



Pitch Perfect

ILLINOIS COLLEGE OF EDUCATION GRANTS ACADEMY SEMINAR

OCTOBER 11, 2024



Who's that??

JESSICA VENABLE, PHD, GRANTS ACADEMY FACILITATOR



Jess Venable, PhD
Partner, Thorn Run Partners

Jessica (Jess) Venable co-leads the firm's Grants Enterprise Strategy consulting practice, which assists clients in increasing the extramural funding base needed to support programs and services, research, outreach and engagement, partnerships, and the innovation ecosystem.

With more than 25 years' experience, she delivers a unique combination of solutions-focused consulting services including strategic planning, government relations, public relations, grants enterprise development and capacity building, partner engagement, Team Science, program design, and grant proposal development.

Jessica also leads Thorn Run Partners' Grantsmanship Initiative. Successful grantsmanship requires a skillset that is built, continually developed, and adapts to evolving contexts. Using a "coaches" approach to learning, Jess helps grant writers self-discover solutions to proposal development, while challenging conventional thinking about research funding that create barriers across cultures and institutions.

Her client portfolio spans the higher education, non-profit, and local government sectors, for whom she has helped win more than \$700 million in competitive grant awards across the past decade alone.

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idea! → Grant! → Nobel Prize!

What we get...

What we want...





Writing a successful grant application is an art

Although the “science” is primarily being evaluated, presentation and respect for the requirements of the funding agency are key aspects that can make or break an application.

Source: Kraicer, J. (1997). The Art of Grantsmanship. <https://www.hfsp.org/sites/default/files/webfm/Communications/The%20Art%20of%20Grantsmanship.pdf>



Grantsmanship.

The **art** of acquiring peer-reviewed funding, secured through (for example) grants.

Grant Writing.

The **process** of crafting a proposal or grant application for submission to a funder.



OMG, another training? On a Friday??

PITCH PERFECT: HOW TO CAPTIVATE FUNDERS

- ▶ Craft proposals that inform and persuade
- ▶ Position your research as a solution to needs and priorities
- ▶ Create compelling oral and written narratives





- ▶ Give me a template.
- ▶ Give me a checklist.
- ▶ What work?
- ▶ What doesn't work?
- ▶ Tell me what to write, and I'll write it.
- ▶ Why are you so annoying?



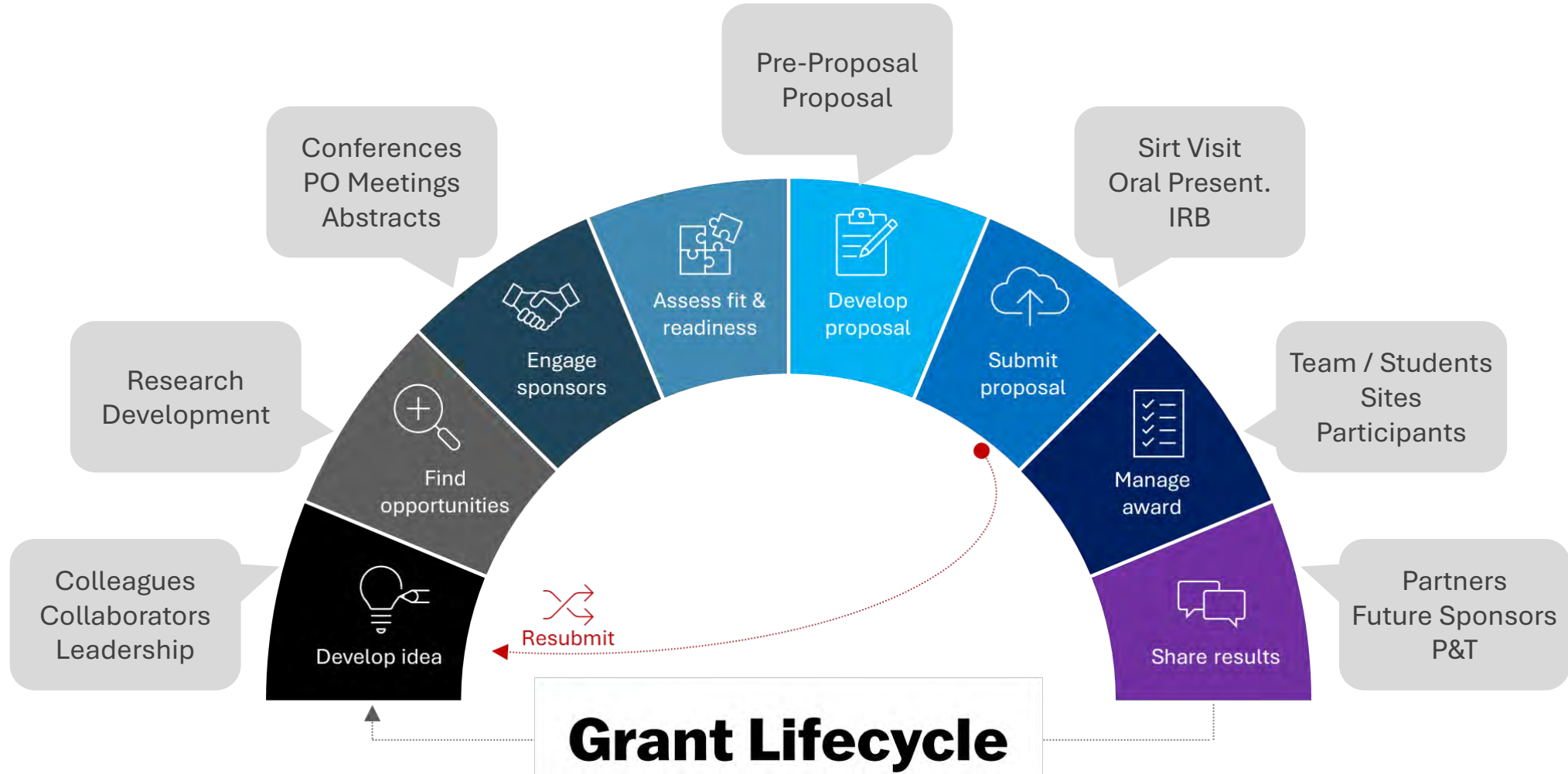


“My epiphany came when I realized that grant programs do not exist to make me successful, but rather **my job is to make those programs successful.**”

Source: Porter, R. (2007). Why academics have a hard time writing good grant proposals. The Journal of Research Administration, 38, 161-167.

I'm a researcher, not a salesperson...

PITCHING YOUR RESEARCH ACROSS THE GRANT LIFECYCLE



Wall of Questions

WHAT?

WHERE?

SO
WHAT?

WHEN?

HOW?

WHY?

NOW
WHAT?

WHO?



**Because grants
don't just fall out
of the sky...**



Extramural funding for research

SOURCES & MOTIVATIONS



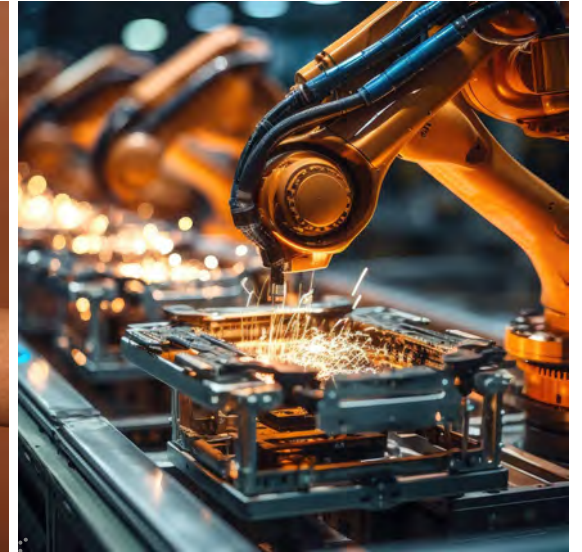
Federal Government
To advance **the taxpayers' interests.**



Professional Societies
To further the interests of a target scientific discipline, community.



Foundations
To promote the mission of the organization, public good.



Industry
To support commercial interests.



Grantmaking priorities

SOURCES & MOTIVATIONS



Now What? Call for Proposals

What? Agency Mission & Strategic Plan

So What? National Priorities

Why? Societal Challenges



Grantmaking priorities

SOURCES & MOTIVATIONS

Research community

Taxpayers & citizenry

Education community

Industry

Foundation, association boards & leadership

Advocacy, lobbying groups

Community sentiment

Current events

New findings & reports

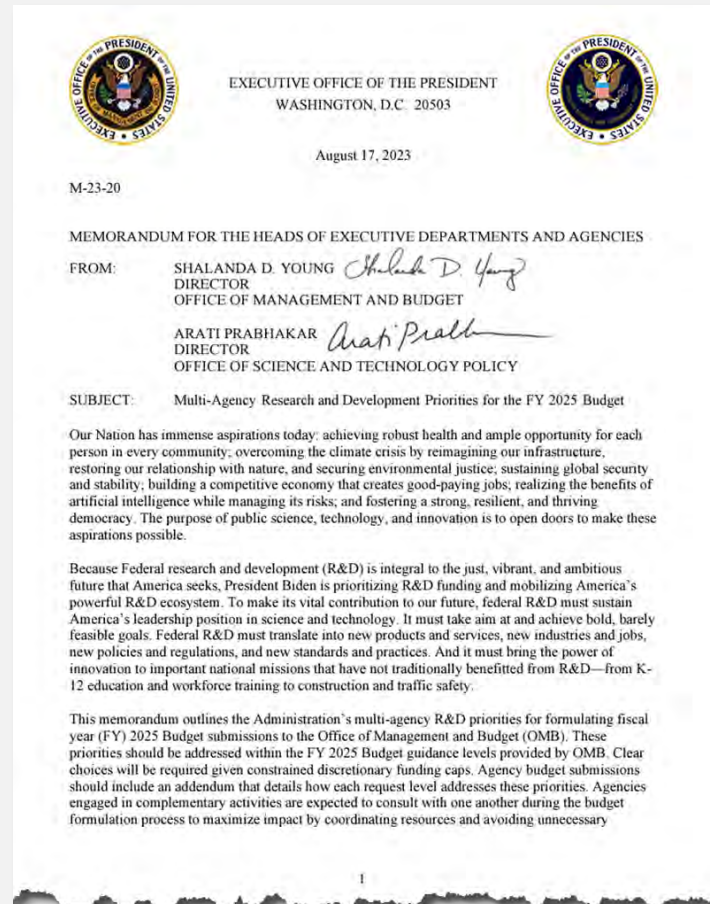
Federal Advisory Committees

Assessment teams



Grantmaking priorities

SOURCES & MOTIVATIONS



Priority Research Areas

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has identified priority areas for research and funding that have the potential to improve mental health care over the short, medium, and long term.

To support these priority areas, teams of NIMH staff and researchers provide guidance on scientific, funding, and policy matters across the Institute. NIMH staff also facilitate the development of research initiatives and funding opportunities. Each team makes substantial contributions to their respective fields that deepen our understanding of science and mental health within the Institute and the larger biomedical research community.

NIMH continues to support the use of Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) as a framework for investigating mental disorders across many different research areas. RDoC encourages investigators to explore the basic biological and cognitive processes that lead to mental health and illness outside the confines of diagnostic categories. RDoC research focuses on transdiagnostic constructs of psychopathology, along a range of functioning, to help understand the development, progression, and treatment of mental illness.

Suicide

Suicide is an urgent, complex public health crisis. The Suicide Research Team was formed as part of NIMH's commitment to helping reduce the suicide rate by 20% by 2025.

Genomics

The Genomics Team helps shape the field of genomic psychiatry, the study of genes to improve risk prediction, prevention, diagnosis, treatment selection, and causes of mental illnesses. The Genomics Team has initiated many programs from basic gene discovery to clinical translational efforts.


Mental Health Disparities

The Disparities Team promotes innovative and high-impact mental health research that enhances our understanding of minority mental health and health disparities, reduces mental health disparities and their impact on individuals and communities, and moves us toward achieving mental health equity.

Global Mental Health

The Global Mental Health Team helps shape and advance NIMH's efforts to improve the lives of people living with or at risk for mental illnesses in low-resource settings worldwide.



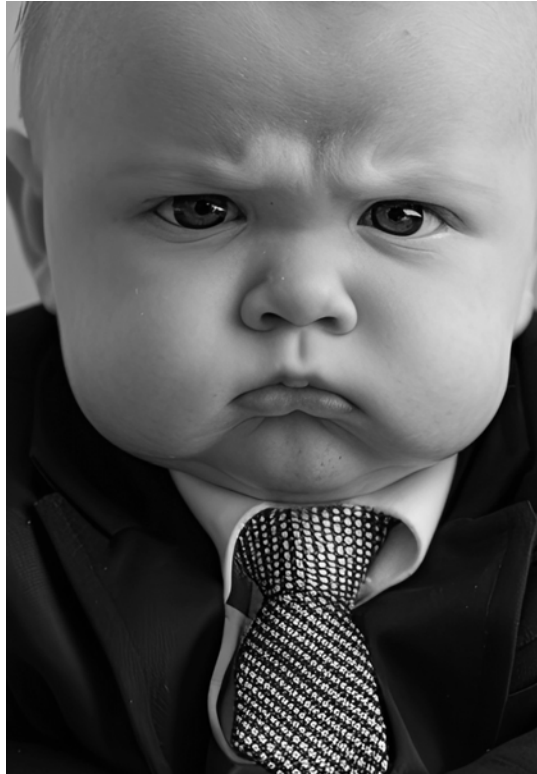


**Because
program
officers and
reviewers are
human ...**



But... I'm brilliant!

ROLE OF PROGRAM OFFICERS



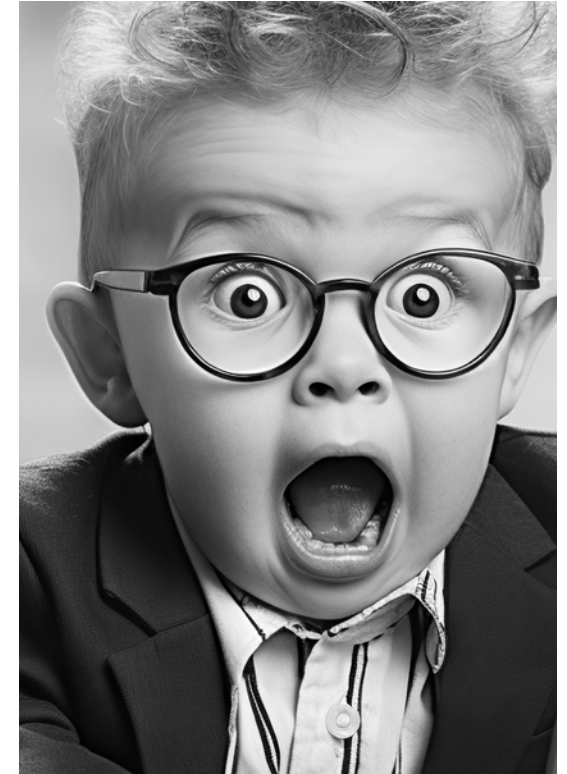
**Identify emerging areas
for support**



**Encourage competitive
applications**



**Recruit reviewers,
manage review panels**



**Work with potential,
current, former grantees**



NIH Review Panel, 1950s

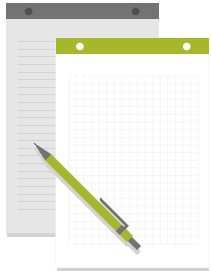


NIH Review Panel, 2010s



But... I'm brilliant!

COMPETING FOR ATTENTION



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Number of pages in the average federal grant application.



.....

Percentage of workers who check their email while on other calls.



.....

Percentage of people who effectively multitask.



.....

Attention span of the average person.





**Because
successful
grantsmanship
requires a
different
approach...**



A different sort of writing...

GRANTWRITING PRINCIPLES

Scholarly pursuit: Reflects individual passion

Past oriented: Describes completed work

Theme-centered: Clear theory and thesis

Expository: Explains to the reader

Impersonal: Tone is objective, dispassionate

Lengthy: Encourages verbosity

Specialized terminology: Aimed at limited audience

Academic Writing

Sponsor's goals: Adopts service attitude

Future oriented: Describes planned work

Project-centered: Clear objectives, tasks, products

Persuasive: Sells to the reader

Personal: Conveys excitement

Constrained: Rewards brevity

Accessible language: Aims at broad audience

Grant Writing

Source: Porter, R. (2007). Why academics have a hard time writing good grant proposals. The Journal of Research Administration, 38, 161-167.



... requires a different sort of thinking.

SALES PRINCIPLES

Know your
Audience

Value Proposition

Storytelling &
Emotional Appeal

Clear & Concise
Communication

Positioning &
Differentiation

Credibility and
Social Proof

Outcomes & Return
on Investment

Call to Action

Brand Consistency

Adaptability &
Responsiveness

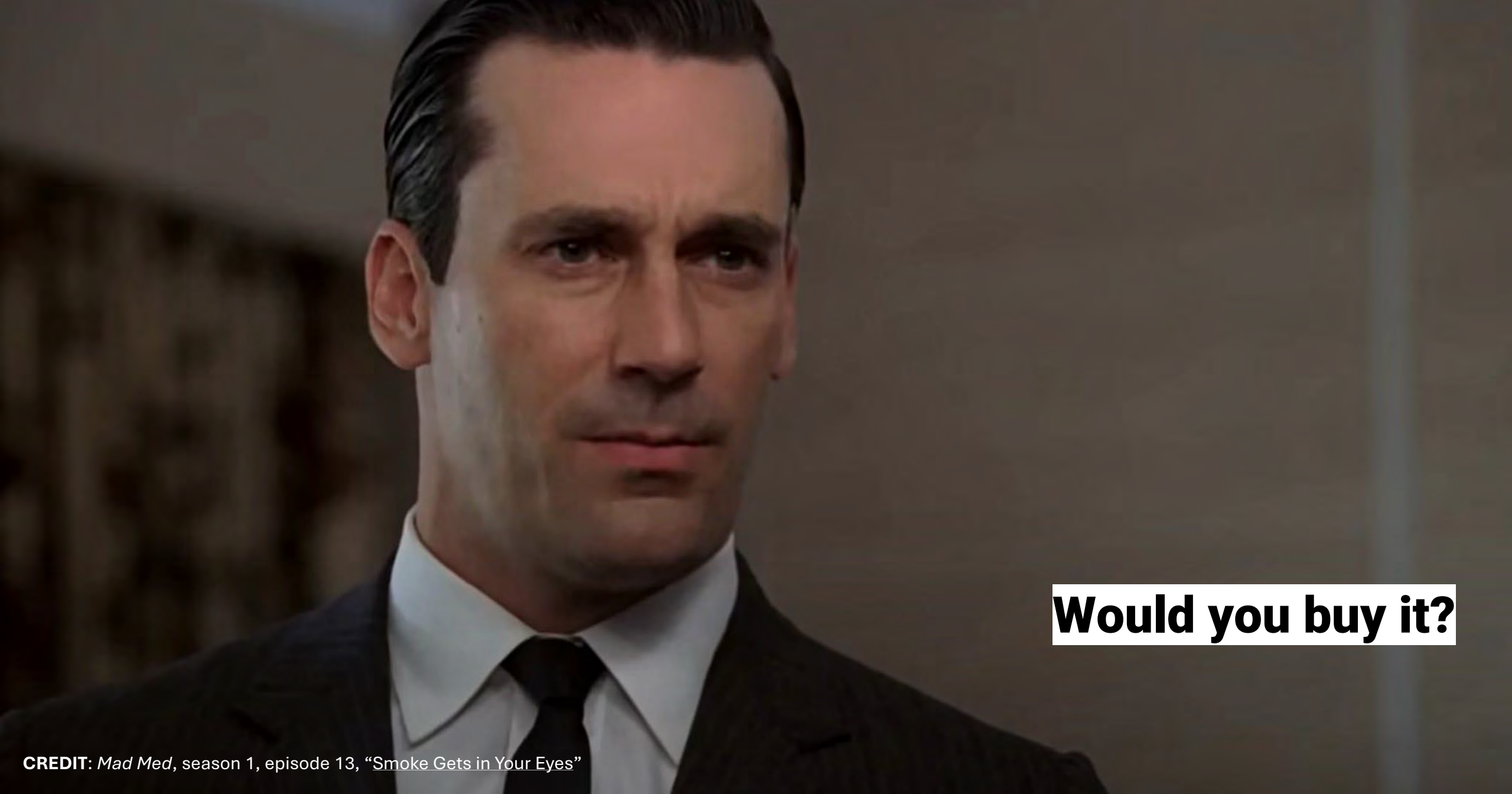


**I'm a researcher, not a
salesperson.**




- ▶ Intellectual freedom
- ▶ Oversimplification
- ▶ Commercialism vs Academic identity
- ▶ Time and energy
- ▶ Credit
- ▶ Quick results





Would you buy it?

CREDIT: *Mad Med*, season 1, episode 13, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”



Break



**What does
this have to
do with grant
writing?**



Sales principles in grant writing

SALES PRINCIPLES MAPPED TO PROPOSAL SECTIONS & REVIEW CRITERIA

Know your
Audience

Value
Proposition

Storytelling &
Emotional Appeal

Clear & Concise
Communication

Positioning &
Differentiation

Credibility and
Social Proof

Outcomes & Return
on Investment

Call to Action

Brand Consistency

Adaptability &
Responsiveness



Pitch Practice

RESEARCH, 3 WAYS

- ▶ Read the sample abstract, Page 1.
- ▶ Discuss how this abstract might be revised so that it incorporates key sales principles.
- ▶ **Review the proposed revisions, Page 3.**

What do you notice

What do you like?

What don't you like?

The Proposed Research

Active Learning at Scale: Advancing Knowledge in Learning Science and Generative AI

This project seeks to deepen our understanding of active learning within scalable educational contexts by developing the Active Learning at Scale (Active L@S) framework. This framework will allow postsecondary students to engage with course content and practice essential skills through generative learning strategies, such as note-taking, summarizing, self-explaining, question answering, and retrieval practice. These strategies, guided by large language models (LLMs), will facilitate an exploration into how diverse student populations respond to adaptive learning tools across various settings. Through this research, we aim to advance the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of large-scale, generative learning technologies and the mechanisms that influence learning efficacy.

Guided by learning science and cognitive theories, this project will employ a human-centered design approach, iteratively developing the Active L@S framework within the existing mobile platform, INFLO. This research will integrate an LLM to produce contextually relevant, research-informed prompts and feedback mechanisms that adapt to student responses in real-time. By applying machine learning, data engineering, and natural language processing techniques, the project will explore how individual differences impact the effectiveness of active learning. Through extensive A/B testing, this work will contribute to a nuanced understanding of the conditions that foster successful learning outcomes in large, diverse student cohorts.

This research focuses on the foundational aspects of active learning and technology-enhanced learning environments, with implications for how adaptive and personalized learning experiences can be effectively implemented on a large scale. The integration of LLMs in education is at an emergent stage, and this project will explore the theoretical implications of using AI-driven tools to support generative learning across multiple domains. Findings from this research will contribute to the literature on learning sciences, human-computer interaction, and educational technology, offering insights into the interactional dynamics between learners and adaptive AI.

The project will systematically examine active learning processes and outcomes through controlled experimental designs, involving over 100,000 students across multiple institutions. Data collection will include student demographic information, system usability assessments, and satisfaction surveys, as well as granular data from digital learning activities. Using a combination of Bayesian analysis, machine learning algorithms, and natural language processing, the research will identify patterns in student engagement and learning effectiveness, while accounting for individual and contextual factors. These analyses will allow for a comprehensive exploration of the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of large-scale active learning.

The Active L@S platform will be integrated into the Canvas LMS, allowing for future research on adaptive learning systems within established educational technologies. Research findings will be disseminated through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and scholarly reports, furthering academic discourse on the role of generative AI in supporting scalable, evidence-based learning interventions. This project will enrich the theoretical landscape of learning science and inform subsequent studies on the application of AI in diverse educational settings.

Adapted from [D. MacNamara, Active Learning at Scale: Transforming Teaching and Learning via Large-Scale Learning Science and Generative AI](#)



HANDS-ON
EXERCISE

Pitch Practice



You have been invited to a dinner with a **major donor** to the COE, known to award **\$1-2M grants** to faculty to advance their research.

The donor often **requests a concept paper on the spot**. She may present your concept to her board of directors, or she could fund it without their approval.

You have been looking for the “right” funding opportunity, but no luck yet.

You decide to **update your brief write-up** on that project in case the donor requests it.

**HANDS-ON
EXERCISE**

Pitch Practice

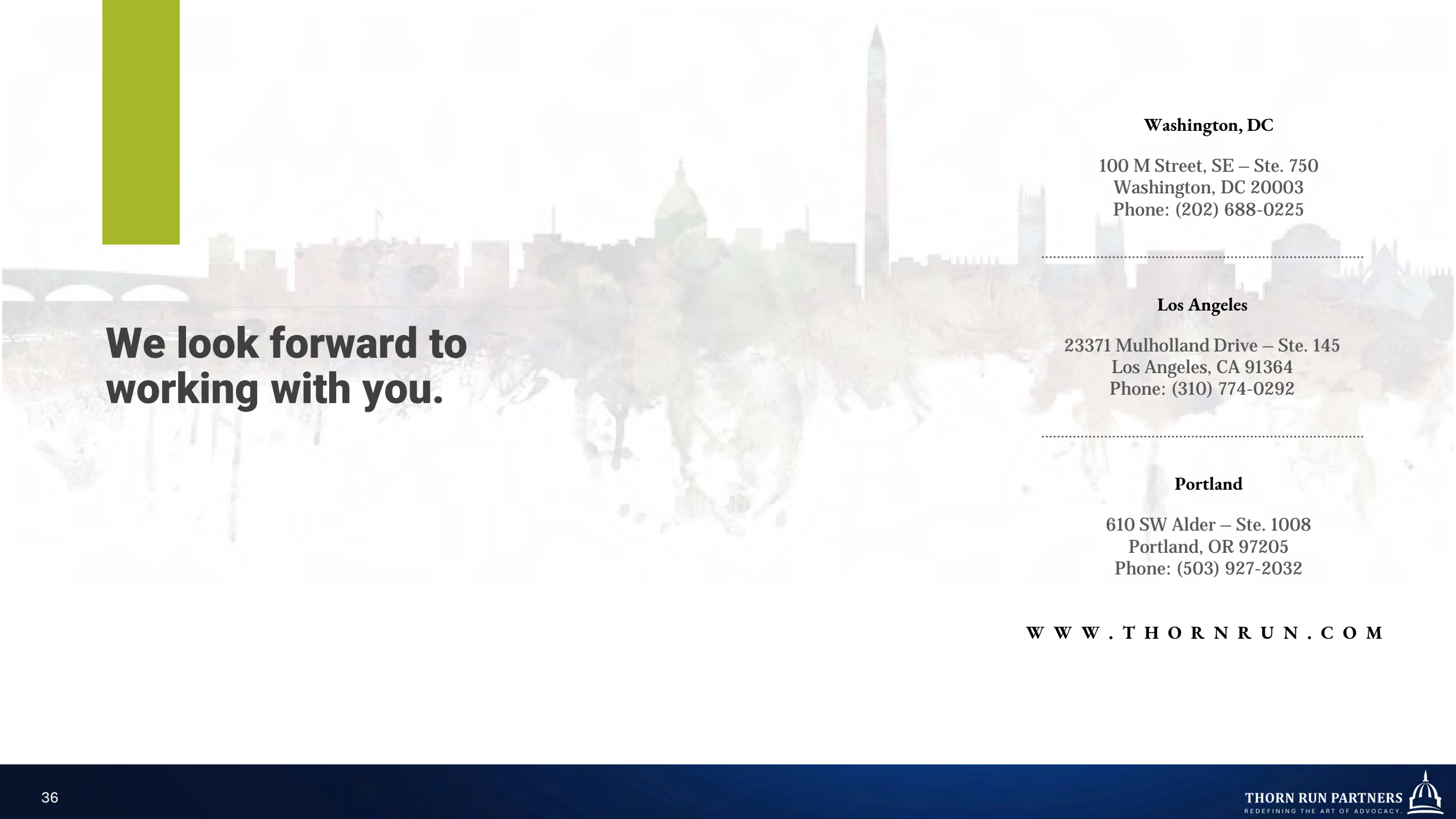




Now what?

Wall of Questions





**We look forward to
working with you.**

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W W W . T H O R N R U N . C O M