

How Did I Get Here? How Multiple Paths to Research Development Strengthen the Field



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Goals of this Panel



- Describe the varied backgrounds that led the panelists to careers in research development
- Discuss why diversity of backgrounds within research development is important to our work and the growth of our field
- Define cross-cutting characteristics that describe a research development professional
- Detail how hiring decisions can create a strong, faculty-centered office of research development

Meet the Panelists



- **M.S (Peg) AtKisson**
 - Associate Member, Grant Writers' Seminars and Workshops
 - 15 years research development experience
- **Kathy Cataneo**
 - Director, Research Development, University of New Hampshire
 - 6+ years direct research development experience
- **Amy Gantt**
 - Director, Office of Research Development, Tufts University
 - 12 years research development experience
- **Sarah Marina**
 - Assistant Director, Office of Research Development, Tufts University
 - 8 years research development experience

M.S. (Peg) AtKisson -



- Started as a double major in European Languages (French, German, Spanish) and English to be an international corporate lawyer. Changed to Biology (BS with minor in Bio)
- Got interested in research, worked as a roadie, fronted a punk band, started PhD program in Cell Biology: bad fit, dropped out
- Technician in Cancer Biology, co-fronted a rock band, started another PhD program in Neuroscience, started a new band
- Finished PhD, started grant consulting for a living; turned consulting work into new office at Tufts
- Went back to consulting, teaching grantsmanship, faculty development

Strengths I Bring to Research Development



- Highly synthetic and lateral thinker
- Deep scientific training; breadth of scientific knowledge and interest – “2 inches deep and 6-8 miles wide”
- Ability to get interested in (almost) anything
- Cultural identity with faculty members
- Strong written and oral communication skills
- Deadline driven
- Punk Rock attitude

Kathy Cataneo



- BA in Math; Math/stat consultant to federal agencies, think tank, and private consulting firm in D.C. area for 4 years; wrote final reports
- While Recorder/Asst. Registrar at UNH, obtained MBA; concentration: systems efficiency engineering
- Asst., Assoc., Exec. Dir. Office of Sponsored Research (28 yrs.); staff of 30 for pre- and post-award, regulatory compliance, finance, accounting, IT, research institutes, state agency relationships; COGR, NCURA, SRA
- Co-I for (unfunded) multidisciplinary UNH women's health research study
- Started UNH RD Office in January 2010, alone

Strengths I Bring to Research Development



- Logical, strategic thinking (math degree)
- Strong interest in clear, concise, compelling writing
- “Eagle eye” copy editor
- Experience with & understanding of federal agencies
- Experience with & understanding of the academy
- Financial & organizational skills, systems efficiency engineering (MBA)
- Understanding of the entire grants process
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Strong service ethic
- Appreciation for research contributions to society
- Creativity

Amy Gantt



- BA in English with a concentration in psychology, MA in sociolinguistics
- Taught writing classes and upper-level English/linguistics classes as an adjunct (and waited tables to make ends meet)
- Began in research development in 2004 as a consultant hired to work on high institutional priority proposals
- Transitioned to director of the research development office in 2010, when the founding director left (hi, Peg!)

Strengths I Bring to Research Development



- Curiosity about and fascination with everything! Left a PhD program because, while I love learning about different fields, I don't want to do any of them
- Strong written and oral communication skills
- Deadline-induced anxiety that results in seeking out ways to be more efficient
- Scientific literacy and the ability to apply learning in one area (discipline, funding agency, or administrative challenge) to other areas where appropriate
- In role as director, the ability to recognize my weaknesses and hire others with complementary strengths – it would be hard to do this by myself!

Sarah Marina



- Transitioned from a BA in Political Science and French Studies directly into a research development support role. Did not know what NIH stood for
- Transitioned to Assistant Director role over an 8 year period via skills gained by osmosis, mentoring, self study, and in a social science masters program
- Now focuses on large, multi-investigator proposals, social science grants, overall office strategy, and creating linkages between research development and other research support offices

Strengths I Bring to Research Development



- Starting from the beginning of the career ladder gave an excellent, comprehensive view of all aspects of research development
- Learning from mentors from a variety of backgrounds allowed for well-rounded development of research development skills
- Graduate work in social science has helped tremendously in adding skill sets such as evaluation and data analysis to my work in research development
- Ability to problem solve quickly
- Knowing when ‘enough is enough’ and additional work won’t lead to increased positive outcomes

Why Diversity of Backgrounds in RD Matters



- A diversity of backgrounds helps us to better serve a more diverse group of faculty needs and interests
- Multiple perspectives on a given issue lead us to better problem solving and processes than any single career path
- By working together, we become more than the sum of our parts

What Defines a Research Developer?



- Ability to think laterally
- Attention to detail
- Perfectionism, within boundaries – and recognizing when the perfect is the enemy of a submitted proposal
- Ability to see the bigger picture and organize disparate pieces into a coherent whole
- A passion for helping submitters to explain their work

What to Look for in Hiring



- Attitude: positive, can-do, service-oriented, team player
- Aptitude: to learn and to synthesize information effectively and accurately
- Evidence that applicant is a strong, persuasive, creative writer who doesn't fall too much in love with their own words
- Respect for the faculty and their work, with the ability to work as a team with the faculty – the faculty are experts in their disciplines, and the research development professionals are experts in communicating their work
- Well organized and appreciative of attention to detail
- Mix of backgrounds and educational levels, and succession planning for RD office

Discussion



- Our premise is that a research development office is more effective when people from diverse backgrounds and points of view work together. *What are your experiences?*
- These diverse offices can bring challenges, especially in full-service central offices that support a wide variety of disciplines. *What challenges do you face, and how do you handle them?*
- In hiring, we don't necessarily look for federal grant experience since that can be taught. *What would your ideal candidate look like?*

Questions and Contact



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