

Virtual REU Site Director Meeting

Tuesday, November 24th, 8:30 am PST

8:30 Meeting Opened by Ian Billick

8:35 Introduction of LC

8:45 NSF Overview (Sally O'Connor, REU program officer)

- Statistics on 2019 vs 2020 summer programs was shared.
- Goals for the meeting
 - o More REU sites running in 2021
 - o Determine what info is needed to make good decision for your students and site
 - o Anticipate changes in budget
 - o Understand the use of a No Cost Extension for your grant from a canceled program
- Be clear about COVID-19 requirements from your institution when students apply this year.
- Last year's students (who have not graduated) should apply again. Use your judgement on deciding between last year's students and this year's cohort. Consider accepting more students if you are able.
- An estimated 153 students were accepted last summer, could not attend, and have graduated.
- Discussion points
 - o Barriers to opening REU sites in 2021
 - o Is there interest in site collaboration?
 - o Should students accepted in 2020 be offered opportunities this year?
 - o Should NSF-funded Postdoc fellow act as mentors for REUs?
 - o How are students matched to projects and locality?
 - o Uncertainty- plan to operate a program. If you incur costs and the program can't run, your grant will still cover your costs.
 - o Graduated students: Should we try to offer them opportunities? If so, how?
 - o How can we use the Travel Grant money?

8:57 Summary of Survey Results (Liz Silva)

- BIO-REU Pulse Check results
 - o 67% of programs did not run
 - o Lab/Bench programs were hit the hardest
 - o Programs got creative, had virtual programs, allowed off-site housing options w/ wi-fi and cellular as part of the budget.
 - o Focus on local students
 - o Barriers to programs that ran in 2020 included cohort cohesion, student work from home challenges, limited faculty capacity
 - o 2021 Barriers to running a program include housing budget concerns, faculty availability, lab availability, and general COVID-19 concerns.

- What support would you like from the LC and NSF? Flexibility around cohort size, flexibility around funding, project guidelines, and creative ideas for programs.
- The full results of the survey will be posted on Slack

9:05 Question and Answer Session

-Kyle Haynes: If we need to change the length of our program, by when should we submit our request for Change of Scope?

Sally O'Connor: Send an email before submitting the change of scope.

-Jose Gonzalez: Are there any restrictions or documentation we need to do in case we have to go with a virtual program in 2021 as a plan B?

Sally O'Connor: NSF will be flexible with program changes to virtual or hybrid programs. Just an email to me (Sally) is necessary. I will respond with a confirmation and upload said email to your file for documentation. The goal is to provide REU opportunities to as many students as possible this summer.

-Kristina Cammen: Should off-site/remote students be provided housing and meal budgets as they are still incurring these costs, particularly low-income students?

Sally O'Connor: Each undergrad student should be treated the same, whether on-site or off-site. The difference is with the students that have already graduated because we don't have the money for them and we can service more students if we use local students without housing and meal money.

-Sally O'Connor: Around the middle of February we will have our first set of contacts with PIs. The uncertainties are that we have a limited amount of money.

-Ian Billick: What is your perspective on prioritizing last year's students that were accepted vs. this year's students?

Sally O'Connor: Recommends not disregarding this year's students to accept all of your last year's students. Each site director will have to make this decision on their own.

-Esther Angert: If a student is identified with a positive COVID-19 result, they would need to be accommodated separately from the other students. How can those added costs of quarantine be supplemented?

Sally O'Connor: If a student must be isolated somewhere like a hotel room, you can use your NSF money to cover the hotel. You should have a deficit at the end of the year you can use.

-Bob Podolsky: Should the guidelines of accepting local students from your home institution be disregarded this year?

Sally O'Connor: You can do more local as part of planning, but do not disregard the goal of the program. Consider using local students from neighboring institutions. There is no right or wrong answer as long as you keep the goal insight. Also, students coming home for

the summer could be an option. NSF will support you with your decision. This will be an exception this year and likely a few years after.

-Bob Podolsky: What about students that were accepted last year at my institution that I don't have space for? Could other programs take them?

Sally O'Connor: It would be good to know if any programs can accept additional students. We are also thinking about the NSF Postdocs as mentors to accept more students. For that to happen, it would be advantageous to the Postdoc to have someone local.

-Michael Finiguerra: Students are housed at a different college and are required to carpool. We don't know if the dorm will be open or if they will be allowed to carpool together. Can we accept local students that have their own housing and transportation?

Sally O'Connor: You have the flexibility to accept local students if it is best. You may want to look into the vaccine as an option, but you have to play it by ear. I'm concerned about older mentors and contact with students, as well.

Ian Billick- If someone goes to a virtual program, does that require a change of scope?

Sally O'Connor: As long as the project is the same, you do not need a change of scope. A change of scope is a change in the actual program, not the way it is offered.

-Ian Billick: Do students accepted in 2020 have priority?

Sally O'Connor: They need to reapply, but who you accept is up to you.

-Lauren Esposito: Could a large housing option that is paid for by REUs also be used to house the Postdocs that don't have housing funds?

Sally O'Connor: Yes.

-Gary Benson: Will costs for COVID-19 testing be covered?

Sally O'Connor: Yes.

9:33 What we learned from last summer (Joseph Ayoob, Fern Tsien, Alan Berkowitz)

- Joe introduced his VROOM group success. They met beginning last April and worked together throughout their programs.

-VROOM brainstormed to address common concerns on how to engage students, deal with IT issues, took advantage of opportunities available to everyone. If one program offered an opportunity, it was offered to other programs in the group.

-Reserved a common time slot for programming between sites.

-Take-home Messages

- Students were very grateful
- Mentor engagement/intentionality was higher and possibly better than other summers

- Programs ran better than expected
- There is a lot more we can do as a group (even beyond the pandemic)

-Joe Ayoob spoke about his specific program (TECBio REU).

- Did lot of small group interactions. Intos, research training, committees/teams, journal club, wellness check-ins and individual meetings with students.
- Adjusted expectations of mentors and students
- TECBio games, interviews, and fun at the end of the week (TGIFs)
- VR poster session with AltspaceVR

-Alan Berkowitz spoke about his specific program. Brought up how affected his students were by mental health issues of the pandemic, BLM, outside issues, and how valuable checking in and having sessions about the issues was to the students.

- More pre-program engagement
- Took 2 extra students
- Projects- data collection from home, data harvested from internet for analysis/modeling, and existing mentor datasets
- Nurturing- mentor/mentee contracts, teams of 3 students & 1 postdoc, tea times & office hours.
- Balance of research with PD/Enrichment- Authentic can be challenging, didn't need as much as anticipated.

-Fern Tsien spoke about her specific program.

- Review of application, acceptance (March)
- Projects had to be adaptable to virtual program format
- On-going communication to transition towards virtual program- with mentors, with accepted students, with other REU PIs (VROOM)
- Before the program started (accepted students)- asked about IT capabilities, asked for student photos.
- Orientation- reviewed zoom etiquette, program expectations, introductions, contact info
- Via Zoom- student/mentor meetings, weekly professional development seminars, mentors' departmental seminars, meetings were added as needed (BLM, pandemic concerns.
- Virtual poster session
- Virtual community outreach to middle and high school students- recorded presentations
- Continued communication with REU PIS

9:58 Closing by Ian Billick

- The LC will be scheduling an open house session for those that couldn't make

-Thanked everyone for their commitment

10:00 Additional Questions

-Joe Ayoob: Will VROOM continue? Yes, that is the intention.

-Cherie Dotson: Concerned about switch to Slack and missing meeting info. How do I make sure I don't miss notifications? Recommended still sending emails.

Joe Ayoob: You can change the notifications settings if you dig into it Slack. Also found it daunting at first.

-Sarah Cohen: Should students be working part time during the program?

Ian Billick: Wants to follow up and confirm with Sally. Thinks that NSF has been flexible given the current circumstances. Recommends documenting it and sending it to Sally so that she can save it to your file.

-Sarah Cohen: Questioned ability of students to do virtual programs with limited bandwidth.

Ian Billick: Recommends doing tech surveys.

Rosemary Smith: We provided loaner laptops and ensured whatever platform was good for them.

Sarah Cohen: Felt that some students felt pressured to say they had IT capabilities that they did not. They live in communities where there just isn't good connectivity.

-Carlos Goller: Should students get the same housing and food stipends?

Joe Ayoob: We gave it to the students.

Ian Billick: Recommends always making a memo of what you did and file it with your finance department so that he can look back and see why.

-Carlos Goller: Do you have any tips or suggestions for captioning or translating through Zoom?

Joe Ayoob: Usually he has 2 human interpreters on the call. Did not have success with automated captioning.

Chat Questions & Comments:

(answered questions in green)

10:15:44 From Gary Benson : If our university requires weekly covid testing (as they do now for all students), they may charge for that for unenrolled students (such as REU students). Can we cover those potential costs with our budget for ask for a supplement?

10:16:06 From Kelly Liu : we normally do not take any in house students. Given the possible COVID restrictions with travel and housing in summer 2021, can we offer our program strictly to in house students?

10:16:45 From Maya Watts : We plan to have our program in-person but have the too few mentors (as they have a backlog of research and travel now). Do we have to gain approval to broaden our mentor pool past the list of mentors submitted in our grant?

10:18:02 From Katherine L Gross : Can REU funds be used to cover the cost of testing.. or the increase in room/board charges to allow students to be on site

10:19:38 From Kurt : May we legally restrict acceptance to those that have a local address? Our mentors are reluctant to accept a student that does not have local family support in case they become ill.

10:22:11 From " Jean" : its surprising to hear that some places would welcome students to their campus. At U. Chicago visiting students cannot come to campus; we dont know when that will be lifted.

10:22:14 From David Brown : Last summer we were able to recruit students from other schools in region, in some cases last minute, but we were dependent on them having their own vehicles for travel to field sites.

10:27:57 From rosemary smith : We did the same. Local students lived at home and drove their own cars to field sites.

10:31:31 From Rachel Skvirsky : If we hold a virtual program, I am still unclear as to whether we should pay for their room and board while at home.

10:32:02 From Tony Wilson : When would we have a sense of the level of additional funding available from REU travel funds that would be available for supporting graduating students accepted into deferred SS20 programs? ***Answered below by Ian Billick**

10:32:30 From Jane Disney : Last summer, we offered our remote REU students a stipend for housing...

10:37:11 From Xinnian Chen : Virtual meetings have opened so much opportunities and I wonder if we can do some joint events, such as R, Python, RCR training as listed here.

10:39:16 From Sarah Cohen : We didn't offer housing stipends since we were not housing them, however we took extra mentees into our program using extra funds.

10:44:19 From Xinnian Chen : Maybe we can use the VR more often during the program?

***10:44:19 From Ian Billick : Tony Wilson- you asked when we will know about whether there will be funds available for graduating students. We are actively working on that issue now and hope to have things figured out in December. No guarantees, but we realize it would be helpful to have this worked out before admissions decisions next summer.**

10:47:09 From Ian Billick : If we work out a mechanism for funding graduated students, we will announce it to everybody and give everybody an opportunity to request funds. If we have more applicants than we have funding for, we will work out a system on how we decide-- it may be something as simple as randomizing choices.

10:47:18 From Katherine L Gross : We had a virtual PD program (which was open to past REUs and incoming/accepted students) and had one session focused on the

reaction to the George Floyd death.. this was 'transformational' for the students.. they were able to open up and it led to a stronger feeling of engagement

10:49:12 From adam summers : An unexpected challenge for our in person program was when a student's parent went on a ventilator during the program. The mental health challenges and potential logistical issues were daunting.

10:50:46 From Ian Billick : My experience is that we have both become more aware of mental health issues in recent years, and that there are more mental health issues to deal with (as measured by students disclosing issues to us). Undoubtedly covid has created even more mental health challenges for everybody. Great point for us all to think about!

10:52:55 From Kristina Cammen : Will VROOM (or something similar) run again in 2021? We will likely be running a virtual program for the first time and this sounds like a great resource!

10:54:00 From Eric Nagy (he/him) : Or even to integrate into in-person programs. Would be great to retain much of the creativity 2020 generated.

10:54:12 From Sarah Cohen : Is there an option for students to participate in the REU as a part-time activity if they want to take outside classes or jobs?

10:55:57 From Xinnian Chen : @Eric@Kristina Agree! It might need a little more coordination as the number of students will be more than a large Zoom can handle.

10:58:20 From Alan Berkowitz - Cary : We did a final symposium via Zoom ... 7 minute presentations plus 3 minutes Q&A ... followed by an open session with students and mentors all together, with each mentor saying something about the students, which was a really wonderful way to end up. Many glowing comments from the students at that time, too. A real REU love fest!

10:58:28 From Cherie Dotson : Virtual poster session.com is a great tool

10:59:38 From rosemary smith : The final presentations by Zoom were great because the students could invite family, faculty who recommended them, and others to view. Great turnout for our students.

11:00:05 From Alan Berkowitz - Cary : It'd be great to have the chat if possible.

11:01:09 From Cherie Dotson : I would not have know about this meeting had it not been for Sally's message. Can you still communicate via email until we are all fully transitioned to Slack. Please advise on how to best get notified about events without getting overloaded with notifications that Slack sends out.