



# Working with Government — the Researcher Experience

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# You think *you're* busy?



# Lessons I learned



- Choose the right problem
- Choose the right agency
- Choose the right person
- Don't waste their time
- Don't raise expectations unreasonably
- Take care to craft a bimodal proposal
- Interact frequently, but unobtrusively

# Choosing the right problem & agency



- DoE experience
- EPA-AIR / NEISGEI experience:
  - Held 2 meetings in DC
  - Identified Gov champion at mid-level
  - Identified actual Gov ground-level staff
- eRulemaking experience:
  - Year-long SGER pre-grant exploration
  - 4 or 5 meetings with interested parties (Gov and public groups) from multiple agencies (over 15 each side)
  - Identified Gov champion at high level
  - Identified actual Gov ground-level staff

# Identifying the right person



- Enthusiastic about new technology/ideas
- Respected by colleagues — the early adopter, not the outsider
- Has the trust of management
- Willing to devote some time to the project
- Willing and able to deliver **REAL DATA**
- Willing to help with the proposal: letter of support, critique of ideas, suggestions

# Why Gov partners are worth gold



- They are the people who *know* the current limitations:
  - They can tell you what has been tried before
  - They can tell you what would be useful
- They face (a lot of) internal flak for working with you:
  - Senior management has little to do with the actual work of turning data into knowledge
  - Senior management very often doesn't appreciate the possibilities of new technology
- There's no guarantee your research is going to deliver anything
  - Even if your research is successful—are you going to spin off a company to market it? How else will it get into government?

# Making friends



- Get acquainted with your partner—determine:
  - mission of his/her organization at the division (or equivalent) level
  - priorities of his/her management
  - his/her specific job deliverables
  - what he/she perceives is the crucial capability missing from available data/analysis resources
- Help the analyst connect the dots regarding your proposed technology and her/his needs — use concrete examples
- Make yourself available to brief the senior management about you and your partner's proposal. Be able to present your case without using your field's technical jargon, using examples that are strongly relevant to the concerns of the agency

# Creating the proposal



- Find an actual need, not just something you'd like to do
- See if it contains some interesting, real research
- *Work out a strategy of incremental “deliverables” so that your partner can demonstrate tangible progress to her/his management during the proposed project period — so that your collaboration becomes an important asset in your partner’s project portfolio*
- For Gov partner and management:
  - highlight the eventual utility
  - BUT don’t promise turnkey functionality; this is *research*
- For the proposal/NSF reviewers:
  - highlight the research
  - show how it enables a general solution, for a lot of people

# 'Traditional' DG topics



- Information integration:
  - How to handle numerous databases, nonhomogeneous content and formats, various sources, legacy systems
- GIS:
  - How to handle geographically-based information (numbers, graphs, etc., associated with maps)
- Human-computer interfaces:
  - How to create easy-to-use, intelligently designed, flexible
- Portals:
  - How to create one-stop shopping for info, services, access to Gov
- Sensors:
  - How to measure things (in the field) and gather the data
- Governance:
  - How to support policymakers, regulation writers, planners...

# Proposal Help



- Check out what others have done:
  - successful proposals and projects descriptions at [www.digitalgovernment.org](http://www.digitalgovernment.org)
  - news updates in *DGOnline* ([www.dgrc.org](http://www.dgrc.org))
  - conference **dg.o** (in Atlanta, in May 2005)
- Start with a small one first, to explore:
  - SGER grant from NSF; ~\$90K for 1 year
  - meet partners, collect data, do pilot work