

MANAGING RESEARCH GRANTS

PRESENTED BY ANDREW MILLER



How do you manage grant finances and make funding decisions?

- Find a funds manager that you trust and can rely on to give you accurate information
- Monthly meetings with my funds manager are absolutely essential
 - Review all grants for projected balances, expenditures and personnel distribution
 - Review labor distribution for all staff
 - Review salaries
 - Make sure to get final monthly reports that you review and file
- Avoid spending on unrestricted funds (start-up funds, retention packages, SOUP/SALAD)
 - Rainy day funds
 - Make sure there are no restrictions regarding expiration dates
- Make sure that all letters of employment or retention spell out in detail how your funds will be allocated (timeline) and what those funds can be used for.
 - Don't allow start-up funds be used for you salary unless you decide that.

What are the most effective strategies for addressing other key challenges associated with research grants

- Trust no one
 - Every dollar needs to be reviewed by you
 - Know all the policies at your institution
 - Make friends with your NIH grants management specialist (they need some love too!)
 - Know the rules, and if you don't know them, ask your program officer or grants management specialist.
 - Don't rely on your institution to have the correct answers
- Be early with your grant submissions and renewals and communicate often with the RAS unit and OSP.
 - Develop a good relationship with your pre- and post award RAS specialists and the contact person at OSP
 - Relationships matter a lot
 - Help them do their jobs, and double check everything they do
- Treat your research program like a business
 - Run it efficiently and ask for help if you don't know the answers
- Hire employees on a temporary basis and have a clear standard as to how they get promoted
- Don't be afraid to fire someone who is underperforming or is not getting along
 - One bad apple CAN spoil the bunch

How have these challenges and associated solutions evolved over the course of your funding career?

- I have always had OCD about grants and the details of various funding mechanisms, and over the years I have become more versed about grant funds management than my grants management “specialist”
- Trust no one
 - Make sure every dollar is reviewed by you
- Make sure your staff know their percent effort on various projects. It’s the law...Their distribution should reflect the amount of time they spend on a project.

MANAGING RESEARCH GRANTS

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How do you manage grant finances and make funding decisions?

Review accounts monthly/quarterly

With accountant, grants management personnel

Different rules/regulations depending on funding agency

End dates

Personnel

What are the most effective strategies for addressing other key challenges associated with research grants

HR

Being PI means being the boss

Organizational structure

Clear plan

Methodological control

Leadership

Clear responsibilities and accountability

Duplication

Videotape and rate

Dealing with funders

How have these challenges and associated solutions evolved over the course of your funding career?

Change in approach to problems

Change in my reactions

“Difficult Conversations”

Do the right thing

Can't avoid just because it's uncomfortable

Accountability (mine)

MANAGING RESEARCH GRANTS (and LABs)

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How do you manage grant finances and make funding decisions?

Meet with grants manager who provides projected balances monthly so you know your funding situation.

Reduce unnecessary costs (e.g. animal per diems, recurring charges, share service charges)

I keep my focus (and funding decisions) on what is going to allow me to collect the best data in the fastest way possible. Efficiency is key, not just for you but for your trainees.

Will it help me publish a paper or get a grant? Publications are the currency of science.

I don't stick strictly to the Aims of the grant, rather I focus on quality, innovation and "coolness" of the science.

What are the most effective strategies for addressing other key challenges associated with research grants

Managing people is the most difficult part of running a lab. Interpersonal management, personal issues...Don't avoid them.

Think of a grant as a means of collecting data for the next grant. You must publish papers and cite the grant, submit to PubMed Central.

Keep a pulse on the changing funding priorities of the funding agency. Talk to the program officer.

You have to evolve with the science, stay innovative!

Establish collaborations for areas that you are not expert. Consult statistician about issues of rigor and reproducibility.

What are the most effective strategies for addressing other key challenges associated with research grants

Meet with your trainees regularly to discuss progress and problems, but also to maintain excitement about research in general. This helps you come up with new ideas for grants and keeps the intellectual environment stimulating.

Personnel costs can be high and one modular R01 doesn't go very far. Leverage R01's by getting students/postdocs to apply for NRSA's then recruit new people for that spot.

You can "bank" money by paying for graduate students early and use it later for whatever you want.

Don't go into debt because you don't want to let people go. It is very hard to come out of debt.

Get effort on other people's grants!

How have these challenges and associated solutions evolved over the course of your funding career?

I have become less concerned about sticking to the original Aims, rather stay innovative and produce the paper that I really want to publish.

Funding rates are much lower and Program Priorities are more important than when I started.

I have realized that students/postdocs can have very good ideas about projects, so I now listen to their ideas and see if they grow on me. If students are passionate about something, it could lead to a very exciting discovery.

You learn a lot by serving on a study section! Don't let rejection get you down for more than a few days, then turn your focus on addressing their criticisms which more often than not leads to a better grant.

Building a network outside your institution is so important for paper and grant reviews. Start building the network early! Also, establish leadership in a field by organizing symposium or editing special issues.

MANAGING RESEARCH GRANTS

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How do you manage grant finances and make funding decisions?

- Budgets are “done” up-front based on grant activities.
 - Decisions about grant protocols, staff, etc determined by available budget for award.
 - Careful planning when grant is submitted including all foreseeable expenses for grant period.
- Once awarded, monitor all expenses in relation to the original budget on an on-going basis. Everything spent has to be consistent with original budget. Administrative assistance is important.
 - The Department systems do not seem to be accurate all the time so you have to keep an eye on them.
- Problems that arise
 - Periodic budget cuts from funding agencies. Average 8-10%!
 - Salary and other expense changes by the University without reference to grant budgets.
 - Other costs or changes that occur due to grant activities.

What are the most effective strategies for addressing other key challenges associated with research grants?

- There could be many meanings to this question. What are the key challenges referred to?
 - Dealing with regulations, like HIPAA and IRB and subject reimbursement
 - Have adequate support for these activities and allow necessary time
 - Assuring that progress reports, etc are done in a timely manner
 - Staffing and HR: Start-Up time
 - Delays in staffing associated with HR
 - Staff training
 - Assuring that the research plan is implemented as planned.
 - Careful oversight, particularly at the beginning of the process
 - Frequent meetings and oversight. Does everyone understand what is going on. Are they with the program?
 - Monitoring the process (Is recruitment happening at the right rate? Is the data being collected? Is the data being entered?)
 - Intervening if there are process problems.
 - Dealing with any staff and or Intuitional issues



How have these challenges and associated solutions evolved over the course of your funding career?

- I used to have more energy and less experience; Now it is the reverse!
- Working with the University systems is much more difficult than it was previously. Things have become exponentially more difficult to negotiate.
- Previously, I was more patient with staff inefficiencies. Now I am quicker to see when someone is not going to be able to do their job properly. You have to balance the needs of the project as a whole with the needs of the individual. However, the University makes it difficult to get rid of staff who are not performing well.
- More efficient in terms of data collection and data entry. I have learned not to collect data I am not going to be able to use.
- Learned to delegate while understanding that I am accountable for results.