Using a Local Consortium to Provide an Enhanced Professional Development Program for Postdoctoral Fellows

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Abstract
A consortium can provide support and expertise for PDGs from institutions with smaller postdoctoral populations and thus provide enhanced career preparation training for their postdoctoral fellows. With this in mind, four Philadelphia institutions organized in 2004 to submit an application to the Burroughs Wellcome Fund (BWF) and Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) “Partners in Scientific Management Program”. The group proposed to develop a course in scientific management to enhance the skills necessary for a successful academic career and to combine the resources (faculty, support personnel, facilities, and monetary) of those institutions. In addition to the local institutions, AAAS/ScienceCareers.org also joined the consortium to help prepare, execute, and fund the course.

The initial phase of the project involved surveying postdocs and faculty at the institutions to determine the appropriate format, size, and content for the course. A four-session course format was selected with each institution hosting one session during the 2006-2007 academic year. After a selection process, fifty-five postdocs representing the four institutions were chosen to participate. Course topics included landing a faculty position, leadership skills, time management, project management, finding funding and mentoring. Half-day and full-day workshops combined keynote addresses by subject experts, faculty panels, lunchtime faculty-led roundtable discussions, interactive workshops and networking opportunities. Combining resources to help prepare postdocs for life beyond postdoctoral training can serve not only to reduce costs and to expand the scope of the program(s), but also to promote collaborations among institutions and provide a broader network of peers and diverse advisors for the attendees.

Course Design & Participation
• 4 sessions from Oct-Mar. (1.5/ full day)
• 1 session at each institution
• 5 topics chosen from high survey responses and by consortium
• 4 member consortium (lead by Dr. Lisa Kozlowski from Jefferson) was enhanced by staff and monetary support from AAAS
• Target of 50-75 attendees
• Enrolled 55 attendees
• 7 from Drexel University
• 7 from Temple University
• 21 from The Children’s Hospital of Phila.
• 20 from Thomas Jefferson University
• $50 course fee waivers were offered
• Selection process
  • Self-selection process due to number that applied

1st Session-Landing a Faculty Position
Host: Drexel University College of Medicine
Organizers: Garth A. Fowler, PhD and Richard Rest, PhD

2nd Session-Leadership Skills & Time Management
Host: Temple University
Organizer: Chevonne DaSilvio-Nash

3rd Session-Project Management
Organizer and Host: Wendy Williams, PhD, The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

4th Session-Getting Funded & Mentoring
Host: Thomas Jefferson University
Organizer: Lisa Kozlowski, PhD

Challenges Encountered / Lessons Learned
1) Format of 4 days over 5 months was not optimal
- Too much sustained effort by coordinators
- Drop in attendance as course progressed
Solution: 1-2 day intensive course
2) Stand alone afternoon session lost attendance
- Difficult to leave lab once expts. started
Solution: Have off-campus or only morning sessions
3) Some speakers unfamiliar with research situations, thus needed more assistance and presentations still could have been more relevant
Outcome: Speakers learned to focus talks toward the audience

Advantages of Using a Local Consortium
• Guaranteed financial support from all institutions
• Significant support from sponsors (AAAS,BWF,HHMI)
• Additional staff support, not available at all institutions
• Expanded expertise from faculty and staff
• More elaborate course than any single institution could provide
• More ideas and contacts
• Sessions held at ‘rotating’ institutions allowed postdocs to speak freely and to be less tempted to return to lab
• Course is being used in training grant applications and renewals
• Resources available from all consortium members (copying, printing, graphic design, admin. staff, speaker information, etc.)

Main Advantage
• Networking for Philadelphia-area postdocs