C-MORE grant-writing workshop: Shaping tomorrow’s leaders in microbial oceanography

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Workshop ideas were discussed extensively with Barbara Bruno and Jacqueline Padilla-Gamiño in the C-MORE Education Office. Grant writing recommendations and guidelines were gathered from an NSF Day at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

The workshop was organized and delivered by Padilla-Gamiño and Bruno on March 4, 2011 (the last day of a C-MORE All Hands meeting). Workshop participants were asked to read over two proposals prior to the workshop and provide recommendations for revisions. Neither proposal has been funded: the first was altered before distribution to workshop participants, in order to learn from examples of ‘what not to do in proposal writing.’ The second was in its original form and had three excellent reviews. The objective with the second proposal was to consider the revision process and how to proceed with a proposal with high potential, in order to resubmit for funding.

The workshop began with a presentation by NSF program director Matt Kane on funding opportunities specific to our field, as well as recommendations on grant writing itself. Matt Kane’s talk was delivered to a large group consisting of C-MORE students, postdocs, and PIs.

The workshop then transitioned discussion of the proposals. For this portion of the workshop only participants (24 graduate students and postdocs) were allowed to attend. The workshop was at capacity. Participants broke into pairs and were given some time to discuss the first proposal (modified from one submitted by Paul Kemp). Paul then led a discussion on how the proposal could be modified and improved. From this discussion, workshop participants learned how to strategically present big ideas and methods for writing realistic project proposals, as well as general rules regarding proposal writing.

The second proposal was evaluated in this same style, but Dan Repeta led the discussion. This gave workshop participants an idea of how daunting the proposal writing process can be. PIs will likely have to resubmit proposals after revising them based on first round reviews, but if the idea is good, it will likely get funded eventually.

We ended with a general question and answer session on proposal writing. PIs gave workshop participants recommendations on how to approach grant writing as a young scientist. Workshop participants then submitted workshop evaluations.

This workshop was evaluated by C-MORE’s external evaluation team, led by Dr. Judith Inazu of the University of Hawaii’s Social Science Research Institute. The workshop was highly rated by all participants. For example, all 23 respondents agreed that the workshop was a good use of their time and all felt that the discussion and interactive portions of the workshop were an effective method to strengthen proposal writing skills.