

# Proposal Development

## I Learned From My Herding Dogs



Well, not everything. And PIs are decidedly *not* livestock. But... even though I didn't adopt my two Pembroke Welsh Corgis with research administration in mind, in the years I have lived with them I have noticed several parallels between their "project management skills" and our work in proposal development. Here are some of the ways in which they guide others from a starting point to a common destination and the similarities to our pre-award activities, whether we're working with a single PI or a team.

A primary characteristic of herding dogs is *strategic thinking* – They are intensely goal oriented, plan several steps ahead, and have a clear sense of how to work progressively toward an objective. In proposal development, we need to strategize, planning upcoming applications and their timelines while also considering how they fit with longer-term goals.

They also continually *keep an eye on both details and the big picture* – When working, herders need to be aware of all the moving parts and how they function as a whole. We need to pay attention to the components of an application and the particulars of the sponsor's guidelines in order to create a cohesive, persuasive submission.

It's crucial to be able to *anticipate problems and change tactics as needed* – Coordinating the actions of others doesn't always go according to plan, so we need to be willing to shift our approach quickly and creatively. Even when we've created what seems like a good plan and seem to be making steady progress at the beginning of proposal development, sometimes we need to reassess and adjust, such as giving more attention to certain aspects or individuals, as well as reworking our timeline and expectations.

Success relies on *constant communication* – Both herding and proposal development are never solo work, but always a collaboration requiring plenty of feedback with all involved. We succeed when we keep our RA colleagues and others on campus updated throughout the process as needed and communicate clearly and often with our PIs.

Because everyone needs to keep moving together, it might take *a bit of heel nipping* now and then – When things stall, gentle nudges and reminders, whether by phone call or email, can help. Barking tends to be counter-productive.

Lastly, they are *always optimistic and take joy in their work*. – We could all learn a lot from dogs in this regard.

And in case you're wondering, yes, they can herd cats. ■



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