

Minutes from External Funds strategic plan working group
March 10, 2005

Present: Robert Sheeley (co-chair), James Mazur (co-chair), Rosalind Amenta, Vincent Ferrie, James Granfield, Kathy Yalof, Patricia Zibluk

The group was given the following questions to consider as a starting point for discussion:

- How effective has Southern been at attracting external funding?
- What does the university need to do to increase the amount of federal and state grant funding?
- What are the university's priorities for external funding?
- What should be the relationship between private sector funding and federal funding?
- What external funding sources have not been fully explored?

Because none of the members of the group were especially familiar with fund-raising as it is done by the Office of Institutional Advancement, the discussion focused on grants and contracts submitted by faculty and staff. However, the group agreed to ask the Provost if he would consider appointing one or more additional members to this group who were knowledgeable about fund-raising and institutional advancement.

Patricia Zibluk distributed three documents with information related to recent grant applications and awards. Two of the documents provided benchmarks about the grants application policies and procedures at 11 other universities. The third document provided information, including dollar amounts, about all grant applications processed by SPAR since 2001, and whether they were funded or not.

One clear trend is that the dollar amounts the university receives from external grants has increased substantially in recent years, as have the numbers of grant applications submitted. These are very positive developments. In addition, the percentage of submitted grants that are actually awarded is very high—in the last year, over 80% of grants submitted have been awarded. Nevertheless, only a small percentage of faculty ever apply for external grants, and so there is room for improvement, and the potential to increase external funding even further is certainly there.

Zibluk also informed the group that an internal review of the SPAR office is almost complete, and the results of this review should provide the working group with many types of data and feedback that can help to guide its recommendations to the Strategic Plan Steering Committee.

One major impediment in obtaining external grants and contracts is the state's requirement that every grant (except those from federal sources, which are exempt from this rule) must be approved by the state Attorney General's office. This is a time-consuming and laborious process, and it may discourage private donors. The regulation may make sense for cases where a state agency (such as SCSU) is paying for goods or services, but the regulation makes less sense for cases where SCSU is receiving money from an outside donor. Sheeley suggested that we might recommend to the administration that the four CSU campuses should work together to change this onerous regulation.

The working group discussed the proposal now being considered by the university to change the distribution of funds generated by indirect cost recovery so that a percentage of the money goes to the principal investigator and a percentage to the department from which the grant originated. The consensus was that this was a good idea, and that it could serve as an incentive to faculty members to write new grant applications. It would also provide an incentive to departments to be supportive of the grant-writing efforts of their members,

because the department would benefit from successful grant applications that include indirect costs.

Regarding the university's priorities for external grants: This question was discussed, but none of the members present was aware of any particular policies or priorities. As it is now, the SPAR office processes grant applications on a first-come first-served basis. Any member of the faculty or staff who has a proposal gets the support and guidance of SPAR, regardless of the purpose of the grant or its monetary value.

What external funding sources have not been fully exploited? One suggestion was that "Title III" grants should be investigated. Some grants aimed at strengthening educational institutions have ranged in the millions of dollars.

The next meeting of this working group was scheduled for Friday, March 17, at 11:00 am in the SPAR office. Mazur said he would notify the members of the group who were not present about the next meeting.