, Merced to plan and coordinate trips for faculty to meet with federal research funding agencies in Washington, D.C.

The primary purpose of the program is introduce junior to mid-career faculty to program managers at federal funding agencies such as the

National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Department of Energy, etc. The meetings provide opportunities to discuss research projects and explore potential opportunities for funding and partnerships with federal programs. In addition, faculty meet with Congressional representatives and staff on Capitol Hill and staff of the UC Federal Government Relations Office. They also attend a reception with area alumni and current UC Merced students interning in D.C.

RDS and GCR staff and University administrative leaders including the Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development (ORED) and the Provost/Executive Vice Chancellor accompany faculty to meetings with program officers, when appropriate.

The impetus for this program was a recommendation from an external peer review of research development activities at UC Merced performed by a NORDP-sponsored team in 2012 as well as institutional recognition of the need for early career faculty development.

other, review the schedule and logistics, be briefed on their meetings and on agency protocols, and address outstanding questions or issues.

### Post-Trip Debriefing

RDS and GCR schedule a meeting with all program participants several weeks after returning to gather feedback on all aspects of the trip. Staff record and use the feedback to improve the program.

## FUNDING MECHANISM

ORED and the schools of participating faculty provide funding for the D.C. program.

Within ORED, RDS has established permanent funding mechanisms to continue annual trips for 12–20 faculty. In conjunction with the Schools and the Provost's office, plans are already underway to designate funding for the trip in new faculty member's start up packages.



© Mike Boening Photography • <https://www.flickr.com/photos/memoriesbymike/with/14968060393/>

## APPLICATION PROCESS

RDS uses a competitive application process to choose faculty who will participate in the program. The application process begins with an email announcement to junior and mid-career faculty. Interested faculty complete an application including a C.V. or biographical sketch, a brief description of research career goals, the federal programs that interest them, and a short white paper outlining a research area that the faculty member would like to have funded. To increase the competitiveness of their proposals, RDS urges applicants to identify specific programs and indicate the value of meeting with its representatives. For example, if an investigator studies aging over the human lifespan, she would designate the Division of Geriatrics and Clinical Gerontology at the NIH Institute on Aging as opposed to the NIH in general.

ORED, in conjunction with the EVC/Provost and Deans, review the applications and select the faculty who will receive program funding. Selection criteria include the strength of the research 'fit' with identified agency funding goals, the quality of research proposed in the white paper, and the potential benefit to the faculty member of participating. The reviewers give priority to faculty members who participated in training programs offered or co-sponsored by RDS during the previous year such as the Grant Writing Institute, Early Career Proposal Development Workshops or STTR/SBRR Funding Workshop.

## PLANNING

RDS and GCR collaborate to plan all aspects of the trip including logistics and faculty preparation.

### Logistics

Logistics for this trip are complicated and require at least six months lead time. Planning the trip entails obtaining and reviewing applications, choosing participants and coordinating schedules for those attending, particularly for campus leadership. Making agency appointments requires approximately one month of lead time. Organizing the trip is also a staff intensive activity. In 2015, three RDS staff members, the CGR Director, the Vice Chancellor for Research, and the Provost all participated. Each faculty member receives a customized schedule with information about hotel and transportation options between meetings.

### Faculty Preparation

Each faculty participant writes a short (1–2 page) white paper that describes the research project they would like to discuss with program representatives. RDS helps faculty develop strategies to pitch their research projects that are customized for each agency.

### Pre-Trip Briefing

Prior to departure, faculty meet individually with a RDS staff member to identify the agencies and programs they will visit, review and polish their white papers and to practice their research pitches. RDS and GCR also schedule a group meeting for all trip participants to meet each

### FEDERAL AGENCIES VISITED

*February 2014 & October 2014*

#### National Institutes of Health:

- Office of the Director
- National Institute of General Medical Sciences
- National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research
- National Institute of Minority Health Disparities
- National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
- National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases
- National Cancer Institute
- National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
- National Institute on Aging

#### National Science Foundation

#### Department of Energy:

- EERE Offices
- Office of Science

#### Department of Education:

- Office of Post-Secondary Education
- Institute of Education Sciences

#### Department of Agriculture:

- National Institute of Food and Agriculture

#### Department of Defense:

- Air Force Office of Scientific Research
- Office of Naval Research
- Army Research Lab
- Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency

#### Institute of Museum and Library Services

#### National Endowment for the Humanities

#### Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA)

#### NASA

#### National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

### Authors

**Susan Carter, J.D.** • Director of Research Development Services  
Office of Research and Economic Development, UC Merced

**Lacey Kiriakou** • Federal Director

Office of Governmental and Community Relations, UC Merced

**Vanity Campbell, MPH** • Senior Research Development Officer

Office of Research and Economic Development, UC Merced

**Sara McDonnell** • Research Development Officer

Office of Research and Economic Development, UC Merced

## OUTCOMES

**10** Federal Agencies Visited

**2** Trips to D.C.

Staff Participants **7**

Faculty Participants **19**

Meetings per Faculty **5–6**

**93** Meetings with Program Officers

**12** Academic Disciplines Represented

### Group Events

#### • NSF Overview

To kick-off the visit, administrators gave a broad overview of NSF to the entire group before faculty went to their individual meetings with program directors.

#### • Group Dinner

After the first full day of meetings, the entire group met for dinner to debrief and socialize with colleagues.

#### • Alumni and UCDC Student Reception

The group attended a reception at the end of the trip to socialize with UC Merced alumni, current students living in D.C. and colleagues.

### Capitol Hill Advocacy

#### • Briefing with UC Federal Government Relations Office in D.C.

Faculty met with UC Federal Government Relations Office (FGR) research staff based in D.C. to prepare for Congressional meetings. FGR staff gave an overview of the federal research budget, current issues in Congress and described resources they provide to faculty.

#### • Capitol Hill Meetings

Faculty and GCR staff met with select Congressional offices representing UC Merced and the region. The meetings provided the opportunity to introduce representatives to researchers in a cross section of disciplines and discuss how federal investments in research are impacting the region, state and their research industry.

### Meetings with Program Officers

In their meetings with program officers, faculty pitched the research projects described in their white papers and listened to feedback from the officers. Most faculty members met with 5–6 program officers and at least 2–3 different funding agencies during the 2-day trip.

RDS evaluates the D.C. programs and counts the following in its many positive outcomes:

- Several PIs have been awarded funding that they attribute to the visits.
- Several PIs have been asked to serve as Agency Reviewers as a result of the visits.
- In numerous cases, Program Officers offered very specific input to improve proposals, including giving specific input on 'fit' of a proposal idea to the agency or to a particular solicitation.
- Many PIs were given advanced notice of upcoming opportunities.