

### **Case Study #1: Navigating Complex Grant Proposals with Professor C.**

Professor C., a globally renowned biologist and esteemed faculty at a prestigious R1 institution, is known for his remarkable contributions to the field. Boasting an H-index of 143, he excels in securing substantial extramural funding, averaging over \$1 million annually. His commitments extend beyond academia: he's an editor-in-chief at a top-tier journal, a consultant for diverse organizations, and leads two bustling research labs, one in the U.S. and another in South America. Recently, Professor C. embarked on a challenging endeavor to establish a new national Center, involving multiple Principal Investigators (PIs), over 30 faculty from multiple units across the university, and two subaward institutions. This initiative marks his second attempt to secure funding for his vision, with the professor confident enough to repurpose much of the initial proposal's content. However, a key difference lies in the funding availability, which is \$12 million less than before.

1. The journey begins with Professor C. contacting the Director of Strategic Initiatives\* (DSI) for support, who advises a formal request to the Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Office (SIRO), for comprehensive package assistance. Professor C. makes the request and SIRO approves.
2. Professor C., plans to reuse an internal cost-share Excel (institutional commitment not shared with the funding agency which forbids cost-share) from the previously unfunded grant, informs the SIRO lead RA but misses out on further clarification.
3. The DSI coordinates meetings with co-PIs, senior personnel, subaward PIs, and collaborators from industry and government to align everyone with the Center's vision. Professor C. participates sporadically, often absent due to international commitments. This irregular attendance pattern continues in the recurring PI meetings organized by SIRO, which includes a list of critical deadlines. His absences leave the DSI and SIRO RAs scrambling to manage missing materials and PI-specific decisions, often resulting in the DSI making those decisions, taking on significant portions of the proposal writing, and soliciting other faculty members' input. The other two co-PIs are also disengaged in the absence of Professor C.
4. A critical juncture arises a week before submission when SIRO declares they won't submit the proposal without the finalized and approved internal cost share. Professor C., under the impression that SIRO was handling this, is taken aback. Despite his belief that negotiating cost share wasn't his responsibility (a task for the advocate), no formal request had been made to the advocate, leading to confusion about the process. A crucial meeting with the DSI leads to some budget adjustments, but Professor C. remains firm on the scope of work which does not match the requested proposal budget. In a race against time, the DSI creates the Excel for cost share and, alongside the advocate, negotiates last-minute agreements with various stakeholders. The proposal is submitted following the approval of the cost share.
5. Post-submission, SIRO calls for a meeting with the advocate and DSI to discuss Professor C.'s approach and strategize for better handling of similar situations in future submissions.

#### Potential Discussion Questions:

1. How should have the SIRO RA team addressed this situation where the project's scope significantly exceeded the available budget, potentially impacting the feasibility of execution in the eyes of reviewers?
2. As the DSI, what actions would you have taken to guide the proposal process more effectively?
3. If you were the lead RA, how would you have managed the proposal's progression, especially considering Professor C.'s sporadic involvement?
4. How could the communication between Professor C., the DSI, and the SIRO team have been improved to avoid misunderstandings, especially regarding the internal cost-share process?
5. What approaches could be taken to ensure active and consistent engagement of other co-PIs in the proposal process? How can the DSI and SIRO encourage co-PIs to share the workload more equitably?
6. What steps could be taken to ensure that busy PIs like Professor C. are more engaged and accountable in collaborative proposal development processes?
7. In what ways could SIRO and the DSI have better managed the proposal submission process to mitigate the last-minute rush and stress?
8. How can research administrators balance the need for PI input with the urgency of meeting submission deadlines?
9. What are effective strategies for dealing with faculty members who have significant commitments outside of the grant proposal process?

\*The Director of Strategic Initiative's role is to serve in an advisory role to the PIs leading large grant proposals by helping them to form cohesive teams, providing suggestions that would strengthen the proposals' competitive advantage, advising on broader impact and education and training, providing access to additional resources needed to show institutional commitment (facilities, equipment, marketing and communication, events support, administrative support) and ensuring compliance. DSI acts as an executive liaison to SIRO and other institutional units or leadership from external collaborators.