

Virtual Collaboration for Grants Development across ACS

PIs

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Linda Musumeci, Russell Wyland and Nicole Stahlmann discuss successful proposal-writing for humanists.

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with special thanks to
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Summary

As outlined in our proposal to ACS, we have conducted three virtual workshops on grants-related topics for the benefit of ACS faculty. Recordings of all three events are available [online](#) and a summary of participant feedback is appended to this document.

The first webinar, held on October 28, 2010 included presentations by Trinity University professors Michelle Bushey and Mark Brodl. Dr. Bushey shared both successes and failures in her own grant track record with [NSF](#), [NIH](#), [ACS](#), [Research Corporation](#), [Dreyfus Foundation](#) and other granting agencies. Dr. Brodl has been a program officer at the [National Science Foundation](#) since 2009 and has written several successful proposals to the [Howard Hughes Medical Institute](#). He shared grant-writing advice for both of these organizations.

The second webinar, held on January 26, 2011, included presentations by Linda Musumeci, Director of Grants and Fellowships at the [American Philosophical Society](#), Russell Wyland, Deputy Director of Research Programs at the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) and Nicole Stahlmann, Director of Fellowship Programs at the [American Council of Learned Societies](#). All three speakers gave an overview of grants available from their organizations and spent some time describing common applicant mistakes as well as strategies for writing successful proposals. Ms. Musumeci also offered some information about possible future directions for APS grant programs.

The third webinar, held on February 3, 2011 focused on the [Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Program](#) (UISFL). The speaker, Christine Corey, is Senior Program Officer with the [International and Foreign Language Education](#) Division of the U.S. Department of Education. This webinar took place a week before 2011 competition was announced so Ms. Corey focused on new focus areas for 2011, program requirements and general advice.

Accomplishments

We have broadened awareness of these grant opportunities among ACS faculty. Proposals are in preparation at the four sponsoring institutions that are directly attributable to information transmitted during one or more of the webinars. We believe that this is also the case at other participating schools but we have not been able to measure this impact.

We have proven the utility of webinars for the purpose of grants development and built bridges among grants officers at member institutions that will allow us to continue collaborating on faculty outreach and development.

The webinars focused faculty attention on the services and resources provided by sponsored research offices on ACS campuses, causing more faculty members to seek out grant support services at their own institutions.

Lessons Learned

We were less successful than we had hoped in building bridges among faculty for the development of joint proposals. Part of the problem was the technology. While Elluminate proved to be quite easy to use, there *is* a learning curve involved, which kept us from holding

break-out sessions after each webinar. Since faculty generally only participated in one of the webinars, audience familiarity with the software did not carry over from one event to the next.

Predicting attendance proved to be another problem. As indicated by the data below, many individuals who registered for the event did not participate. Part of the shortfall is accounted for by the fact that on many campuses webinar attendees watched in a shared space over a single connection. However, since Elluminate only allows for 50 simultaneous connections webinar organizers may have turned away registrants unnecessarily.

	Registered	Attended ¹	Completed survey ²
Science (October 2010)	51	29	15
Humanities (January 2011)	67	40	27
International (February 2011)	49	31	23

Participant comments on the evaluation survey for the humanities webinar indicated that the speakers spent too much time discussing information that is available on agency websites and that the proposal-writing hints were more useful. In response, we changed the format of the third webinar to a question-and-answer format in order to steer the speaker towards providing information that would be of greater interest to the audience. However, the third event focused on a federal program that was not as well-known and some of the feedback indicated that a general overview would have been helpful.

The technological management of the webinars was easiest for the October event because both of the speakers were on an ACS campus with an academic technologist standing by. The January webinar involved speakers from three different non-ACS locations. NITL staff worked with each of the speakers, conducting equipment tests before the event, to ensure a successful webinar. The speaker for the February event was less cooperative about equipment checks and had no IT support in her office so NITL connected her to the webconference via telephone.

The most successful aspects of the webinars were attributable to:

- Educating the speakers about the audience and their interests
- Collecting questions from registrants before the event and asking speakers to tailor their presentations to these interests
- Having one or more moderators monitor the chat room for questions and concerns
- Orienting the speakers to the technology (webcam, headset, Elluminate interface) at least one week before the event
- Orienting audience members to the Elluminate interface, especially the chat room and audio setup
- Communicating frequently with registrants and campus coordinators about logistics

¹ Attendance is estimated based on the number of signed-in connections at the midpoint of the webinar. Some of these connections represent multiple viewers participating from one location. The speakers and moderators are included in this number.

² Surveys may have been completed by people who watched the recording of the webinar. These individuals would not be captured in the number who registered to participate in the live event.

Webinars are an efficient way for program officers from funding agencies to reach out to and educate potential applicants. Many agencies have realized this and are sponsoring webinars on their own. ACS-sponsored webinars have distinct advantages over agency-sponsored webinars, however. In preparing the program officers for the webinars, we were able to educate them about the nature of PUIs in general and ACS institutions in particular.

From the perspective of ACS grants officers, webinars are a way of getting faculty interested in a particular opportunity or program. While each ACS campus may have only one or two potential applicants to a program, joint webinars allow us to leverage the consortium to garner the interest of program officers.

Since webinars are recorded and posted online, even faculty who can't participate in real-time are able to benefit from the information. Online recordings become a tool for advising future faculty as well.

Moving Forward

We see these three webinars as a foundation for developing a tradition of collaboration for faculty outreach and training in proposal development. Most ACS institutions have only one or two faculty interested in a particular program. Working together will produce efficiencies in the time and resources devoted to learning about new opportunities, developing proposals and managing grants.

Trinity is arranging for webinars about the US Dept. of Education's Fulbright-Hays program and the National Science Foundation's social science programs. Southwestern and Sewanee have each agreed to organize a webinar during the 2011-12 academic year. Rollins will lend its Adobe Connect subscription to host the webinars³.

The webinar series has generated additional interest in producing web content for faculty training and grants development. Possible content might include podcasts of interviews with successful faculty or screencast tutorials about web applications (e.g. NSF Fastlane, eRA Commons, etc.).

Building on the inter-institutional connections developed during the series, we are exploring ways of bringing like-minded faculty together to develop joint proposals.

³ NITLE will stop supporting Elluminate in May 2011. Adobe Connect has similar functionality and allows for up to 100 simultaneous connections.

Revised Budget

In our original budget we had anticipated bringing speakers to one of the campuses to broadcast the webinar. This proved to be unnecessary because speakers preferred to conduct the webinars from their own offices. We also found that web and phone communication were sufficient and we didn't have to travel between Trinity and Southwestern. We requested and received ACS approval to spend these travel funds on additional equipment, software and support to assure the sustainability of the series and to explore other content-creation tools.

	Proposed	Adjusted
NITL consulting	\$4,000	\$6,000.00
Project administration expenses	\$300	0
Speaker expenses	\$3,000	0
Small equipment fund	\$1,200	\$1696
Software & Subscriptions	0	\$674
Books	0	\$130
	\$8,500.00	\$8,500.00

We extended our contract with NITL to support two additional webinars in 2011.

We purchased additional noise-cancelling headsets and webcams to distribute to future webinar speakers and moderators.

We purchased a small video camera and two voice recorders along with assorted accessories (memory card, batteries, carrying case, microphones) in order to record conversations with representatives of grant-making organizations even outside the webinar setting (e.g. at conferences, campus visits, phone conversations, etc.) We are exploring other forms of web content, such as podcasts.

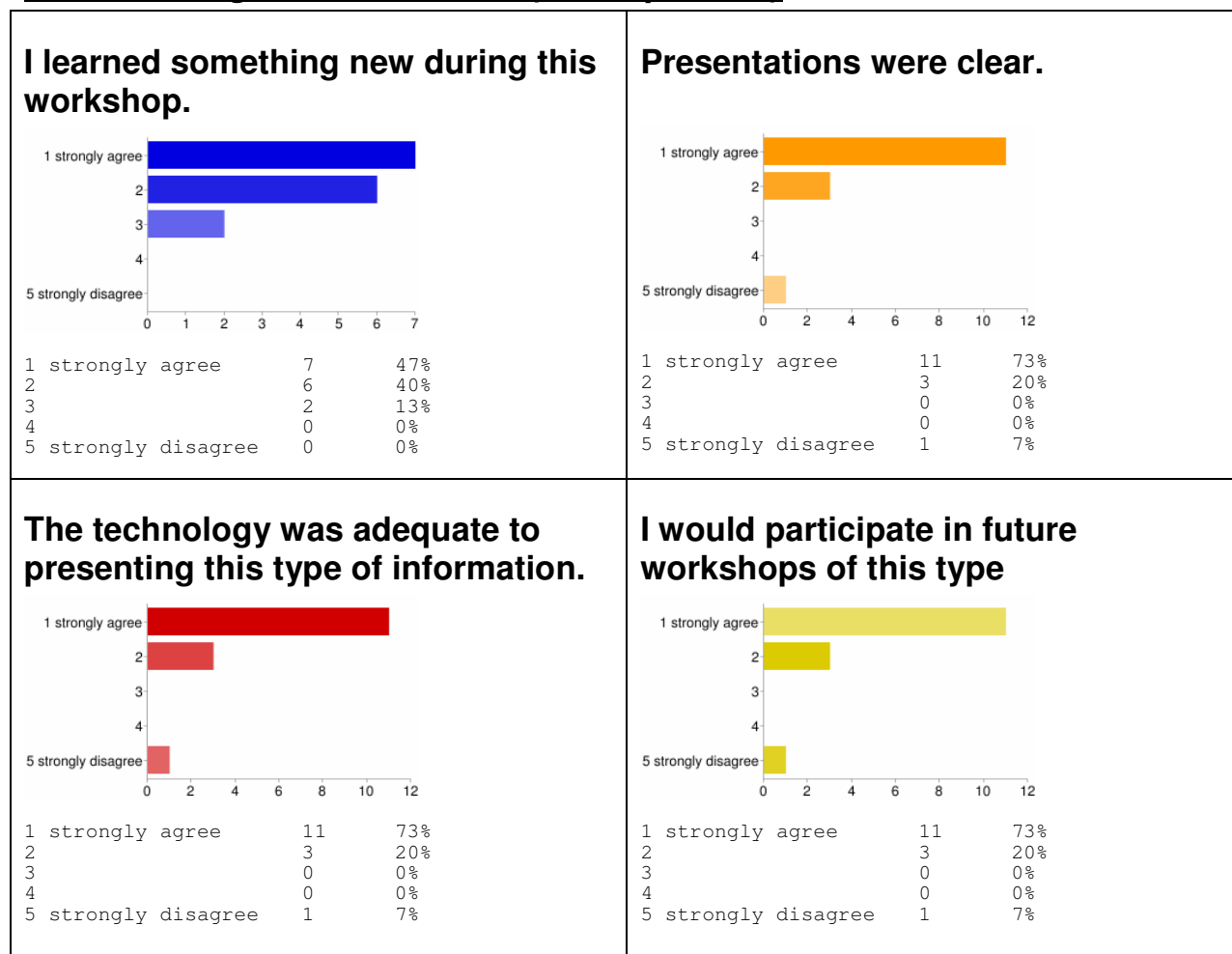
We subscribed for one year to WebEx webconferencing service because NITL plans to discontinue its support of Elluminate in May 2011. Rollins will allow us to use Adobe Connect for larger webinars, but having a dedicated conferencing subscription will allow us to hold more spontaneous meetings for collaborating faculty.

We purchased Camtasia software to allow us to convert Elluminate-formatted webinar recordings to additional formats that are more easily shared via YouTube, podcasts, etc. Camtasia will also allow us to explore additional content to support grant development, such as screencast tutorials for grant portals, etc.

We purchased several books to aid us in brainstorming and planning future workshops. In particular, The Art of Funding and Implementing Ideas will help us guide social science faculty in grant-seeking and two books on grants for artists will help us to prepare useful webinars for our faculty in the creative and literary arts.

Appendix: Survey Results

Grant-writing in the sciences (15 responses)



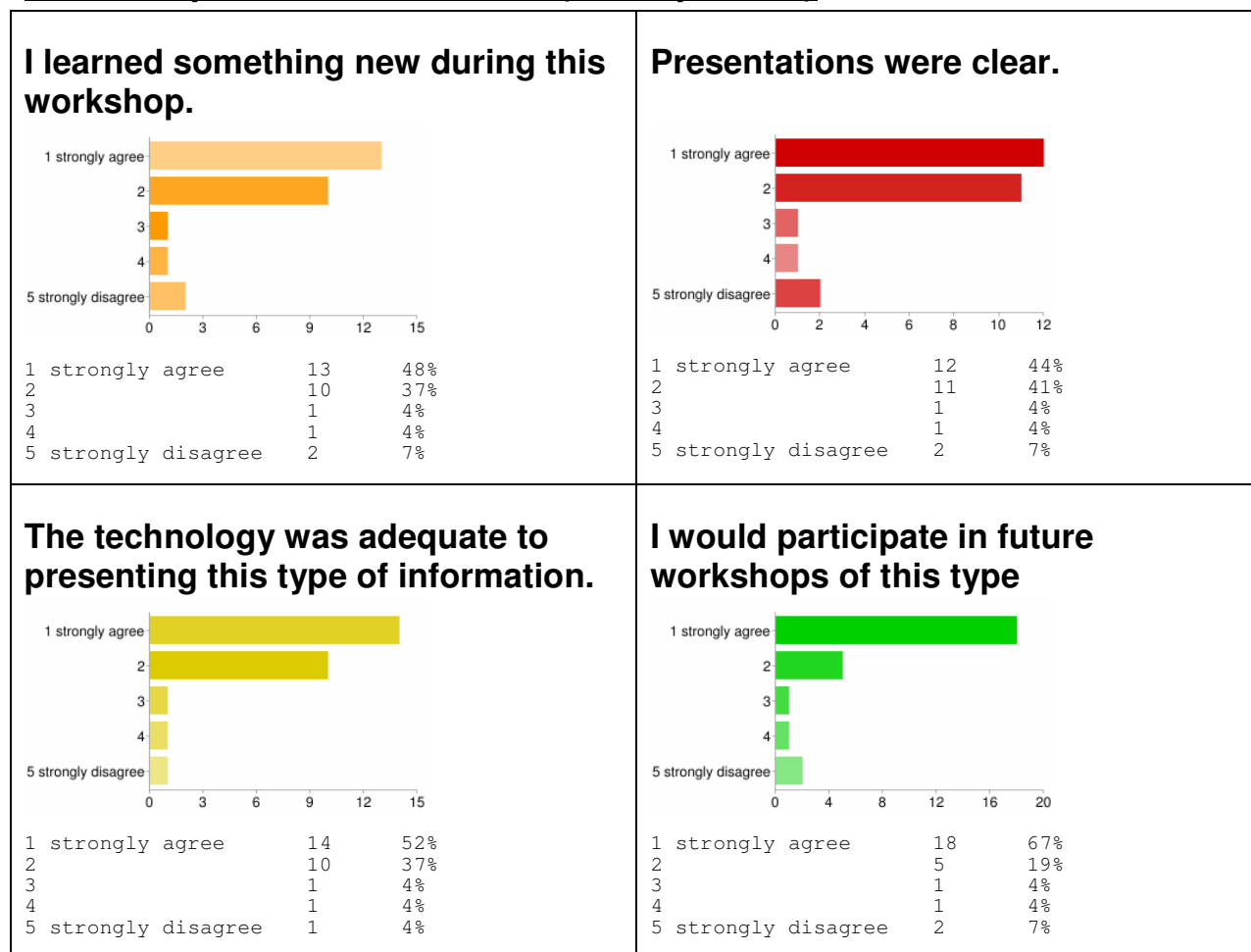
Selected Comments

I am pleased we were given access to the recording. I had to step out a few times so it is nice to be able to go back to the time I missed.

Illuminate is a great platform. Very knowledgeable presenters.

Great job! very informative.

Fellowships in the Humanities (27 responses)



Selected Comments

Until the q&a session at the end, the presentations were somewhat boilerplate. A lot of the information seemed like things that could be pulled from the web. It would be nice to have the presenters spend more time on information or suggestions that aren't readily available from other sources.

"To be worth an hour and a half of work time, there really has to be something going on that can't be just read on the web. This requires genuine interactivity (i.e. a Q & A session) or someone presenting something new (rather than information that's available on the web).

What was done was done well, but I don't feel it was worth my time."

Most of the information presented could be readily found on the website of these grant organizations. Therefore, a lot of time seemed to be wasted going over familiar territory. I would've preferred information on insiders' perspectives--techniques for writing strong grant proposals, success stories, etc.

All the presenters did was tediously repeat information available on their respective websites, as they repeatedly told us. What a waste of time for everyone involved!

Thank you so much - it was such a great way to showcase these three different but similar funding agencies.

I am new to grant writing, so much of the information was new to me. But, I wondered how much "new" information there was for others. The "avoids" and "make sures" were the most helpful.

The relay was not clear for the ACLS and APS presentation. It distracted from the presentation. The NSF presentation were of the very best quality and standard. I viewed the NSF and humanities presentations and plan to view the international presentation as well.

Federal funds for international programs (23 responses)

<p>I learned something new during this workshop.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>1 strongly agree</td> <td>16</td> <td>70%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>6</td> <td>26%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>1</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 strongly disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </table>	1 strongly agree	16	70%	2	6	26%	3	1	4%	4	0	0%	5 strongly disagree	0	0%	<p>Presentations were clear.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>1 strongly agree</td> <td>11</td> <td>48%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>7</td> <td>30%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>1</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 strongly disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </table>	1 strongly agree	11	48%	2	7	30%	3	4	17%	4	1	4%	5 strongly disagree	0	0%
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<p>The technology was adequate to presenting this type of information.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>1 strongly agree</td> <td>9</td> <td>39%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>8</td> <td>35%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>6</td> <td>26%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 strongly disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </table>	1 strongly agree	9	39%	2	8	35%	3	6	26%	4	0	0%	5 strongly disagree	0	0%	<p>I would participate in future workshops of this type</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>1 strongly agree</td> <td>20</td> <td>87%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>1</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 strongly disagree</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </table>	1 strongly agree	20	87%	2	2	9%	3	1	4%	4	0	0%	5 strongly disagree	0	0%
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Selected Comments

This speaker simply responded to questions sent to her in advance, seemingly without a lot of forethought to organizing them. The presentations for the other webinars, with a prepared PowerPoint and then time for questions, was much more effective.

"It was very helpful that the speaker was able to field questions that were submitted in real time as well as those submitted before the webinar.

“All the topics you've chosen have been of interest though we haven't always been able to find someone to attend. This might be the best way to handle information sessions on some of the funding sources that only affect a few faculty per institution (such as EPA programs, NIST, government labs, USDA, etc). ”

Although not the fault of the webinar sponsors, I would have gotten much more out of the presentation if I had studied the DOE website beforehand. However, reviewing the online material after the fact will undoubtedly suffice.

I look forward to putting more thought into the possibility of applying for this grant. Thanks for making this info available to us!

"This was my 1st Webinar. I'm not a Technology expert so I just knew that I wouldn't be able to download something or something else would go wrong and my computer would crash. I was so shocked that at the very FIRST try I was able to see and hear correctly and even ask a question! "