



# It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know

## Award Decisions Increasingly Depend on In-Person Interactions...

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“When I was a program officer, in-person interactions with faculty submitting proposals were instrumental in helping me assess and decide who was the best fit for the award.”

**Former Program Officer,**  
NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

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## ...But It's Harder and Harder to Secure Face Time with Decision Makers

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“Our faculty had the relevant expertise but since we hadn't won a large award from DOD before, we weren't even on the program manager's radar.”

— *Vice President for Research,*  
*Public R1 University*

“

“My office didn't find out that the agency had already held a meeting and invited other institutions to help write the RFP until after the fact—now we're having to work twice as hard to even be considered.”

— *Vice Provost for Research,*  
*Public R1 University*

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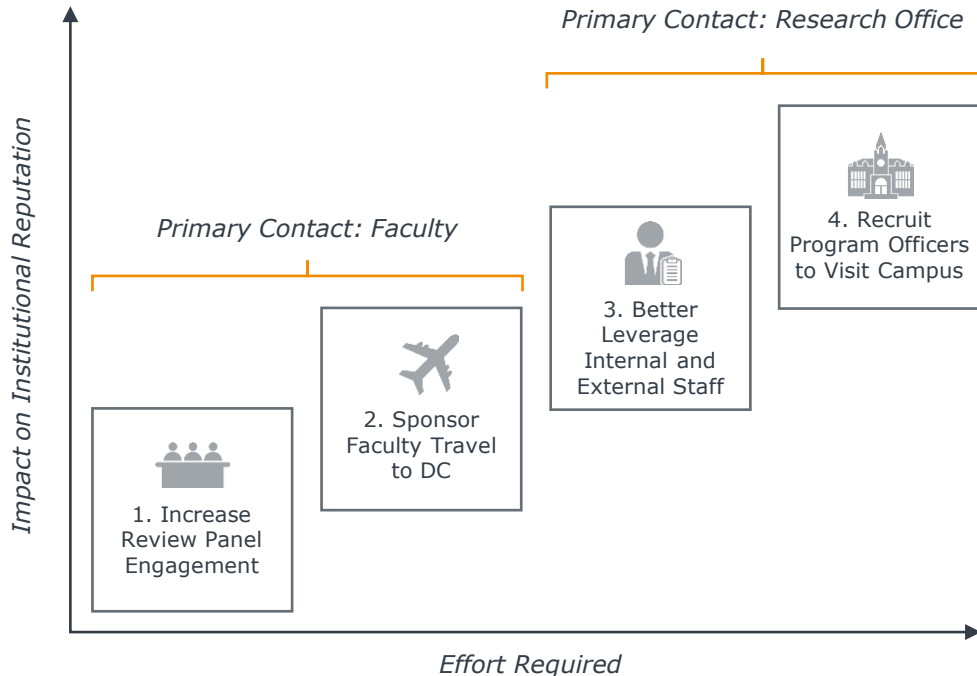
“I hired a PR firm in DC that said they could get my faculty into the important meetings, but we're twelve months in and we haven't gotten a single invitation.”

— *Vice Provost for Research,*  
*Private R2 University*

# Getting Your Foot in the Door

Four Main Levers for Faculty and Institutions to Cultivate Federal Relationships

## Strategies Mapped by Effort Required and Reputational Impact



# 1. Increase Review Panel Engagement

## Five Steps to Grow and Optimize Faculty Review Panel Service

**1**

### Articulate Benefits

Emphasize full spectrum of benefits and share examples from faculty who have leveraged service experience to compete for funding

**2**

### Explain Process

Publicize steps faculty should take to position themselves as potential reviewers and offer guidance as needed

**3**

### Create Incentives

Provide small monetary incentives to signal that university values this engagement and to help defray costs (e.g., travel)

**4**

### Recognize Service

Count participation toward faculty service to free up time and reduce perception that review panel service is another unrecognized responsibility

**5**

### Capture Insights

Ask former reviewers to present at future workshops, serve as mentors, and share intel with the campus community

### Case in Brief: Towson University



- Office of Sponsored Programs and Research (OSPR) created Peer Review Incentive Program to encourage faculty participation on review panels
- Four weeks prior to serving on a federal review panel, faculty can submit an application to OSPR to receive a \$750 stipend
- OSPR requests—but does not require—that faculty who receive stipends share info from their experience with other researchers on campus or assist with future OSPR workshops

## 2. Sponsor Faculty Travel to DC

### Structure Travel Program to Improve Funding Conversations

#### Why Faculty Struggle to Engage Federal Program Officers

- ✘ Deterred by costs associated with traveling to DC
- ✘ Hesitant to travel and speak with program officers independently
- ✘ Unsure how to prepare for program officer conversations
- ✘ Unclear about next steps to maximize the benefits of travel



#### Features of Effective Travel Programs

- Provide funding (ideally, upfront) for faculty who satisfy clear eligibility and proposal requirements
- Use a cohort model and send research staff to accompany the group and attend meetings as needed
- Have faculty apply to program several months prior to travel and collaborate with research office to develop concept papers, biosketches, and talking points
- Require post-travel report summarizing insights gleaned and next steps for submission—then track participants' subsequent proposal submissions/awards

#### University of Idaho's ORED<sup>1</sup> RISE<sup>2</sup> Meet Your Sponsor Program



- Two formal proposals per year for DC travel cohort; rolling applications for individual, non-DC travel
- Awards up to \$1,500 per PI
- In 2019, funded 5 individuals for 2 to 3 day trip to DC

1) Office of Research and Economic Development.  
2) Research, Infrastructure, and Scholarly Excellence.

# 3. Better Leverage Internal and External Staff



## Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

*Examples:*

- Determine which research office representatives attend meetings and agency conferences in DC based on their personal backgrounds, networks, and strengths
- Designate a staff member as the dedicated relationship manager for lobbyists and third-party consultants
- Hire and/or restructure research development roles to focus on specific funding agencies

## Create Accessible Collateral

*Examples:*



**Louisiana State University** created one-page [handouts](#) that showcase its research strengths and how faculty research is addressing real-world problems that external stakeholders care about



**Vanderbilt University** produced two-page [overviews](#) of the institution's relationship with major federal funding agencies

## Consider Relocating Research Staff to DC

*Examples:*



**Associate Vice President, Research Development**

- Relocated in 2018
- Focused on cultivating long-term relationships with funding agencies, especially DOD
- Seeks to “get on the front end of writing RFPs”



**Director, External Partnerships and Economic Development**

- Relocated in 2016
- Tasked with broad partnership building, which includes federal agencies but also other institutions and industry



## 4. Recruit Program Officers to Visit Campus

Successfully Drawing Agency Reps to Campus Requires an Updated Approach

### Six Strategies to Consider



#### Leverage DC Presence

Use federal affairs team to promote research interests in DC and make initial introductions to agency contacts



#### Provide Non-Monetary Incentives

Invite program officers to participate in distinguished lecture series or attend other research events during their visit to campus



#### Frontload Relationship Building

Attend networking events and begin meeting with program officers—especially those who are new in seat—well in advance of asking them to visit campus



#### Collaborate with “Competitors”

Partner with nearby institutions to host a joint visit; this can help smaller institutions compete for program officer time and it allows program officers to maximize the impact of their travel



#### Draw On Personal Networks

Ask faculty or administrators with personal connections to the agency or program officer to make the visit request



#### Create a Compelling Agenda

Design and promote a customized visit agenda that aligns with program officer and institutional goals



## 4. Recruit Program Officers to Visit Campus (Cont.)

Ensure Agenda Mutually Advances Agency and Institution Goals

### Sample Day-Long Agenda

*Department of Defense (DOD) Program Officer Visit*

9:00am: Breakfast with Chief Research Officer

10:00am: Seminar (followed by Q&A)

11:30pm: Tour of Campus Facilities and Cores

12:30pm: Lunch with Provost and President

1:30pm: One-on-One Faculty Meetings

3:00pm: Tour of Labs and Centers/Institutes

4:00pm: One-on-One Faculty Meetings

5:30pm: Dinner with Deans and ADRs<sup>1</sup>

### Takeaways for Research Office

Incorporate some less structured sessions to allow for candid conversations with program officer

Reduce burden on visiting program officers by minimizing number of sessions for which they are presenting

Directly involve senior leaders to signal the institution has prioritized engagement with the agency and acknowledge DOD's preference for hierarchy

Showcase the institution's unique capacity and infrastructure

Collaborate with ADRs to identify faculty whose research aligns with agency interests and help them prepare prior to the visit

1) Associate Deans for Research.