

Creation of K-State Research and Extension Proposal Services Office (K-State REPS Office)

Issue: In response to the call for proposals in March, 2010 and in recognition of the shift in funding approach at USDA, Kansas State University responded to the AFRI RFA with a flurry of communications and special campus-wide and college-level training sessions. The effort was an attempt to raise awareness and marshal available campus-wide resources to enhance the competitiveness of K-State faculty in response to the call. One factor that was known prior to the AFRI RFA, but that became even clearer as faculty and administration began to anticipate submissions to AFRI, was that faculty in academic departments associated with K-State Research and Extension, more specifically within the College of Agriculture, lacked competent, system-wide assistance with grant preparation. It was known too that such assistance was available to faculty in other colleges across campus and that services were also available to faculty colleagues/collaborators at other Land Grant institutions. Thus, despite the “can do” attitude of faculty at K-State in responding to the RFA, they began the process of proposal preparation under less than ideal conditions or, at least, at a competitive disadvantage compared to their colleagues at sister institutions.

What has been done: A task force was formed that was comprised of experiment station funded research faculty and additional staff personnel that served in support of grant preparation within academic departments. I chaired the task force. The group was charged with thinking through a strategy to address the problem noted above. The group met four or five times and engaged in internal discussions within the College of Agriculture, and also externally engaged with the Office of the Vice President for Research and a conference call with the Office of Sponsored Program Services at Purdue University. From these discussions, a draft organizational plan was developed for the office staff that would be needed that best fit the situation within the College of Agriculture and K-State Research and Extension.

The K-State REPS Office has now been operational for approximately 14 months. Three positions have been created: Senior Grant Specialist and two Grant Specialist positions. The Senior Grant Specialist position was filled in June 2011 and the two Grant Specialists were hired from the same pool of candidates in November 2011. One of the Grant Specialists left early in calendar year 2012 for personal reasons.

Impacts/New Partnerships: In July 2012, approximately 13 months after establishment of the unit, proposal data were gathered and a survey administered to assess impact of the unit during its first year of operation (FY12). Results of the data and survey can be summarized as follows:

1. During the final two quarters of FY12, the unit assisted with more proposals compared to the first two quarters (80 proposals versus 21, respectively), suggesting the unit continues to become more widely known among faculty.
2. Proposals handled by the REPS personnel were generally larger than the proposals worked on by non-REPS staff (\$368,145 average for REPS versus \$200,226 for non-REPS staff in the final two quarters of FY12).
3. However, in total, non-REPS personnel are still processing significant numbers of proposals suggesting even greater potential growth for REPS impact.
4. Written comments from the survey suggest a high level of satisfaction with the work of the unit personnel.
5. In aggregate, 96% of survey respondents indicated their proposal: 1) Would not have been submitted if I had not received support from Proposal Services (31%) or 2) Would have been submitted without Proposal Services support, but their help made the process easier and my proposal better (65%).

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life): Our survey indicated a high level of satisfaction among faculty using the office for assistance with proposal preparation. Sample written comments from the impact survey were:

- This office is a WELCOME ADDITION to KSU. We should have had more support long ago!
- Our partners had little experience with NSF proposals in the past. Terri provided experience, coordination, and vital feedback for a very complex process of application. Terri was a pleasure to work with and we look forward to many successful applications with Proposal Services.
- In general Dawn and Terri were always supportive, readily available, easily supportive. Whenever I had questions that they don't know, they took the effort to find out and get back to me with information. They simplify my grant writing efforts. Thank you both for the support
- Dawn has been a very valuable resource for grant submission in my research program. We rely heavily on her to give guidance on submission policy, budget checking and organizing the submission process. Having this support staff is critical to bringing outside funding into the university.
- Thanks for ALL that you are doing. It IS making a BIG (positive) difference.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience? It is difficult to separate out one activity, session or set of sessions, but the entire experience, coupled with my mentoring relationship and outside reading undoubtedly shaped the way I approached and "sold" the project, including the need for funding.

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