Working Effectively with Faculty

Joanna Downer, PhD, Office of Research Development, SOM
Brian Smith, MD, Department of Pediatrics (faculty)
Esther DeMarco, Molecular Genetics & Microbiology
Taylor Nguyen, Duke Clinical Research Institute

Session Learning Objectives

• Understand perspectives of faculty and RAs;
• Identify keys to effective communications that can improve relationships with faculty;
• Identify tools and resources to reduce frustration and improve effectiveness.
Terms to be used

• “technical” = business portion of the proposal
• “electronic” = Duke or funder systems
• “science” = main descriptions of scholarly activity

The Grant Machine (i.e. Team!)

- PI
- RA
- FUNDER
- Central Offices
Research Administrators & Faculty: Baseline Perspectives

- Research Administrators’ perspectives
  - “One with” the Duke grant preparation systems, or funders’ submission and reporting systems
  - Largely and sometimes entirely focused on financials (business aspects of budgets, expenditures)
  - May be unaware of or unfamiliar with the purpose of the research or grant in question.
  - Swamped

- Faculty members’ “natural” perspectives
  - Wholly focused on the “science” – their scholarly activities and the parts of the grant that describe their plans.
  - Competing demands: teaching, administrative, mentoring, clinical care, etc.
  - Financials and budgets are almost never at the front of their minds.
  - Swamped

PI “Knowledge Gaps”

- Duke rules
  - Internal due dates
  - System requirements

- Budgeting
  - Subcontractors vs. vendors
  - Costs that hit directs vs. indirects
PI - Support from Research Administrators

• Timelines
• Complicated applications – outline of sections
• Assigning grant sections
• Letters of support
• Tables
• “Back” sections – templates/examples
• Strategizing on ways to assign costs across years

Where is our common ground?

• Shared Goals
  – Everyone’s goal is to submit the highest quality application/proposal possible (read: the strongest “science” and compliant with funder and Duke policies/requirements)
• Expert guidance
  – Faculty are usually not expert in Duke’s or funders’ systems; they need your expertise.
Principles of Effective Communication (I)

• Know your audience
  – Start your communication from shared understanding
  – Use shared goals to motivate
  – Make giving you what you need their easiest “to do”
• Know your “stuff”

Principles of Effective Communication (II)

• Clear & complete
• Confidence
  – Expertise, concise language, carefully constructed emails
• Concise
  – Make every word work
  – Write, review, revise
• Consistent
  – Both your details and your message
• Community
  – Developing and sharing resources and tools
Clear & complete

- **Who** will be responsible for which components
- **What** all is needed from each person
- **When** is each item due
- **Where** should the information be sent or stored
- **Why** – Providing additional information explaining the reasons behind things is a great way to inspire confidence.
- **How** each item should be done to ensure consistency

Confidence

- Earn the PIs confidence by including supporting information when you answer their questions. This helps the PIs realize you’ve done the research and provided accurate information.

Example
- Include the weblink to where the information is found.
Concise

• Don’t lose your audience: get to the point quickly and succinctly
• When sending an email, ensure that you are including only the essential message you’re trying to communicate. Be mindful that you probably only have a minute or two of your faculty member’s attention.
• When meeting in person, plan ahead. Know your subject matter and try to keep your faculty member on topic.

Consistent

• Consistency is a building block of trust
• Put tools and processes in place and use them
• Provide the same level of service as often as possible; if you’re not able to do so, make sure you discuss this with your faculty member so they are aware
• Be responsive
Community

• Reach out to the larger Duke RA community for advice and guidance in handling issues
• Increase your knowledge base so that you can become a resource in your community
• Develop and share tools
• Use the RA resources available through Duke

Tools – make the to-do easy

• Get it started: questionnaires and timelines
• Keep it moving: budget tools, tracking sheets, and research strategy templates
• Tailor tools for each need
• Develop your own tools based on need
Available Resources

- SOM: Office of Research Development; departmental resources (DoM, DoS, Peds); ORA
- SON: Office of Research Affairs
- University: Joanna’s counterparts in Trinity Natural Sciences/SSRI, Pratt (?), Nicholas School, Lemur Center; ORS
- All: Duke Office of Clinical Research (for human subjects research design, conduct, and advice); Office of Sponsored Programs
- Contract Proposal preparation guidance and advice: Taylor Nguyen & DCRI (tools), ORA

Contact us!

- Joanna Downer: joanna.downer@duke.edu; 681-8272
- Esther DeMarco: esther.deMarco@dm.duke.edu
- Taylor Nguyen: taylor.nguyen@dm.duke.edu (especially re: contract proposal tools)
Conclusions

• Effective communication using these approaches builds & maintains relationships with faculty (and others!)
• There will always be difficult people, but using careful, effective communication and effective tools can reduce *your* frustration.
• Don’t let negative situations or people steal your positive energy.

Discussion