TRAINING GRANTS BEST PRACTICES

Training grant applications to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have some of the most extensive requirements for supporting data of any of the federal applications, including those for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Although the extensive data required by NIH is rarely required by other agencies, becoming familiar with these data requirements will help applicants to understand and build a strong rationale for training grant applications to almost any agency. Therefore, potential training grant applicants to all agencies are advised to review the following NIH website that offers specific instructions for supporting the development of a training grant.

http://www.nigms.nih.gov/Training/InstPredoc/PredocTrainingDescription.htm#NIGMSreqs

The National Science Foundation provides another valuable training grant resource through a video about their IGERT training grant application preparation requirements and review processes. This can be viewed at:

http://nsfgov.httpsvc.vitalstreamcdn.com/nsfgov_vitalstream_com/igert.swf

The following Best Practices are based on NIH and NSF requirements, are likely appropriate for any agency.

Assessing Feasibility and Competitiveness

- Define the extramural funding base among the proposed training faculty. Most, if not all, faculty should have at least one major grant in a related field. All major federal awards are helpful, but a strong funding base with the target agency is especially important for NIH and NSF applications.
- Identify a PI with both a strong funding and training record in the proposed training field.
- Define and assess the mentoring history of the training faculty. Does the faculty have multiple graduates in prominent and/or upwardly-mobile research positions?
- Define the unmet training need. How will the grant fill a void both nationally and within the institution? NSF and NIH will rarely support an existing program; rather, the application should be enabling a new area of emphasis.
- Discuss the proposed training idea and faculty qualifications with someone who has served on a training grant study section at the target agency.
- Assess the available evidence to determine if the proposed program would be likely to attract a pool of high quality Training Grant Eligible applicants? (See T32 Table 8 data*)
- Determine the feasibility of accessing the required applicant and student data, e.g., GRE, undergraduate institution, for all applicants in the last 5-10 years. (See T32 Table 7 data requirements*)

*http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/#data

Developing the Plan

- Define a course of study. How does it differ from existing programs? Is it rigorous yet doable?
- Include teaching opportunities for the trainees.
- Consider including industrial internships and extramural collaborations.
- Develop timelines for program development and for individual student progression.
- Develop an assessment plan for the program and for the students, and include assessment implementation on the timelines.
- Include an external advisory committee in the assessment plan; seek members with training grant experience.
- Develop an advertising plan; consider distributing information via websites and professional meetings.
- Develop a budget. Consider budgeting student support in Years 3-5, after completion of candidacy exams unless an alternative rationale prevails or is recommended by the agency.
- Make a list of departments and programs which might be willing to provide matching funds for unmet costs such as tuition and stipends that exceed agency caps.
- Consider the faculty-to-funded student ratios on the application and have a plan for allocating slots. (NIH T32s generally fund only 2-4 slots in the first year.)
- Request proposal development support from the SIRO office, Peter Schiffer, Director, pes12@psu.edu.