Developing a Strategic Plan for Funding Your Research

The first few months as a new faculty member can be overwhelming, but setting aside some time to start developing a strategic plan for funding your research will help you in the long run. New faculty members face a tremendous number of demands on their time. In addition to learning your way around campus, setting up your office, getting to know your colleagues, and preparing to teach, set aside some time to develop a strategic plan for what you will do over the next few years to position yourself to secure funding for your research. Creating a plan to guide you will make finding and competing for funding less overwhelming and will help you to use your time more efficiently. In fact, many of the things you'll need to do can be accomplished in parallel with your other activities. For example, when you meet with your Department Chair, ask about departmental expectations regarding funding, and as you meet your departmental colleagues, keep an eye out for potential grant mentors and collaborators.

Below is a list of steps you need to take as part of developing your strategic plan. Subsequent chapters will explore many of these topics in more detail.

- **Develop your research agenda**: What research topics do you plan to pursue over the next five years? (You probably had to do this as part of your search for a faculty position, but you should revisit your plan periodically as your field evolves and as you determine the strengths of your institution and identify potential collaborators.)
- **Develop your education agenda**: What are your interests related to education in your discipline? (This is particularly important if you plan to pursue funding from NSF.)
- **Determine the expectations for research funding in your department**: How is funding counted in the promotion and tenure process in your department? Are you expected to win external funding early in your career, or are publications more important? When should you start pursuing external funding?
- **Find research grant mentors**: These may be well-funded faculty in your department, colleagues from other departments, former dissertation advisors, staff in your research development office, or colleagues from other institutions.
- **Find out who is likely to fund your research, and get to know those funders**: Just as you need to network within your research community, you also need to get to know and understand your funding community – understand the mission, culture and procedures of agencies and foundations likely to fund your research, and get to know the program officers, reviewers, and researchers who are well-funded in your research area.
- **Develop a process for identifying specific funding opportunities that you may want to pursue now or in the future**: Many grant programs are recurring and have relatively predictable due dates. Others, particularly those in highly active

areas, may suddenly appear. Creating a process for identifying opportunities early will give you time to plan the opportunities to pursue and avoid last-minute proposals.)

- **Identify potential collaborators if appropriate**: If you're in a field that encourages collaboration, collaborating with other researchers can help you move into new fields of research and compete more successfully for grant funding. It's important, however, to determine how your department and institution view collaboration and how joint projects and publications will be handled during the promotion and tenure review.
- **Identify research development resources at your institution**: Most universities have research offices, and many have research development offices that provide a range of services that may include websites with updated funding opportunity lists, proposal workshops for new faculty, personal consultations, and even assistance with editing your proposal. Sponsored Projects (or similarly named) offices will often help you with your budget and with routing, uploading, and submitting your proposal. Seek out the resources available at your institution and the procedures required to use them.
- **Do your homework and determine what you need to do to be competitive**: Writing a proposal takes a lot of time and effort, so you'll want to make sure your proposal is as competitive as possible. Do you need more preliminary data? Have you read all of the relevant literature? Do you understand the program to which you're applying? Have you talked to the Program Officer? Have you talked to other researchers who have been funded through that program? Develop your proposal-writing skills. If your institution offers proposal-writing workshops, take advantage of them. Ask your funding mentors to show you examples of successful and unsuccessful proposals.)
- **Schedule your proposal writing**: What grant do you plan to submit first and when is it due? What grant will you submit after that? How long will it take to produce the proposal? When should you start working on that first grant? Put those dates on your calendar, and set aside time for proposal writing. If you wait for your calendar to be clear, it will never happen!)
- **Plan to be declined**: It's a fact of life for anyone who submits proposals that they will be declined more often than they'll be funded. Successful researchers learn from their reviews and continue to submit proposals. Build into your plan the expectation that you will need to revise and resubmit your proposal before it is funded.

In the rest of this book we'll discuss these steps. We'll also give an overview of the actual writing process and the sections of a typical research proposal. Our intention is to give you a high-level overview of the process for finding and competing for research funding without overwhelming you. Other resources, including our monthly newsletter and agency- and discipline-specific books on funding, explore these subjects in considerably more detail, discussing particular programs and agencies.