

Best Practices for Sponsored Programs Success

One of the sessions at the Twelfth Annual Conference that commanded everyone's attention at the NSPAA Annual Conference, held at the Marriott Hotel Downtown Jackson, June 7-10, 2006, was "Best Practices for Sponsored Programs Success", organized and moderated by Dr. Mildred Huff Ofofu of Morgan State University. The session featured dynamic presentations from four NSPAA member institutions:

- A. Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- B. Florida A&M University (FAMU), Tallahassee, Florida
- C. Howard University (HU), Washington, District of Columbia
- D. Texas Southern University (TSU), Houston, Texas

A. Howard University (HU) -- Ms. Stacy-Ann White, Acting Manager, Office of Research Administration, opened the session with an exciting presentation on "The E-Advantage" (Electronic Research Administration). She explained that Grants.gov is a one-stop electronic grant portal where potential grant recipients will receive full service electronic grant administration. Ms. White reminded us that the goal is for Grants.gov to be a unified interface for all agencies to announce their grant opportunities, and for all grant applicants to find and apply for those opportunities.

She concluded her presentation by enumerating some of the major advantages of using ERA: allows institutions to eliminate the burden of paper-based data collection, reduces administrative burden on the Federal Grants community, provides electronic validations improve data quality, shortens

the cycle from application receipt to award, and is a Presidential mandate.

B. Florida A&M University (FAMU) -- The presenter, Dr. Keith H. Jackson, Vice President for Research, provided a quick overview of FAMU, and used excerpts from “Moving to Best Practices in Benchmarking Sponsored Programs Administration” by W. S. Kirby and P.G. Waugaman as background for his presentation. Dr. Jackson focused on four key areas necessary for a research administration system to be effective:

How well does the institution 1) promote an environment that results in increased research activity and provide the resources to support it, 2) use and leverage available resources 3) serve its faculty to support research competitiveness and 4) maintain requisite accountability? He affirmed that FAMU has been successful in implementing the aforementioned key areas, and maintains best practices by focusing on policies and procedures, compliance and auditing, and technology transfer.

C. Southern University and A&M College -- Ms. Cheryl E. Hall, Esq., Director of Sponsored Programs, gave a thorough and up-beat presentation on “Contracting – Ways to Prevent a Catastrophe”. She clarified general definitions to differentiate a contract from other assistance mechanisms, and offered tips for getting an institution ready for contracting, such as institution registration in the CCR database and sources for identifying contract solicitations. Ms. Hall then provided specifics regarding the solicitation process, contracting methods, and contracts negotiation tips. She concluded the presentation with infrastructure considerations such as administrative oversight and management plan, which included monitoring, long range strategic plan and marketing plan. The attendees were advised to always remember the Golden Rule in Contracting: “When you accept an agreement, you have an obligation to live up to its terms and conditions”.

The session was so well received that it was suggested that “Contracting” should be offered as a pre-conference workshop for the 2007 Conference.

D. Texas Southern University (TSU) -- Dr. Robert Ford, Associate Provost for Research, gave a general overview of procedures and processes for operating a successful sponsored research office. He discussed pre-award issues such as coordinating teaming agreements and contract initiatives, disseminating research opportunity announcements, providing proposal submission guidelines and check-in, conducting budget reviews. For post-award, Dr. Ford discussed steps in processing agency award notices, preparation of research expenditure reports for designated state agencies and cataloging, providing technical and disseminating required internal reports for funded projects. He asserted that faculty members at TSU have had substantial success in obtaining awards due to the services provided by their sponsored programs office, such as technical support for proposal writing, facilitation of collaboration among interdisciplinary units, and hosting grant-writing workshops. One of TSU’s policies is to allow for liberal facilities and administration (indirect) cost sharing as an incentive to faculty members.

The session was the first of many at which “best practices” in sponsored research offices will be shared. Additional institutions will be highlighted in a future Phase II session, including North Carolina A&T State University and Prairie View A&M University. Please contact Dr. Mildred Huff Ofosu, at mofosu@moac.morgan.edu, if you have a comprehensive sponsored programs office and desire to discuss best practices at your institution.