

The Applied Economics Profession in a New Era of Competitive Grants

How to Succeed as a Multi-Disciplinary Scientist

Webinar presented by

Council on Food, Agricultural and Resource
Economics (C-FARE) www.cfare.org and
National Association of Agricultural Economics
Administrators (NAAEA)

March 31, 2010

NAAEA



Welcome and logistics

- Welcome on behalf of C-FARE and the NAAEA
 - We are delighted to have 100 sites (max) participating
 - Many viewers are sharing access

- Using the webinar interface
 - Main screen shows presentations
 - Message box on left shows messages to you
 - You can write text messages using the chat line at the bottom left.
 - Use this to ask questions and respond to others.
 - If your question is not answered, repeat the question.

- Webinar is being recorded in its entirety and will be posted at www.cfare.org and other websites.

Agenda

- ❑ **Introduction** - Moderator - Scott Swinton, Michigan State University (10 minutes)
- ❑ **Overview of NIFA and the new AFRI** – Deborah Sheely, USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture (15 minutes)
- ❑ **How to Position Yourself in a Leadership Role on a Multi-Disciplinary Grant** – Elena Irwin, Ohio State University (15 minutes)
- ❑ **Becoming a Team Player in a Multi-Disciplinary Grant** – Lisa House, University of Florida (15 minutes)
- ❑ **Open Questions and Discussion** – (15 minutes)
- ❑ **Conclusion** – Scott Swinton – (10 minutes)

Moderator: Scott Swinton



Professor, Michigan State University

Email: swintons@msu.edu

Website: <http://www.msu.edu/~swintons/>

- Current research on economics of enhancing provision of ecosystem services from agriculture. Teach grad agricultural production economics and undergrad ecological economics.
- Projects with the National Science Foundation, U.S. Dept. of Energy, U.S. Agency for International Development and USDA AFRI.

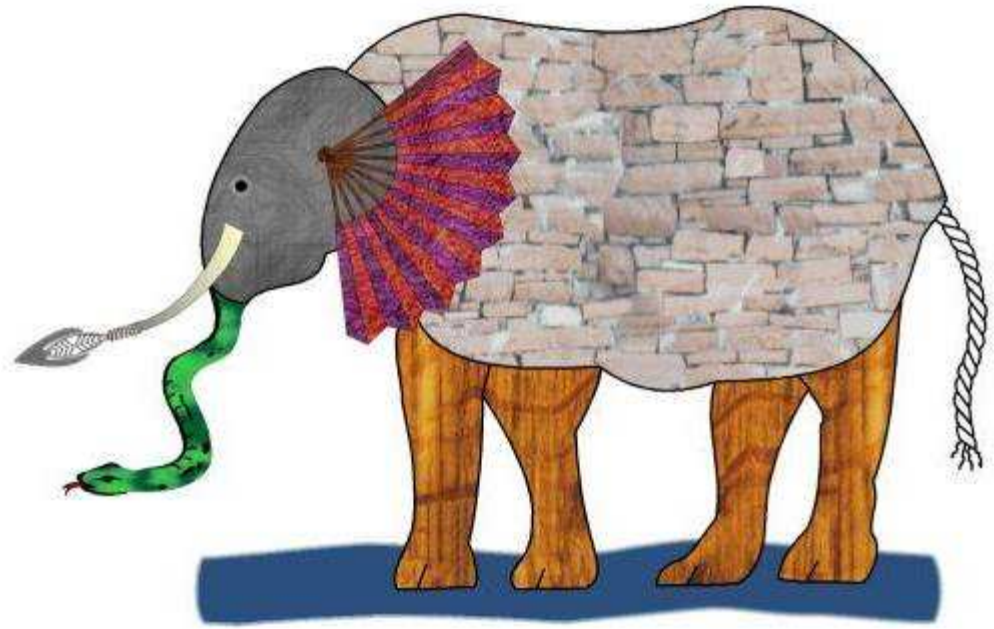
Purpose of Webinar

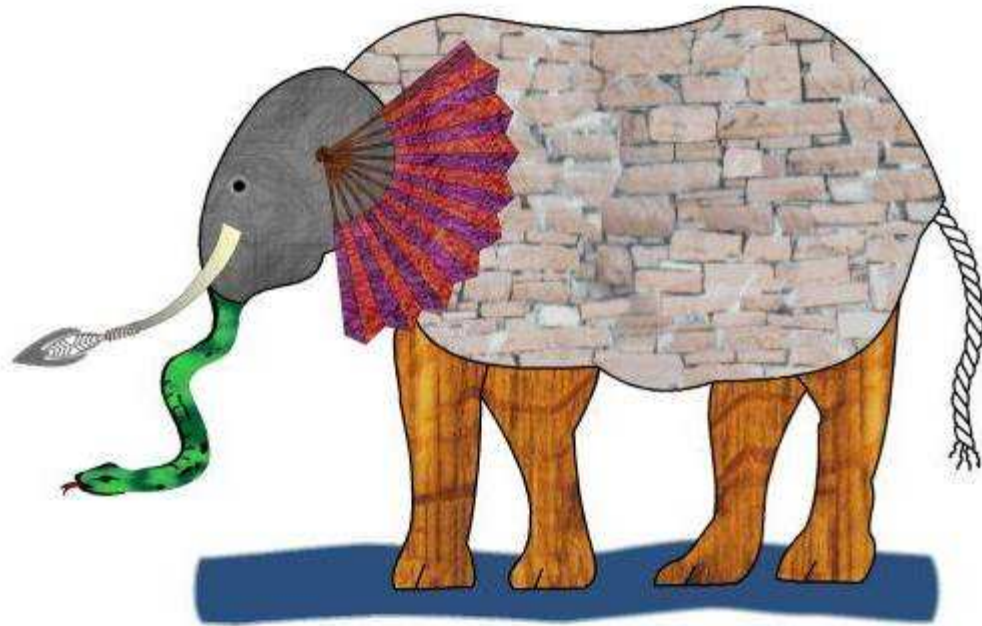
- **Context:** New grant programs such as the USDA Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) focus funding on large, multi-disciplinary projects.
- **Goal:** To provide a forum for applied economists on how position themselves strategically in these major, multi-disciplinary grants.
- **Focus:** We focus on changes in USDA's Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). Similar approaches apply to other agencies as well.

Fable of the Blind Men and the Elephant



Slides from Tom Baerwald, NSF
via Elena Irwin





“And so these men of Hindustan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right
And all were in the wrong.”

- John Godfrey Saxe, mid 1800's

Major science policy problems are interdisciplinary, research funding too

- USDA Agricultural & Food Research Initiative programs

- NSF
 - Coupled Natural-Human Systems
 - Human & Social Dynamics



Applied economists bring valuable disciplinary skills to the multidisciplinary kitchen

USTENSILES DE CUISINE / KITCHEN UTENSILS



- ❑ Framing problems
- ❑ Production & consumption behavior
- ❑ Incentives, markets and feedbacks
- ❑ Economic impact and returns to research
- ❑ Modeling skills

Points to consider in joining these skills with those of researchers in other fields

- How to position yourself to partner with other researchers?
- How to design and manage a multi-disciplinary team for success?
- What are the plusses and minuses of multi-disciplinary team research?

Deborah Sheely



Deputy Administrator, Competitive Programs – USDA NIFA

Email: dsheely@nifa.usda.gov

Website:

http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/AllUnits/staff_view.cfm?record_id=146&CFID=10924685&CFTOKEN=65730675

- Deborah provides leadership to the USDA NIFA Competitive Programs Unit
- Prior to becoming the Deputy Administrator, she was the Director of Integrated Programs at CSREES.

Elena Irwin



Associate Professor
The Ohio State University

Email: irwin.78@osu.edu

Website:

<http://aede.osu.edu/people/display2.php?user=irwin.78>

- Dr. Irwin is currently a Co-Investigator with the Baltimore Ecosystem Study, and a past Co-Investigator of the Lake Erie Biocomplexity project.
- She is the co-recipient of the 2009 Sustainability Science Award from the Ecological Society of America for her coauthored paper in PNAS's special feature on land change science in 2007.

Lisa House



Professor and Director, Florida
Agricultural Market Research Center,
University of Florida

Email: lahouse@ufl.edu

Website:

http://www.fred.ifas.ufl.edu/showdirector_yentry.php?id=7&membertypeid=1

- Her research interests focus on consumer preferences and demand for food products.
- She has received grants to research subjects such as consumer acceptance of genetically modified foods, demand for seafood products, perception of fruits and vegetables, and the role of social networks in new food product adoption.

Concluding Remarks

- Partnerships that work
- Project planning & management
- Benefit-cost

Finding good partners

- Positioning yourself for partnerships
 - Listen to potential collaborators
 - Attend their seminars
 - Advise their graduate students
 - Communicate economic insights related to ***their*** research interests
- Identifying good potential partners
 - Good personal chemistry
 - Strong in their fields
 - Reliable at getting tasks done on time
 - Open to sharing research leadership (*jazz ensemble*)

Multidisciplinary team as jazz ensemble

- ❑ When another skilled musician plays the melody, play good harmony.
- ❑ Everyone gets to solo, showing their disciplinary strengths.

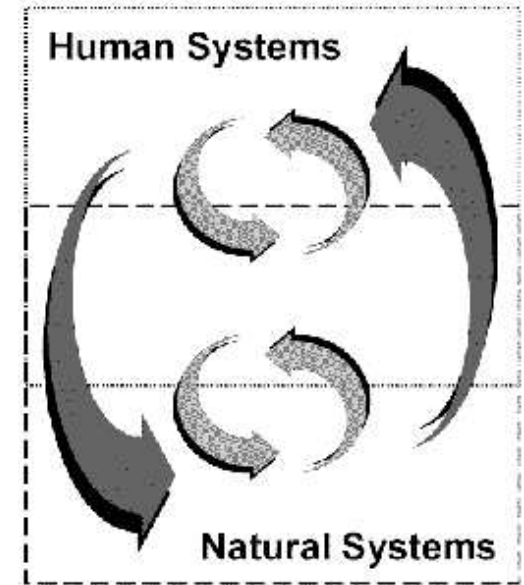


Project design and management

- Research idea & proposals
 - Unifying concept/image (“ecosystem services”)
 - Plenty of time

- Management
 - Budget for communication
 - Grad students as “glue”

- Diffusion
 - Writing together builds bonds



Team building as an investment

- Planning team research takes time
 - Meet to share research ideas, interests & skills (before grant announced)
 - No track record with the team? Consider a planning grant.
 - Monitor future grant RFA's

- A successful multidisciplinary team is an investment that can pay off over future projects

Evaluation advice for administrators (Hello, NAAEA, that's you!)

- Consider criteria that measure general impact – not just in the discipline
 - Journal Impact Factors (often higher in interdisciplinary journals)
 - Total citation counts of published works



Finally, multidisciplinary research can be fun, rewarding and important

- Research innovation can occur at the interstices between disciplines.
 - Out of the comfort zone and into the excitement zone.
 - Bioeconomic systems modeling
 - Policy simulations

- Making a difference
 - Policy relevance, scientific innovation
 - News coverage



Opportunities and thanks

- For more:
 - Organized symposium at AAEA (July 25-27)
 - C-FARE will send details to all webinar attendees

- Please contact C-FARE with info about your multidisciplinary projects and grant applications

- Thanks to all from NAAEA and C-FARE (and from us for their sponsorship).