Topic: Grants and Other External Funding for Community Engagement

Speakers:
Dr. Jorge Atiles (Associate Dean, Extension and Engagement; College of Human Sciences)
Stephen Mason (Associate Vice President; OSU Foundation)
Tory Lightfoot (Research Support Services Manager; College of Arts and Sciences)

Summary:
Dr. Jorge Atiles began the discussion by introducing several concepts that can help guide a search for funding opportunities. Many of these recommendations center on spending time and developing relationships with potential funders. Atiles emphasized that such relationships are key to successful grant seeking because they allow funders to clearly identify the value they receive from their investment. Thus, Atiles encouraged attendees to learn not only about previous grants given by a particular funder, but their organizational history, goals, and future plans as well. Atiles emphasized that this often means “dreaming together” with potential funders—identifying goals and passions shared by both the grant-seeker and funder. This relationship should endure through all stages of applying for, receiving, implementing, and reporting on a grant. Thus, budgets should be created with community needs and logistics clearly identified, and all impacts of funded work should be communicated clearly to funders and all other stakeholders. Atiles concluded with two recommendations for identifying potential grants. First, he encouraged attendees to spend at least 30-60 minutes a week browsing online grants databases and websites. Second, he also encouraged attendees to look for any potential connection (e.g., shared—past or present—research topic, geography, or institution) they may have with a potential funder. These connections can provide an important first step in creating a necessary relationship.

Mr. Stephen Mason then introduced attendees to the work of the OSU Foundation. The Foundation connects
members of the OSU community with sources of private money. Mason indicated that his job is to connect companies and foundations with the right people on an OSU campus. Throughout these connections, Foundation staff play an advisory role, interacting with each individual and/or group when necessary to facilitate financial gift giving. Mason said that Foundation staff are patient and willing to let relationships develop without their direct influence when possible. Similarly, Mason said that faculty and staff can submit project ideas to the Foundation (via an online form) who will then monitor potential funding sources and can even help an individual develop a grant proposal. Mason noted that some departments and colleges may prefer that project ideas be submitted through college-level staff. Mason emphasized that no matter the administrative mechanism, the Foundation wants to help develop gifts of all sizes—large and small—and that all private funding is required to flow through the Foundation. Mason concluded by noting that while focus areas can become more or less attractive to funders over time (trends the Foundation tracks), he recommended two ways to attract funders’ interest at this time. First, collect appropriate, adequate data to justify an investment in higher education. Second, collaborate with a local nonprofit to demonstrate a commitment to and knowledge of a community.

Ms. Tory Lightfoot then discussed some of the ways in which the National Science Foundation (NSF) has begun requiring evidence of community benefit (which it refers to as “broader impacts”) in its grant-making. Broader impacts have become an increasingly important element of NSF proposals. Indeed, Lightfoot said that two criteria now dominate proposals for NSF funds: intellectual merits and broader impacts. She also reported that the NSF has similarly expressed an interest in funding more projects that benefit under-represented groups, a term that may vary depending on the discipline in which a proposal is submitted—in other words, that different groups may be under-represented in different disciplines. Lightfoot said that she works with many faculty members who, before applying for NSF funds, had not previously considered the potential impact their work could have on a local community. With few exceptions, however, she reported that these faculty find connecting their grant-funded work with a community to be quite satisfying and something that want to do again.