

Social Responsibility – A Padded Budget

<p>This is a role play involving a researcher who wants to seek funding for gathering baseline data on health behavior in the nearby Latino community which will be the basis for a larger grant that would fund a public health campaign, his/her department chair who is insisting that the research budget be padded to benefit the department, and a trusted colleague with whom the researcher consults about how to counter his/her chair’s demands.</p> <p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher • Department Chair • Colleague—the Researcher’s Trusted Other <p>Scenarios</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenario One: Researcher discussion with Trusted Colleague • Scenario Two: Researcher discussion with Department Chair 	<p>Role Play Tips</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed role descriptions and prompts are provided to guide the role play. This is not a strict script. Encourage role players to familiarize themselves with their characters and get creative! • Encourage role players to use their actual names in place of character names. • Experiment with changing the prompts to inject some variability in role play dynamics (e.g., have a character offer a conciliatory opening line or a belligerent opening line to see how that changes the course of the role play). • Run a role play more than once, changing role players.
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Role Play: Researcher Role Guide

Character Description: The Researcher

You have established an excellent relationship with one of the Latino community’s in your city, and have promised the leaders of that community that you will work with them to develop a public health education campaign. Part of that agreement is that you will seek an NIH R03 grant to fund a health behavior survey that will inform the basis of your public health education campaign. You have done surveys of this kind before and are quite certain that the work can be done for \$50,000 per year over 2 years. You are confident that you have a feasible plan. The survey you are going to administer is a preliminary step toward submitting a very strong and larger R01 application to create and evaluate the health education campaign.

Such a small grant for such a high priority cause should be easy to obtain with your professional track record. Your Latino collaborators are very happy with this plan and respect your professional reputation and your commitment to their community. They are quite certain that they can look forward to a

successful health campaign and a healthier community, thanks to a strong partnership with you. In turn, you see your partnership with this community as an important long-term commitment.

When you develop your proposal and take it to your department chair for his/her signature, he looks it over and scowls. S/he wants to see more money coming into his department and pushes you to inflate the budget, and submit it as an R21 with a budget of \$125,000 in year one and \$150,000 in year two. S/he argues that you are expected to cover at least 50% of your salary with grant funding and reminds you that the R21 would bring in over \$150,000 in additional facility and administrative costs (F&A), some of which returns to the department. The department chair adds that reviewers won't know what percent effort is actually needed to execute the project. S/he wants you to pad the budget by paying yourself at a higher percent effort than you can devote to the project, and by adding all sorts of extra, unnecessary costs, including the effort of some departmental colleagues.

You feel that such an inflated budget will fool no one and jeopardize your chances of getting this preliminary grant. And inflated budgets are clearly corrupt.

Role Play: Department Chair Role Guide

Character Description: The Department Chair

You are the head of a large department at a fairly renowned institution. You are under a lot of pressure from the administration to have faculty salaries supported, on average, at 50% by grants. You get no sympathy in this from some of your faculty who naively expect the university to support them even in a currently poor economy. One of your community "do gooder" faculty has just come into your office with a grant proposal that will provide a mere 5% of his/her salary, though the project is quite ambitious and will benefit the Latino community around the university. S/he seems to feel that supporting the people in the community is just as important as supporting his/her department in the university! S/he also seems to think that money grows on trees.

Role Play: Trusted Colleague Role Guide

Character Description: The Trusted Colleague

You have been on this faculty for 15 years and understand the bind that the department chair is in. While you can see both sides of this issue, you know how to speak to his values when negotiating with the chair and you understand the motives, personalities, and values of your colleagues quite well. In this case, as a trusted friend, you want to be supportive of your idealistic colleague who does not want to pad his budget.

- The following are the kinds of insightful questions that a trusted colleague might ask:
- What is the main goal the chair seeks to meet? Is it reasonable?
- What were the funding expectations at your time of hire? Are you meeting them?
- How can you reframe your position to support his overall goal while also supporting your goal?

- Are you willing to give a little if s/he gives a little?
- Is what the department chair asks illegal?
- Has your Office of Sponsored Programs published any guidance on budget development?
- Is it helpful to explain to the chair that you feel stuck between a rock and a hard place—wanting to avoid fraud while advancing the financial well-being of the department?

Scenario One

The researcher has just been to see the department chair, expecting praise and a signature on his/her grant proposal. Instead, s/he has been admonished for not putting himself/herself on the grant for 50% and otherwise padding the budget. S/he is so taken aback that he simply thanks his/her chair and leaves hurriedly. S/he thinks for a few minutes, and then phones his/her trusted colleague to see if they might brainstorm about how best to negotiate with the department chair.

The trusted colleague comes right over to the researcher's office.

Prompt

Researcher: "I can't believe I'm being asked to inflate the budget on my grant proposal just so the department chair can rake in more money. Do you have any advice for me?"

Colleague: How do you respond?

Scenario Two

You return to see your department chair, grant application in hand.

Prompt

Chair: "I see you have your proposal. I hope you have revised it as I requested."

Researcher: How do you respond?

Take away points:

- A good research budget is logical, justifiable, and based on integrity. Paying for your effort on a research project is important, especially if your department has funding expectations for its faculty. Enlisting the help of experienced colleagues and/or financial staff can help you to estimate the costs of a proposed project, the amount of funding that is reasonable to ask for, how to justify costs, and ultimately come to a balanced solution between your interests and your department's interests.

References

DuBois, J., Sieber, J., Bante, H., & Partin, K. (n.d.). RCR Casebook: Stories about Researchers Worth Discussing. Retrieved November 7, 2019, from <https://ori.hhs.gov/rcr-casebook-stories-about-researchers-worth-discussing>.