

Leveling Workload


The University Grantee Perspective

May 1, 2013



Grantee Interactions with NSF

- Pre-Award Life Cycle

PI: has an idea; finds a funding opportunity; identifies collaborators; writes the science; sketches out budget; writes ancillary pieces (human subjects, animals, data management, etc.) 

Department Administrator (DA): fills out the boilerplate sections of the proposal; puts the budget onto forms ; creates the Current and Pending Support page; collects collaborator information; reviews proposal for completeness ; transmits to Chair and Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) 

Pre-award Cycle, cont'd

- **Chair:** Reviews for: effort availability; conflict of interest; cost sharing commitments; congruence with department goals; resources availability, etc. 
- **Dean:** Reviews for flagged potential conflict of interest; school commitments, etc.; provides final sign-off for academic unit 
- **Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP),** the last stop: Reviews proposal for: conformance with guidelines; conformance with University policies; appropriate subcontractor documentation (if any); budget, in accordance with A-21 and University rates; provides AOR approval and
MEETS THE DEADLINE!

Challenges

Myths

- Scientists plan ahead and are super-organized
- Universities are administratively top-heavy
- Electronic proposals take 2 seconds to submit, so PI can submit to OSP 5 minutes ahead of deadline

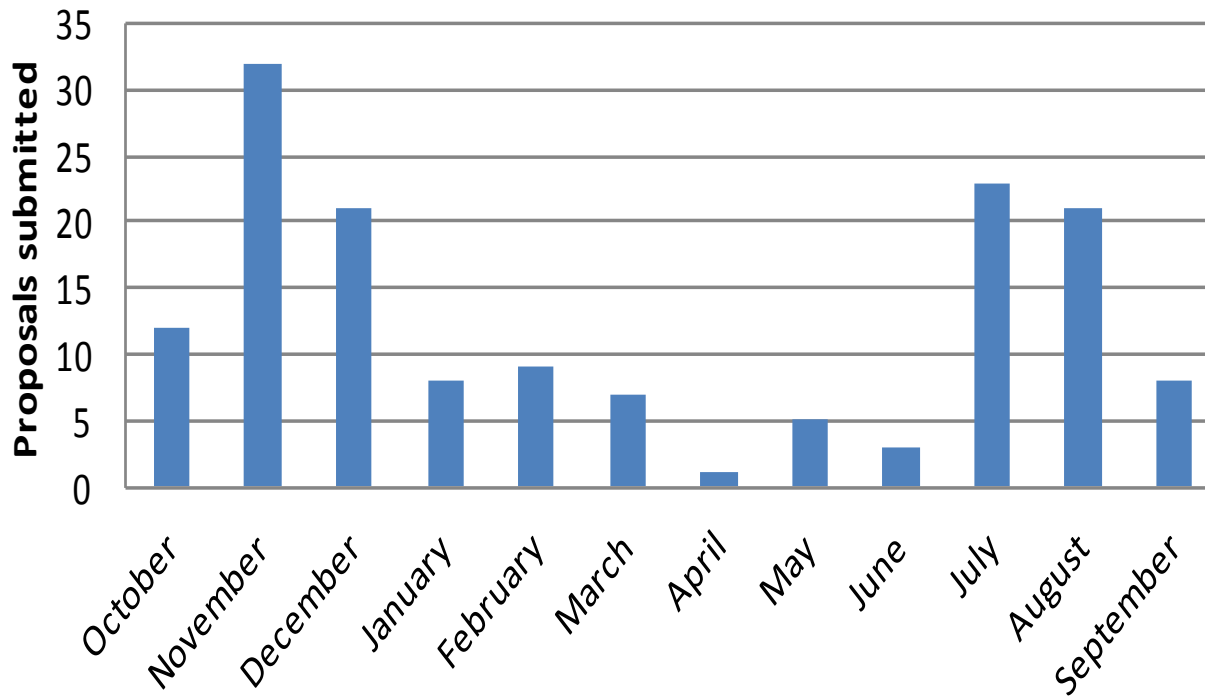
Facts

- Scientists, like most humans, procrastinate
- The “A” of our F&A rates have been capped for 20+ years
- OSP actually tries to read proposals before we sign them on behalf of the institution

Timeline

- Proposal submission
 - Proposals are created within a 3-4 week period
 - The PI doesn't want to release the proposal until the last minute
 - Administrative reviews by Chair and Dean are done in a compressed timeframe
 - As the last stop in the pre-award life cycle, OSP's deadline days are hectic and do not promote reasoned review
 - Clustered deadlines mean periods of frantic work to the exclusion of all other, followed by a lull (clean-up)

NSF Proposals Submitted FY12 by NYU, Washington Square



Between Pre- and Post Award

All of these Committees also have clustered workloads due to clustered deadlines:

- Human Subjects
- IACUC
- Biosafety Committee (Recombinant DNA)
- Radiation Safety Committee
- COI Committee

AND

- Award negotiation/acceptance involves PI, Chair and Dean (sometimes), OSP and CO

Advantages to Distributed Deadlines

- All players will have more time to devote to proposal preparation and review, resulting in:
 - Better written proposals
 - Fewer mistakes
 - Better compliance
- Regularized deadlines (a la NIH) would allow for better planning
- PIs will have time to write more proposals (better for us, maybe not for NSF)
- Department administrators would experience more even workflow

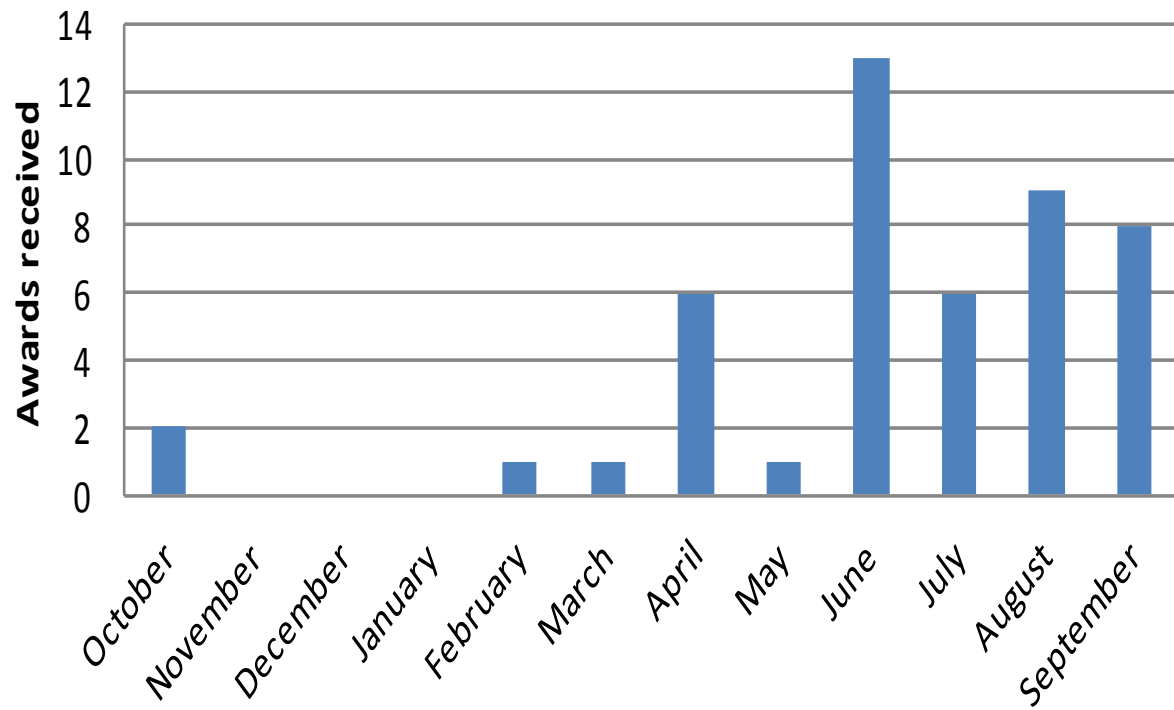
How did NIH do this?

- NIH spread out its program deadlines several years ago, by mechanism (type of grant) – not an option available to NSF
- Curtails the initial budget period for new and competing awards (with full year of funding)
 - One negative consequence of this was increased need for carryover
- Challenge: Some NSF programs will be driven by the discipline, e.g., Antarctic research, anthropological research which typically take place in the Spring and Summer

Political realities

- Sequestration and Continuing resolutions have forced many federal sponsors to backload their awards when budgets are not determined until several months after the start of the fiscal year
 - The Federal budget picture could derail an evenly distributed award plan

NSF Awards Received FY12 by NYU, Washington Square



Award and Post-award Cycle

- Award received - OSP
- Compliance review cleared (OSP w. IRB/IACUC)
- Revised budget needed (DA, PI, OSP, SPA (post-award unit))
- Account established (SPA)
- Draw down – individual awards (SPA)
- Subcontract created (Contracts Office/PI/Collaborator)
- Expenditures reviewed - ongoing (Dept. Admin, PI, SPA)
- Property tagged and inventoried (Property mgmt)
- Progress reports submitted (PI)

Every unit benefits from a distributed workload

View from the grantees

- Distributed award schedule eliminates highest volume during traditional vacation period
- The emphasis on collaboration has exponentially increased the need for subcontracts; our Contracts Office will now be able to create subs in a timely way (avoiding the Summer/early Fall backlog)
- All units of the University will benefit from proposal deadline and award re-distribution
- The tasks themselves will not change
- Grantees are accustomed to modifying their expectations based on grantor requirements
- As long as the money keeps flowing, we will adapt!

