Grants: Building a strong alliance team

Hello, and welcome to one of a series of virtual information videos.

My name is Catherine Bilheimer, and I am a grant manager with DPR's Grants Program.

Today, I will be discussing with you how to build a strong Alliance team.

What is an Alliance Grant?

DPR's Alliance Grants promote or increase the implementation, expansion, or adoption of effective, proven, and affordable IPM systems or practices.

These can be in agricultural, urban, or wildland settings.

Alliance Grants strive to decrease risks to public health and the environment, and bring together a team of experts who support successful project execution.

What makes a successful project?

Successful projects demonstrate strong partnerships, outreach, or an educational or training component to promote IPM and the broad application of the proposed IPM systems or practices.

They can serve as a model for similar situations, and have a high potential for wide adoption.

Of note, an Alliance project does not focus on conducting research.

Projects that focus on research can be funded through DPR's Research Grants Program.

So what is an Alliance Team?

An Alliance, or Alliance Team, is the group of individuals and organizations that have broad influence

who will jointly accomplish the goals laid out in the proposal application.

An Alliance should include a lead principal investigator who will oversee coordination of the project.

Team members can include a broad swath of participants, but the best Alliances have team members with relevant knowledge in the field of study and strong connections to the intended audiences.

So how does one go about assembling an effective Alliance Team?

Assembling an effective Alliance Team is essential to the success of the project.

Alliance team members should include active participants in the project.

Examples include commodity group representatives, pest control advisors or pest control operators, growers, academic and private advisers, school district representatives, representatives of public health entities, urban or industry representatives, sustainability or certification programs, non-governmental organizations, and other entities with a regional scope.

Each Alliance Grant will be assigned a DPR grant manager.

The DPR grant manager takes an active part in the Alliance Team, including helping to create partnerships, setting priorities, and carrying out the project.

The manager oversees objectives, tasks, deliverables, and reporting.

Many Alliance Grants have an educational or training program.

If an alliance project includes a training program, there are several factors that can make training programs more effective.

One: include time and travel funds for trainers to meet and practice as part of the scope of work and budget.

Two: online course creation requires experienced online course designers and a realistic estimate of the time required.

Content must come from those who are experts, and their costs must be included in the scope of work and budget.

Interviews were conducted with principal investigators and team members from seven Alliance projects asking about their experience with creating strong Alliance Teams.

A number of common elements emerged, and I will go into greater depth for each of these in the following slides.

The elements that came up time and time again were: reaching out to the right context is critical, involve the Alliance Team in the proposal development process, proposal flexibility really matters, consider the number and role of Alliance Team members, the PI has a unique role, and hit the ground running.

The first element of creating strong Alliance Teams is having and reaching out to the right contacts.

Ways to do that are to stay up date on the recent advances and happenings in the project field areas so that you are familiar with and reach out to the right professionals and experts.

Look at your objectives and tasks carefully, and reach out to contacts that are highly qualified in these particular areas.

Some organizations have lots of partners, and they can reach out to them and possibly include them as Alliance Team members.

The second element that emerged from conversations with team members was to involve the team when developing the proposal.

You can do this by starting to reach out several months ahead of the proposal due date.

Communicate with members individually or as a group.

Involve members in the proposal development process so that they can help shape the proposal and have a sense of commitment. Let members know what is specifically expected of them and the required timeline.

This can be done by assigning specific hours to activities in the scope of work.

Request a letter of intent from members to include in the proposal.

This letter of support details the expectations of the members.

It is important to allow for some flexibility in the proposal.

Write the proposal and add flexibility - for example, sometimes there is a need for a specific team member but the individual has not been identified during the proposal development process.

Also, have some flexibility for members to contribute to the team in the way that they want.

It is important to consider the number and role of Alliance Team members when developing your Alliance Team.

The number of members depends on the project and the tasks that are assigned to various members.

Start with a small core team that understands the tasks and is committed to completing the project.

Other members will likely emerge as the project takes shape.

Engage team members and allow them to contribute in a way that is fun and meaningful for them.

Make members feel invested so they have a sense of ownership.

This can be done things such as authoring a chapter, participating in a video, or being part of a publication.

The principal investigator, or PI, has the primary responsibility for financial management and control of project funds, and they are responsible for all aspects of project administration.

A PI should handle the logistics so that they can ensure that the team functions well.

They need to build in resiliency, and, when there are inevitable issues, it is up to the PI to make up the difference, all without putting too much pressure on the team.

The team process can be slow and the PI will need to anticipate and accommodate for that.

The PI needs to be patient and accepting of all input.

The final common element that emerged from our conversations with PIs and Alliance Team members was to hit the ground running.

It is important to plan a team meeting very early in the proposal development process for the members to begin to work collaboratively and envision the objectives for the project. Use this time to write well-constructed objectives and tasks that will allow the project work to start right away.

Now I will walk through an example of an Alliance Grant project.

This is a project that employs community science for early detection and rapid response to optimize control of invasive plants in California wildlands.

This example has been made up, but it can be found in its entirety in our sample Alliance scope of work and budget contained within the supplemental guidance documents included on the Alliance Grant application materials webpage.

In this example Alliance project, there were four goals.

The first: to engage and educate community members and field crews in identifying and documenting observations of invasive and early detection and rapid response species through the use of a mobile application.

Second: they were to devise a plan for land managers to verify observations submitted by community members and field crews, and implement appropriate control methods.

Third: it aimed to to evaluate and refine the early detection and rapid response program for future adoption, and finally, they aim to perform outreach by promoting and demonstrating the program in other regions.

They identified the audience and the necessary expertise for their project.

The audience consisted of community scientists, such as members of the public, volunteer groups, and work crews, and land managers.

And the necessary expertise to accomplish these goals was weed science, especially as it relates to California ecosystems, relevant software development, such as plant observation mobile application, and, finally, teaching and communication.

This is an example of the Alliance Team that would be created for this fictitious example of an Alliance Grant.

First of all, the principal investigator.

In this case, the principal investigator is from a nonprofit organization, and they have expertise in California invasive plant management and are familiar with carrying out early detection and rapid response programs.

They have administered workshops and trainings and they are in charge of project administration.

Second, on the team would be a designer for plant identification mobile application.

And these qualifications would be: able to tailor mobile applications to different user groups and create user-friendly informational material.

Also, coordinators for volunteer group organizations are part of this team, and these members know the needs of volunteer groups.

They facilitate communications with the public and volunteer groups, and they inform the program what will work for volunteer groups across the state.

Finally, they have members from regional and State Park liaison, and these are members who know the needs of the land managers.

They can facilitate communication with those land managers and they inform the program that will work for land managers across the state.

This is an example of our Alliance Team members for this fictitious example.

In this case, we have one principal investigator that is with the California Habitat Conservancy, and then and two non-key personnel also with the California Habitat Conservancy.

Then there are three key personnel from different organizations that are all absolutely important to the role of this project and its success, and, finally, we have another two non-key personnel that also help with the Alliance Team.

For any additional questions please email us at IPMgrants@cdpr.ca.gov or visit our website at cdpr.ca.gov/dprgrants to access application materials and find more information.