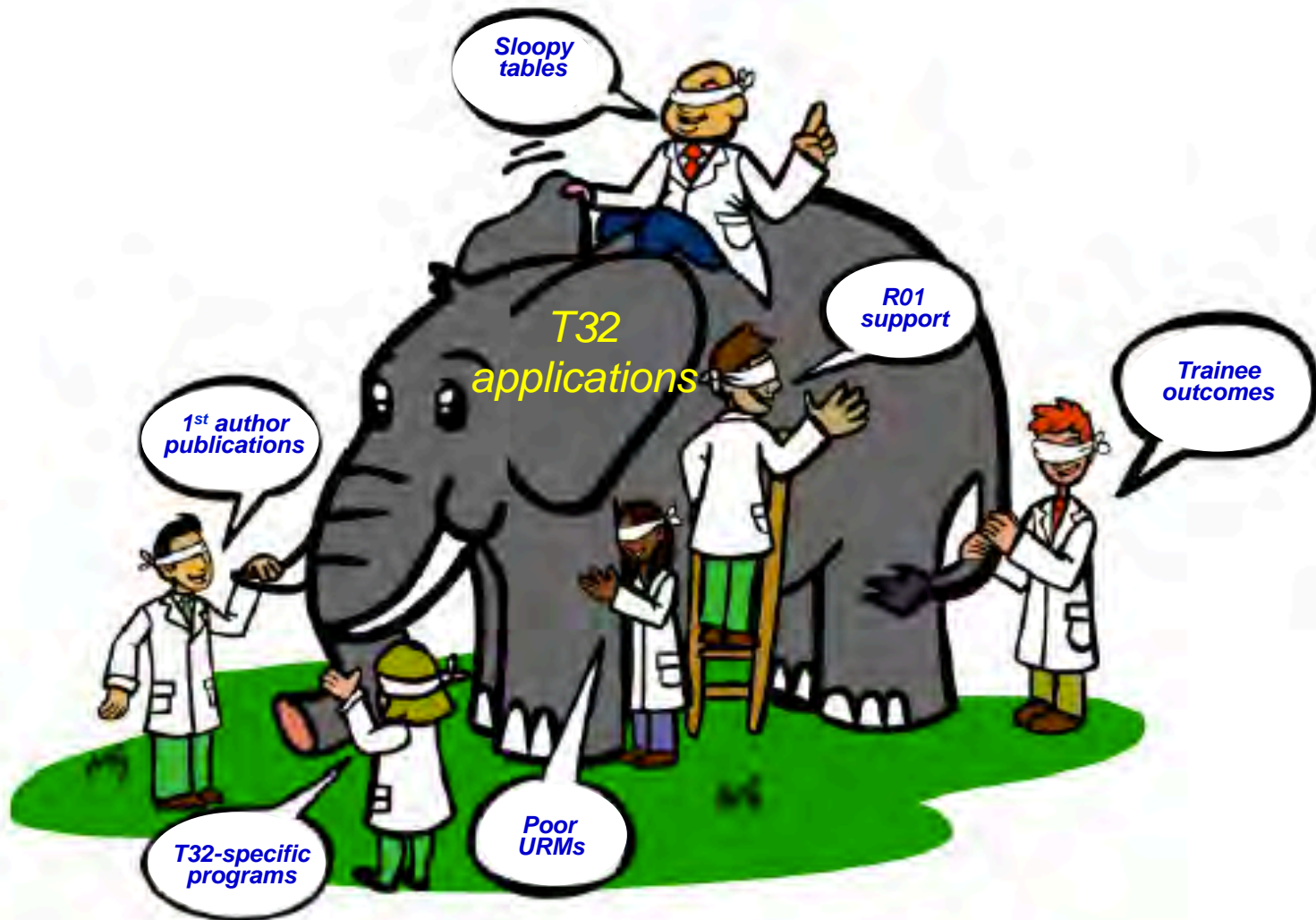# CABTRAC Workshop:
Reviewing T32 Grant Applications

Channing J. Der, Danny R. Welch, Adrienne D. Cox

CABTRAC Annual Retreat

Kiawah Island, SC

October 27, 2015

How T32 reviewers look at T32 applications

General thoughts about the T32 review process

- Review panels can be "uneven" – individual reviewers place different weights on standard review criteria

- Most submitted proposals are excellent – funded proposals must stand out from the crowd

- Avoid the mentality of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" – even successful programs need to inject innovation; stay fresh and dynamic

- Some elements, although not technically required, are considered essential by reviewers (e.g., functional, documented EAB)

- The application needs to be "bullet-proof" – do not rush submission; go in strong

- **No matter what, "The reviewer is always correct"**

Want to promote excellence in reviews?

Volunteer for NCI Subcommittee F!

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Top reasons why T32s are not funded

- Program does not "add value" to the trainee experience

- Program is not distinct from other T32s at the institution

- Weak program and/or trainee oversight; insufficient feedback mechanisms

- Mentors do not have R01 or R01-like funding; not good distribution of trainees among mentors

- Trainees do not have first-author publications

- Trainees do not stay in biomedical workforce

- Information in tables is confusing and/or inconsistent w/ text

- Lack of response to previous reviewer concerns

"What have you done for us lately?"

- Refreshed elements since previous funding cycle
    - New program elements
    - New oversight mechanisms
    - Balance of senior/up-and-coming mentors

- Rationale for current program emphasis

- Process/plans for transition to new leadership (e.g., succession plan, when applicable)

On the CABTRAC website: more T32 workshop information
http://cabtrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/T32WorkshopCABTRACbreakout10-14-2013.pdf

Recent T32 reviewers like:

"Value added"
- Training in translational research, clinical shadowing, quantitative biology, appreciation for "big data"
- Formal training in grantwriting / mandatory applications for external funding
- Requirement for SHORT didactic training for postdocs
- Program content refreshed from previous funding cycle

Program-specific mentoring
- Mentoring committees for trainees (although these can create conflicts in predoc overlay programs)
- Mentoring programs for junior faculty

Achieving group identity and promoting community
- Monthly journal clubs
- Opportunities for trainees to host seminar speakers
- Annual program retreats
- Inclusion of mentors in program events

Recent T32 reviewers also want to see:

Group identity and community
- Monthly journal clubs
- Opportunities for trainees to host seminar speakers
- Annual program retreats
- Inclusion of mentors in program events

Institutional support
- Financial and otherwise

Internal mechanisms for program and trainee evaluation
- Formal feedback from trainees (incl alumni) and preceptors
- Internal advisory boards (at least partially distinct from program leadership; can include alumni)
- External advisory board, that meets regularly; documented

Program-specific diversity recruitment / retention efforts
- Active engagement by PD/s

How to help reviewers focus on program-specific information

Assist reviewers to extract TG-relevant information from the details found in the tables:

- **Tables** – include explanatory **footnotes** and comments

- **Progress Report** - provide both summary #s and detailed information on TG-associated and TGE trainees (versus non-TGE trainees at the entire institution), especially**:**
  - **Publications**
  - **Post-TG outcomes**