August Lunch and Learn 8/16/18—Preparing for Postdoctoral Fellowships and Grants

There is a travel award available from the office of postdoctoral affairs.

No one was available to attend from the writing center, but we were given contact information for Charlene Orchard c.d.orchard@utah.edu should we wish to contact someone from the writing center.

The panelists:

Jan Abramson, MS, Sponsored Projects Officer, Office of Sponsored Projects

Peter Kraus, Associate Librarian, Marriott Library, University of Utah

Gary Schoenwolf, Distinguished Professor & Experienced Grant Writer

Kami McNeill, Research Manager, Pre-awards, Eccles Institute of Human Genetics, University of Utah

On writing your grant:

Gary has had roughly 30 postdocs in his tenure as a professor, and about 2/3 acquired independent funding. He is involved in a fellowship writing workshop that is full for this year, but will happen again next year.

It is important to give a faculty mentor at least one month for feedback on grants, and you should also give your proposal to someone outside your lab to evaluate the science and the "wow" factor of your grant. Why are you doing your science? Why is it important? It is important to sell your project and yourself.

When writing a postdoctoral fellowship specifically, it is helpful to show a shift in training from what you did in graduate school because you are getting more training and skills to answer more important questions. When you are required to have a co-investigator because your PI is a new faculty, it is important your Co-PI reads your grant then gets involved in your project. Keeping the interactions informal is recommended, as well as finding a faculty member who is less busy and looking for the next adventure.

Reviewers for grants are tired and overworked humans who often read your grant on airplanes. They likely review grants to learn things, so it is your responsibility as the grant writer to teach them. Typos and misspellings are really annoying to reviewers, and they may dismiss your grant based on this. In theory, grants are supposed to be considered based on the science, the scientist, and the references 1/3 each. However, a particular third may sway the other sections. Grant review is biased by emotion.

On finding funding from private foundations:

Peter is a librarian, but has experience with STEM professionals applying for funding through private foundations and helps find the money from these sources. He is willing to do a "101 class for writing for private foundations" with individuals or small groups to help find the money. His email address is peter.kraus@utah.edu. Private funding may be the best option for international postdocs even if the

foundation says the grant is citizens only. Private foundations can change their own rules if they want. Often, private foundations do not give feedback to each grant because the staff is small. However, if you call the foundation, they will often set up a telephone meeting with you to give advice on a potential resubmission. It is important to leverage what the funding agency wants to fund. It is also important to ask the foundation who will be reviewing your grant and write to that audience. It is often an educated lay person or a panel of them, so it is important to avoid jargon.

On pre-award and OSP (Office of Sponsored Projects) requirements:

Jan is with OSP, and says it is very important to route all grants through OSP (Office of Sponsored Projects). OSP ensures grants are compliant with University policy. The university reserves the right to turn down a grant if it didn't go through OSP first, and there are terms or conditions that University cannot accept. While this is very rare – you don't want it to happen to you. When a grant goes through OSP, the University assumes fiscal and financial responsibility for the grant to protect both you and the University from litigation. Always keep your mentor in the loop, and request guidance and support; find out who the grants and contracts officer is. Be assertive.

Kami's role is in pre-award support for basic scientists. It is important to understand the pipeline for submitting your grant and finding the pre-award people for your department at least 2-3 months in advance. The pre-award people proofread your grant, ensure the requirements are met, and monitor the submission process. They do NOT evaluate your science. Some departments have designated editors to look for mistakes.

Final words:

Kami: Do not underestimate the administrative burden of submitting a grant.

Gary: Good luck! Find help as it makes a big difference.

Jan: Thank you for putting yourself out there. When you deal with rejection, write 10 emails and send none of them.

Peter: Persevere! Don't underestimate yourself.